

BRITISH WORKING CLASS FICTION: THE SENSE OF LOSS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and, above all, gambling, filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult.

(*Nineteen Eighty-Four*)

George Orwell's image of the politically inert, indefinitely containable 'proles' is an early (and extreme) example of what was to become a persistent post-war representation of working class life. His idea that the proles could be controlled as much by popular entertainment as by direct state coercion anticipated by nearly a decade Richard Hoggart's qualms about the emergence of a new 'mass' culture.¹ It should be said, of course, that Hoggart was not delineating a feasible totalitarian future, but examining the cultural consequences of an already-established welfare state. According to him, it was in a measure because of such improvements as mass literacy and greater affluence that working people were being diverted into a media-orchestrated consumerism. Close-knit communities, based on local industries and the extended family, were breaking up and traditional values were being either negatively reinforced (fatalism becoming mere inertia) or crudely displaced by the ersatz aspirations of the market economy. Arnold Wesker took this theme up in plays like *Chicken Soup With Barley* (1958) and *Roots* (1959) and campaigned, through his speeches, polemical writing² and the 'Centre Fortytwo' project, for an appropriation by the working class of bourgeois culture alongside the recuperation of half-forgotten radical and folk traditions. Behind the arguments of Hoggart and Wesker lay a conviction that so-called progress, under the post-war capitalist dispensation, exacted too high a price in cultural impoverishment from those most vulnerable, through lack of understanding or political commitment, to the blandishments of 'never-had-it-so-good' materialism. It was a perspective without the theoretical sophistication which supported Herbert Marcuse's denunciations of mass culture in *America*,³ but it belonged nevertheless to a vigorous British tradition of social—sometimes socialist—criticism going back to the early days of the Industrial Revolution itself. From Carlyle, through Dickens and William Morris, to D.H. Lawrence there

runs a rich vein of anger at the cultural deformations wrought by urban-industrial conditions. A comparable antipathy to industrial society, coupled with a hankering after more organic or more hierarchic social structures, can also be found in the cultural criticism of T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis.⁴ However, what distinguishes Hoggart and Wesker from the others I have mentioned, is their location of the organic not in some pre-industrial or de-industrialised *gemeinschaft*, but in older and still-surviving elements of industrial experience itself. They neither invoke an arcadian past, nor invent fables of pastoral innocence in the manner of more conservative writers.⁵ It is taken for granted by them (and the many left-wing cultural critics who have followed them) that whatever of the past has been lost or whatever potential futures foregone, the focus of understanding and change must be the working class's own historically specific conditions of existence.

To be sure, older patterns of working class life and feeling can become pastoralised and serve as sentimental myths in the same way as the Noble Savage or the British Yeoman have done. A thoroughgoing cultural sociology would obviate such distractions by explaining the complex historical relations between specific forms of material and cultural production.⁶ However, what I will call the sense-of-loss perspective, despite its limitations, has more than a merely symptomatic interest for the student of working class culture, as the following extract from Jeremy Seabrook's *What Went Wrong?* will help make clear. Seabrook is describing what happened to his home town (Northampton) after the Second World War:

The passing of the old shoe-making community represents for me something beyond a subjective feeling about the ruin and dispersal of my own extended family. Somehow, that community—closed and impoverished though it **was**—held within itself a possibility and a promise of an alternative future; nobody wanted to perpetuate those conditions. But that alternative has not been realized; on the contrary, it has been slowly extinguished by the events of the past thirty or forty years. The suppression of the possibility of their change was an act of violence against them and the way they lived and the hopes they cherished. Their change was eclipsed and deformed by the change that actually occurred. Their past, the past of the people who worked in these empty factories and wasting streets, sentimentalized now in **tele** dramas and documentaries and memoirs, has been isolated from contemporary experience. The values by which they lived—the dour stoicism, the self-denial and austerity—so hardly imposed, have become an irrelevancy.'

My paperback edition of the book carries a blurb that situates *What Went Wrong?* 'in the tradition of Orwell's classic *Road to Wigan Pier*'. It is an appropriate comparison insofar as both accounts are informed by a definite, though idiosyncratic, socialism. But there the similarity ends, for Seabrook's view of working class life—both here and in his earlier *The*

Unprivileged (1967)—is largely free from Orwell's too-frequent condescension and a related tendency to over-emphasise the surface details of work, family and neighbourhood life without probing their deeper cultural implications. Like the other working class writers I shall go on to discuss, Seabrook writes from a wealth of first-hand *experience*, as well as acute and compassionate observation. To be sure, such experience is helpless without theory: if simply living a working class life were enough to understand its strengths and limitations, there would be no problem. Yet theory, left to itself, will go on elaborating structures until there is no *escape*-route back to feeling at all.⁸ Seabrook's gaze is directed by theory, but it rests as often on people's changing hopes and loyalties as on their 'objective' conditions. He is therefore well-placed to estimate the 'promise of an alternative *future*'⁹ that was endemic to the very conditions of dispossession which have characterised the proletariat as a subordinate class. His '*view-from-below*' approach can also testify convincingly to the ways in which misguided social engineering has been as much to blame as the careless operation of market forces for bringing about a 'spoiled capacity for *change*'.¹⁰ That lost opportunity for shaping a better future is the same, in essence, as the one bemoaned by Hoggart and Wesker: whatever its local features may be, it originates in the erosion of communal commitments by the commodity-values of capitalist consumerism.

The struggle between a diminishing inheritance of older working class values and several varieties of acquiescence (e.g. 'realism', cunning or plain greed) in the hegemony of commodity-values is the point of entry I have chosen for the detailed discussion of fictional texts that follows. My aim in doing this is not to endorse the sense-of-loss perspective as adequate for fully understanding the situation of the contemporary working class. It is rather to use the experience of stress and contradiction which that perspective typifies as a means of highlighting some of the ideological shifts and turns by which what has happened to working people since the last war has been allowed—and encouraged—to happen. The shifts and turns I shall first discuss have their origins in the Fifties and Sixties, a period when welfare capitalism held out to many people the prospect of an end to class conflict—if not of classes themselves—in the steady upward progress of prosperity for all. When we reach the Seventies and Eighties we shall encounter some texts which have tried to relocate a transformative potential in working class life during a period when the forces that threaten that life barely even pretend to a concern about welfare or prosperity—let alone equality—for all. It is in the bleak climate of rampant market forces and authoritarian government that the search for an unspoiled capacity for change in working people has been resumed.

One of the most significant expressions of the sense of loss in post-war fiction comes near the end of Alan Sillitoe's Saturday *Night* and Sunday

Morning. Working at his monotonous bicycle-factory job, with the prospect of marriage on the horizon, Arthur Seaton reflects:

. . . this lathe is my everlasting pal because it gets me thinking, and that's their big mistake because I know I'm not the only one. One day they'll bark and we won't run into a pen like sheep. One day they'll flash their lamps and clap their hands and say: 'Come on, lads. Line up and get your money. We won't let you starve.' But maybe some of us will want to starve, and that'll be where the trouble'll start. Perhaps some'll want to play football, or go fishing up **Grantham** Cut. That big fat-bellied union ponce'll ask us not to muck things up. Sir Harold Bladdertab'll promise us a bigger bonus when things get put right. Chief Inspector Popcorn will say: 'Let's have no trouble, no hanging around the gates there.' Blokes with suits and bowler hats will say: 'These chaps have got their television sets, enough to live on, council houses, beer, and pools—some have even got cars. We've made them happy. What's wrong? Is that a machine gun I hear starting up or a car backfiring?'

Der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der-der. I hope I'm not here to see it, but I know I will be. I'm a bloody billy-goat trying to screw the world, and no wonder I am, because it's trying to do the same to me."

This passage derives some of its force, and most of its psychological significance, from Arthur's sense of personal entrapment. He doesn't dislike the idea of marriage to Doreen, but he recognises that it represents a partial compromise with those conventions of respectability against which he has so far deployed so much of his 'cunning'. Determined not to be 'ground down', he redoubles his hostility towards some favourite targets of his machine-gun and dynamite fantasies. It is at this point that the feelings expressed encompass much more than a sense of personal entrapment: they register the experience of class subordination. What is at issue is no longer just Arthur's guerilla tactics against nosey neighbours, cuckolded husbands and factory foremen, but the larger engagements of the class war itself. Rhetorical self-address gives way to a discourse of collective experience, heralded by the recognition 'I'm not the only one'. The first person singular dilemma yields to a series of economic and cultural conflicts centering on a solidarity of loss: 'we' are bribed and badgered into foregoing our freedom, but one day 'we' will refuse the phoney promise of prosperity and fight 'them' for the real power that is denied us. Of course, Arthur's brand of anarchic individualism cannot allow him to envisage solidarity of *action* in anything but negative terms ('we' will gun them down, or blow them to bits) and here Sillitoe goes a long way towards acknowledging the self-defeating contradictoriness of Arthur's position. A few lines later, we are told:

Violent dialogues flayed themselves to death in his mind as he went on serving a life's penance at the lathe.¹²

The lath; that is a 'pal', because it allows for thinking, is also—and more decisively—a 'life's penance', locking Arthur into the capitalist production process. Whatever consolations are offered by the shop floor culture (e.g. the pleasure of physical performance; partial control of the pace and quantity of production; opportunities for practical jokes and mockery of authority¹³), the fundamental reality of repetitive, unhealthy work, performed for the profit of someone else, inexorably reasserts itself.

Although Arthur sees himself as a 'rebel', his self-centred hedonism is as exploitative of others, especially women, as the industrial system which exploits him. By its very nature, his tooth-and-claw philosophy of life mystifies class issues by converting them into a virile clash of cunning against the bastards who would grind you down. Though the rhetoric of his interior monologues draws strength from a minimal notion of class solidarity, he is not permitted to see how **insubordination**¹⁴ by isolated members of a subordinate class may legitimise the conditions of that subordination itself. Even as loss of freedom is acknowledged and a passive consumerism refused, the terms employed testify to the pervasiveness of an alienated cynicism which can see no difference between bosses and trade unions, or between cheating the establishment (army, police) and stealing a drunk's **wallet**¹⁵ or cuckolding a fellow worker. It hardly needs saying that such anarchic self-seeking is the ideological mirror-image of bourgeois individualism and a perfect instance of how a ruling **value-system** permeates and controls the very language in which oppositional attitudes are formulated. Arthur's cunning, for all its irreverence, derives its conceptual consistency from a profoundly exploitative commonsense. (Later we shall see how two novelists in the Seventies and Eighties have turned to collective experience as the source of a quite different kind of 'common' sense.)

None of Sillitoe's major protagonists (almost all of them male) is allowed to get beyond this essentially picaresque construction of oppositional experience, despite occasional outbursts of naive communism.¹⁶ Because of this the long-distance runner, **Smith**,¹⁷ remains in some respects the quintessential Sillitoe rebel. His act of insubordination against the reformatory has an undeniable anarchistic purity. By blatantly losing the cross-country race, he declares his opposition not just to a particular application of bourgeois **rules** (playing to win) but to the whole apparatus of public good manners and sportsmanship by which the ruling class mystifies its coercive power.

As soon as we move from Smith back to Arthur **Seaton** the problems arise. For a start, Arthur is not in a **marginal**—i.e. narrowly 'deviant'—social situation, though some of his family are outright criminals. The institutional incarnation of bourgeois society which he confronts is not a falsely benevolent reformatory, but a nakedly exploitative factory. In place of a governor mouthing avuncular platitudes, he stands eyeball-to-

eyeball with Robboe, the unyielding mediator of capitalist work-discipline. Smith is, in a sense, able to stage-manage the immediate circumstances of his defiant gesture, because the terms of his conflict with authority are relatively straightforward: he has only to refuse the bribe of personal 'success' in a single, climactic moment. In contrast, Arthur experiences every day, both at work and in his community, the most intractable and confusing aspects of working class life; that the harsh terms on which his labour is expropriated—monotony, injury, regimentation—are also the conditions of his 'freedom' to daydream on the job and enjoy himself at the weekends; that cunning cannot alleviate the essential conditions of his life and that it may, in any case, create as many problems as it solves (e.g. it helps him keep the affair with Brenda going, but it is no help at all in avoiding or terminating her pregnancy); that the television sets and bigger wages by which his parents' generation has been bought off nevertheless represent a liberation from the poisonous anxieties of pre-war slump.¹⁸ It is a pity that, having allowed these contradictions their discomfiting presence in the text, Sillitoe marginalises them by finally endorsing a simplistic image of his anti-hero's incorrigible rebelliousness, 'There's bound to be trouble in store for me every day of my life, because trouble it's always been and always will be.'¹⁹ Arthur's freebooting attitude is given the last word. The official pieties of welfare-statism and the affluent society are bluntly rejected, yet the text is silent about the complicity of this attitude in the ideological legitimization of class inequality.

Sillitoe leaves virtually unexamined the contradictory relationship between class subordination and the insubordinate individual. John Braine, in *Room At The Top*, seeks a formal and ideological closure that will fix sympathy on his protagonist as a victim of the class system while, at the same time, reconciling us to the opportunism which that system encourages. Stuart Laing rightly finds in the novel a recognition of 'human' values, class-specific or otherwise, which are sacrificed to Joe Lampton's social advancement. It is this recognition which, according to Laing, allowed *Room At The Top*, in the political climate of the late Fifties and early Sixties, '... to present itself as an oppositional account of contemporary society (aligning itself with New Left cultural critics, with mythologisers of "traditional" working class culture and with the desire for a humanitarian, idealist politics as embodied in CND), while simultaneously ultimately endorsing as "realistic" the ideology of affluence and individual material gain, of embourgeoisement and political pragmatism.'²⁰ Thus the novel was able to satisfy a contemporary appetite for social criticism (the 'anger' of the Angry Young Men), while offering no awkward promptings to collective action or commitment. There is a textual strategy at work that parasitises 'human' values in order to banish them more persuasively to the margins of practical social being. Joe Lampton's 'Dufton Standards' are invoked to mitigate the unfairness of his reaction

to Alice's having once been an artist's **model**.²¹ His cynical manipulation of Susan Brown's feelings is regularly offset by reminders of his impoverished background and war service in the RAF. Even his 'innocent' pleasure in a theatre visit with Susan is underwritten by his uncorrupted view of her beauty:

Brought out, perhaps, by the music and the dancers blown across the stage by it like pieces of coloured paper, a deeply buried instinct asserted itself: I wanted simply to admire what is, after all, a rare human type: a beautiful and unspoiled **virgin**.²²

This is the same Joe who worked out, with his friend Charles, a financial grading system for women and it is the same Joe who can say later, as he recalls the Carstairs' party:

I've never loved her more than I did then. I forgot the Jaguar and the **Bentley** and the Ford V8. She loved and she wanted to be loved, she was transparent with affection; I could no more deny that correct response in my heart than refuse a child a piece of bread. In the back of my mind a calculating machine rang up success and began to compose a triumphant letter to Charles; but that part of me that mattered, the instinctive, honest part of me, went out to meet her with open **hands**.²³

This passage typifies Braine's method: even as the symbols of affluence are 'forgotten' they are carefully itemised; Joe's reciprocation of Susan's affection is characterised as an instinctive reaction, from the heart, in contrast to the calculating going on in his mind. Like the 'deeply buried instinct' in the previous passage, this is intended to invoke a proletarian honesty of feeling fighting a rearguard action against sterile middle-class rationality. It is, of course, a contemptible caricature of both classes to maintain that either has a monopoly of thought or feeling, even if such crude categorisations of mental processes had any merit in themselves. But, if working class equals spontaneous and uncalculating here, it certainly does not do so elsewhere in the text. It is the working class Charles who voices one of the novel's most memorable statements of 'realism' when he advises Joe to ditch Alice in order to avoid a public scandal:

'If Mr. **Aisgill** wanted a divorce, he could afford detectives to trace you here. . . Can't you imagine it? Can't you imagine the story in the Sunday papers? Face facts, Joe. You couldn't bear to be shown up like that. You don't belong to the class that thrives on scandal. You'd have your heart broken.' He looked away from me and said in a low voice, 'And you'd break the hearts of a lot of other people. People who don't wish you anything but **good**.'²⁴

Just what the 'good' is that is referred to at the end, we aren't told, though it can't be anything to do with moral obligation or even emotional fulfilment. What is obvious is the appeal to an assumed fear of scandal that makes Joe sound more like Hedda Gabler than the hard-bitten lad from

Duften. The working class is no longer on the side of spontaneity; Duften's 'standards' have been reduced to a wariness of the Sunday papers. Charles's advice is placed immediately before the scene in which Joe virtually rapes Susan and she ends up 'full of physical contentment'.²⁵ His desertion of Alice is thus presented as both a sensible acceptance of proletarian moral scruples and a surrender to 'the hot lunacy of [his] own instincts'.²⁶ which is, in its turn, a proletarian assault on Susan's middle-class timidity.

When Joe learns the gruesome details of Alice's death, he takes a bus to nearby Leddersford and ends up wandering in a working class district:

It was a fine evening for the time of year, with an unseasonably soapy warmth trickling along mean little streets; most of the house doors were open and people were standing inside them, just standing, saying nothing, looking at the black millstone grit and the chimneys and the dejected little shops. It was Friday and soon they'd go out and get drunk. At this moment they were pretending that it was Monday or even Thursday and they hadn't any money and they'd be forced to sit in the living-room amongst the drying nappies looking at their wife's pasty face and varicose legs and hating the guts of the bastard in the next street who'd won a cool hundred on a five-shilling accumulator; then they'd stop pretending and gloat over their spending-money, at least three quid—

I stopped and leaned against a lamp-post because I couldn't go on any longer. I should have gone into the country. You can walk in the country without wanting to vomit, and you're not hurt because the trees and the grass and the water don't care because you can't expect them to, they were never concerned with love; but the city should be full of love, and never is.²⁷

Braine's textual strategy is completed by a rejection of the Duften connection now that its moral usefulness is exhausted. Having served their turn as vindicators of Joe's personal betrayals, the Duften standards must be jettisoned to make room for the mature version of his pragmatism. This is accomplished by a transference of the sense of loss away from traditional working-class versus commodity values and onto the conditions of urban life versus an uncorrupted countryside. The working class is represented as just as greedy and mean-spirited as the 'zombie'-like middle class into which Joe has now been inducted. The novel's only credible alternative value-system (there being no *radical* value-system, of course) is thus discredited, and the common-as-muck Mavis, whom Joe drunkenly picks up in a pub, completes the picture. Good-hearted though she is allowed to be, Mavis's primary textual function is that of incorrigible prole, the anti-thesis of everything Susan stands for. After a street-brawl with Mavis's ex-lover and his mate, Joe is rescued from his proletarian dark night of the soul by emissaries of Warley. In a paroxysm of token self-reproach, he is swept back to well-heeled zombiedom as the novel ends.

In complete contrast to Joe Lampton, David Storey's self-seeking protagonist in *This Sporting Life* is not granted a systematic textual

endorsement of his pragmatism. There is no discourse of wistful humanitarianism to smoothe away the jagged edges of greed and ambition. There are no cleverly deployed retrospects of lost authenticity. Arthur Machin's story moves back and forth across the years of his sporting life in a structural mimesis of his own bafflement at how the pieces may be intelligibly fitted together. Bafflement is the keynote of Arthur's feelings: equipped with a hugh physique and a proletarian machismo fed by cheap novels and the rugby league ethos, he is incapable of understanding, until it is too late, Mrs. Hammond's proud but damaged sensibility:

All along I'd thought of myself as the gallant frog, going out Saturday afternoons to be knocked about, thumped, cut, and treated generally like a piece of mobile refuse, just so I could have that extra load of cash, and help her out. I even used to think of her when I was playing, as if I was playing for her, as if it was all worth it if only to make her happy—with a car, a fur coat, and now a T.V. set.²⁸

Arthur's dream of conspicuous consumption turns into a nightmare and he comes to recognise the inherent brutality of this naive materialism. He has tried to buy Mrs. Hammond and fashion her into the prop his ego requires, '... I needed *her* to make me feel whole and wanted.'²⁹ Though he understands at last that she was afraid to commit herself because of her fear of rejection, his obsession with her reaches to the core of his own insecurity. They are both the products of complex conjunctions of cultural and emotional loss. Her potential for happiness, briefly realised during the war in the company of other women, has been stifled by a possessive father, a depressive husband and, terminally, by Arthur's peremptory exactions. When he first tries to get her to bed, in what amounts to a near-rape ('I couldn't understand why she hadn't expected it, why she didn't give in'), she protests 'You're a man! . . . You're a bleeding man!³⁰' and behind that cry is a lifetime of impoverishment. She is the victim of patriarchy, oppressed immediately and intensely as daughter, wife and mistress. However, at a further remove, she is a victim, like Eric and Arthur, of an economic system which puts a high cash-value on competitiveness and dominance. The ruthlessness of that system touches her life directly in her other specifically feminine rôle, that of widow. Left with two children by a husband killed in Weaver's works, she is deprived of compensation because, as Weaver tells Arthur, 'It wasn't going to do us any good to admit liability.'³¹ Bequeathed little, except guilt about Eric's probable suicide, she is obliged to take a lodger out of financial necessity, only to fall prey to Arthur's insecurity. If Arthur is 'a piece of mobile refuse', she is 'like something that's left over' in a deeper sense than Arthur's mother has in mind when she uses that phrase.³² Mrs. Hammond has been chewed up and spat out by capitalism.³³

Several important links are established in the text between Arthur and Eric Hammond as victims of economic exploitation. Eric has died (suicide

or not) in an archetypal industrial situation, tending a large and lethal machine; Arthur's surname points to his increasingly machine-like behaviour on the field as the fundamental character of his 'sport'—a peculiarly brutalising form of *work*, after all—is revealed to him. Arthur removes Eric's shoes from Mrs. Hammond's living room by metaphorically stepping into them himself. Though his temperament is the opposite of Eric's tormented self-absorption, underlying both is a deep feeling of alienation. Mrs. Hammond says of Eric, 'He used to say he didn't know why he was living. He used to say—why was I ever made alive? When he went like that, I felt I hadn't been proper to him. I hadn't made him feel that he belonged. . .'³⁴ Her use of the word 'proper', like her later use of words like 'decent' and 'respect' invokes a still-active working class morality which she shares with Arthur's parents, though, of course, it furnishes the terms in which they condemn her. That morality, communal, austere, inflexible, is a central focus of Arthur's sense of loss. Faced with his parents and the way of life that sustains their values, he offers a glimpse of his numbing outsiderism as it momentarily affects his father:

. . . just for a moment, he saw that through my eyes there was nothing there at all. He saw the neighbourhood without its affections and feelings, but just as a field of broken down ambition, He might have wanted to be a footballer in his youth. My mother looked at him as if she'd been turned to stone. He just sat there, the little man with no trousers, his head shaking from side to side in bewilderment, his face screwed up with inadequacy and self-reproach, half-blinded with tiredness and life-fatigue?=³⁵

At this stage of his life, still mesmerised by his success, Arthur can only achieve a vicarious recognition of the cultural limbo he inhabits. Yet the image of glimpsed futility is a powerful one for all that and it prefigures the growing life-fatigue ('an odd resigned feeling'³⁶) which he experiences at the end of the novel. This is surely another, less pathological, version of Eric's predicament. He was a man whose stultified existence was without even the short-lived justifications of money and success. Arthur, for all his energy, ends up with a parallel resignation towards the mechanical 'futility of the game',³⁷ a game that reproduces the same relations of exploitation—and uses up bodies in the same pursuit of private profit—as the industrial system which has destroyed Eric.

Storey's later novels, including that gothic fable of tormented class-relations, *Radcliffe* (1963), focus more and more on the personal pathology of loss rather than its collective aspects. What is both culturally explicable and personally tragic in *This Sporting Life* becomes a species of incomprehensible fate in *Pasmore* (1972) and *Saville* (1976). Though a compelling weight of social detail is still present, there is no longer an attempt to find social *explanations* for his protagonists' problems, once their long agony of adult emotional life has begun. Storey continues to deal powerfully with the anguish of cultural estrangement, but only as one aspect of a

lostness that is endemic to the human condition itself. If Sillitoe's inclination is towards the picaresque, Storey is drawn obsessively to the tragic, to the wrenching conflict and slow, sapping bewilderment by which his characters are beset.

A third approach to working class life is offered by Barry Hines. In fact, Hines's novels span a wide range of possible reactions to class subordination, from Sillitoeque freebooting, through tentative attempts at alternative patterns of life, to the recognition—in practice, if not in theory—of the importance of collective action and class solidarity. Lennie Hawke, protagonist of Hines's first novel, *The Blinder* (1966), is very much at the freebooting end of the reaction-spectrum. A schoolboy footballing prodigy, he moves through the episodic structure of the novel with enormous self-assurance, defying his teachers and getting the girls, including one of his teachers' wives; above all, conscious of his sporting talent yet not mesmerised, like Arthur Machin, by the glamour of professionalism. His surname is indicative of Hines's purpose: to set forth the clash between proletarian charisma and a stultifying, hierarchical society, both inside and outside the game.

Lennie's basic outlook is revealed in an early conversation with the middle class Jane:

'Nobody's right for you, are they? Why don't you run away and find yourself an island somewhere?'

'I've found one. It measures a hundred by sixty and they've goals at each end.'

'And what about the other twenty-one players?'

'They don't count. It's just me, and the ball, and the goal.'''

Though he clearly has a great affection for his father, Lennie's attitude to most other people, including his mother, is either complete indifference or a mild irritation that occasionally intensifies into anger. Mrs. Rowley, the teacher's wife, arouses his adolescent sexuality, but he has no strong feelings for her beyond that. Jane eventually prompts him to a couple of passionate outbursts, but only when she has told him of her pregnancy and they have parted on account of *his* refusal to get married. In short, he behaves very much like a typical male of his age, too preoccupied with his own self-fulfilment to notice much—or care much, if he does notice—about how other people, especially his sexual conquests, are feeling. Yet, despite having established Lennie's self-regarding machismo quite persuasively, Hines sidesteps the cultural and psychological issues this might raise. How far Mrs. Rowley is exploited as well as exploiter; whether Jane gets a raw deal; the manner in which working class gender-attitudes are responsible for Lennie's conduct towards them both: these questions nag us with their eloquent non-articulation. Hines is too busy setting Lennie up as a victim of Mrs. Rowley's sexual jealousy and Mr. Leary's outraged pride. The idea that Lennie might have been guilty of anything

more than high spirits and plain-speaking is kept firmly at arm's length, in order that his last defiant gesture (flinging the bribe money in Leary's face) can stand as a picaresque *débâcle* in which roguishness, grown suddenly responsible, emerges with the moral victory over sanctimonious authority.

The Blinder contains some characteristic Hines ingredients—insubordinate working class male versus the system; the unsatisfactoriness of male–female relations; the arrogance of power—but they are not organised into a coherent ideological structure. More interesting, in view of Hines's later development, are the things that are not foregrounded or barely even acknowledged, like the questions mentioned above. For the rest, and despite its usefulness as an apprentice piece, the novel is meandering and superficial. Even more clearly than Sillitoe's novels, *The Blinder* reveals the weaknesses of an individualistic stance towards a subordination that can only be fully evoked in its collective, as well as its personal, dimension. Hines was to learn this lesson quickly, whereas Sillitoe continued to cling to his original position. The complex relationship between a subordinate class and an insubordinate individual has not yet been evoked by Sillitoe with the perceptiveness we find in *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968) or *The Gamekeeper* (1975).

Both Billy Casper and George Purse experience the futility of trying to pit their personal resourcefulness against the social forces ranged against them. Their love of nature and rapport with the birds in their keeping are callously disregarded: Kes is killed by Billy's brutalised brother, Jud, and George's pheasants are blasted by the guns of his employer's shooting party. All the stratagems by which Billy survives are revealed as the useless, though utterly justified, expedients they are; he cannot win against the objective conditions of his impoverished existence. Even the image of lost security which he recalls in the derelict cinema at the end of the novel is no more than the memory of a night at the pictures with his father. It is a miracle that he has survived without his responses being completely blunted and distorted. By patiently recording the details of Billy's experience, as he blows a soap-bubble in the school toilets³⁹ or examines the kestrel's rejectamenta,⁴⁰ Hines shows the boy's struggle to know and to control a small fragment of his world. It is a largely inarticulate process, but it can generate more conventional forms of learning, like the voracious reading of falconry books. What is required is a motivation outside the coercions and persuasions of institutional authority. School, the careers department and the pit are all irrelevant or hostile to Billy's real needs. He views them with either dull resignation or fierce resistance. Yet, though he may be able to circumvent some of their petty cruelties and demands, he cannot escape the institutions themselves, any more than he can escape his unloving home environment. He will follow Jud into the pit, because there is nowhere else for him

to go.

George Purse *has* managed to escape the pit, but only to find himself more than ever subject to a class-system based on the ownership of industry and land. The annual slaughter of the birds he has painstakingly nurtured is a regular reminder to him of the futility of his labour and the fundamentally violent character of expropriation:

. . . he stood by the hedgerow at the end of the wood and watched them tumbling out of the sky. This was what he was paid for, but at times like this he sometimes wondered what it was all about. When he saw one young cock missed by two barrels in front, then by two behind from the next gun, he could not help punching it on its way with a clenched fist.

'Go on, you bugger,' he said, as he watched it fly on, unharmed, and carry on right over into the next field.⁴¹

Like Billy's kestrel, the cock pheasant embodies a potentiality for freedom which cannot be realised often or for long. The world belongs to organised hunters, not free-flying individuals. George understands this, having worked in the pits and absorbed some of the miners' class militancy. *The Gamekeeper* contains many small, but suggestive, exchanges like the one about how few bottles of beer have been provided by the Duke for his beaters:

'I can't understand it, George. There must be somebody getting more than their share.'

'It's simple, Sam, there isn't enough beer. If there **was** a few more crates, and everybody knew there was enough to go round, they wouldn't go making pigs of themselves, or storing it away in their knapsacks, would they?'

'You know why that is, don't you?'

'Course I do. He thinks we'd all get drunk.'

'He's right an' all.'

'No, he's not. Would you, Sam?'

Surprised at the question, Sam Dobie looked at him, then had a drink to give himself time to answer.

'No, come to think of it, I don't suppose I would. Not while I was working.'

'No, and neither would I. Them who want to get drunk get drunk anyway. The rest wouldn't have any more than they do now.'

'Well, what's the point in having any more then?'

'Because you'd be able to make up your own mind, instead of him making it up for you.'⁴²

Individual loss—of freedom, much more than beer—is exposed in its fundamentally collective character. Similar moments of recognition in *Sillitoe's* novels are invariably marginal to, if they do not somehow underwrite, his characters' personal survival-strategies. Hines shows the process of understanding and the possibility of change as matters of negotiation between members of the subordinate class. Greater freedom for all offers the only prospect of greater freedom for each; but it must be envisaged

on the basis of a value-system deliberately different from those of the ruling class and the subordinate class alike. In its critical stance towards the established positions of bourgeois hegemony and proletarian deference or insubordination, the alternative value-system would be radical in the sense Frank Parkin has defined:

The radical value-system purports to demonstrate the systematic nature of class inequality, and attempts to reveal a connectedness between man's personal fate and the wider political order. . . This type of class-oriented meaning system is an important counterweight to that of the dominant order not only in an obvious political sense, but also at an individual level. That is, attachment to the ideals of socialism can provide men [sic] with a sense of personal dignity and moral worth which is denied them by the dominant value system.⁴³

Parkin is writing about a fully developed radicalism embodied in leftwing political parties and discourses, but Hines concentrates on the possibility of emergence of that value-system from the communal values and conditions of working class life. He is as aware as anyone on the left of how far this process has failed to happen in post-war Britain,⁴⁴ but he refuses the unregenerate freebooting of Sillitoe and the hopelessness of Storey. A recent novel, *Unfinished Business* (1983), shows some vital connections between class and gender in constructing for its heroine a personal liberation from suburban materialism and domestic labour. Although that liberation is achieved at considerable emotional cost, there is a positive emphasis on its value as an educative process. Even the deserted husband begins to learn something of the pressures and rewards of domestic labour and child-rearing. But Hines's most powerful version of an emergent radical value-system is set in the culturally privileged context of a mining village with its potent traditions of group loyalty.

The Price of Coal (1979) is, in fact, the story of a community. Its two parts are linked by thematic continuities more than by character: each deals with the harsh conditions of pit life and the good-humoured stoicism of the mining people, the first by means of the cosmeticising of the pit for Prince Charles's visit, the second in relation to the 'reality' of an underground explosion and its tragic consequences. The mismanagement and waste which produce the comic absurdities of Part One are equally responsible for the lapse in safety which causes the fatal accident in Part Two. Behind both episodes there is the wider reality of a class-divided society. When a group of miners talk of Prince Charles's inherited wealth and the Civil List, their discussion places a sense of loss firmly in its political context:

' . . . He owns big estates in Cornwall and Devon, and some property in London. Nearly a hundred and thirty acres it said. The best is though, when the Civil List came out in 1973, Parliament agreed to pay His widow sixty thousand pounds a year. That's over a thousand pounds a week taxpayers' money.'

Albert looked puzzled. Had he missed it on the news? Had it happened when he had been on holiday, and he hadn't seen a newspaper all week?

'How do you mean His widow? I didn't even know that He was married.'

'He's not. But she'll still want looking after when he dies, won't she?'

'A thousand pounds a week?' Albert looked away from the shaft towards the fields and the village while he thought about it. 'How much do ordinary widows get?'

'Nineteen pounds **fifty**.'

Harry laughed and shook his head at the precision of Syd's answer.

'He knows some stuff does Syd. He's got a better memory than Leslie Welch.'

'Leslie Welch? Who's he?'

At first the others thought Alan was fooling. But then, **realising** his age, they knew that he meant it. Harry was annoyed with him for being so young.

'The only Welsh he knows is Welsh rarebit.'

'Racquel Welch. I know her.'

'Bloody hell. I wish I did.'

They laughed, but they had missed his mood. Harry did not mean lust. Her name symbolized a better kind of life, a life of luxury and glamour; and as he stood there in his ragged clothes, with a weak back, waiting to go to work in the freezing darkness for seven hours, it accentuated the paucity of his own life. He wanted something more, and just then he wanted it so badly that it became a physical need, like thirst or hunger. But he could think of no drink or food that might satisfy it. So he just stood there, **looking** over the Gelds of ripening corn in the sunlight, waiting for the feeling to go **off**.⁴³

Hines is a long way from underwriting any kind of privatised materialism here. Harry's idea of the good life has certainly been shaped by media images of 'luxury and glamour', but we are reminded that his years of debilitating labour underground have earned him the right to dream, even if his dreams are of neither a new, socialist commonwealth nor the old common culture. In his inadequate way he is struggling to relate some notion of a better life to the brute facts of his industrial existence. More importantly, his private reverie is set against a collective discourse in which class inequality is plainly exposed, with the result that Racquel Welch's insubstantial charms are demystified by the simple arithmetic of differential wealth.

The possibility of a radical value-system is more dramatically **fore-grounded** by the pit-disaster:

'... What I mean is, if we were in charge of the day to day **running** of things, and were responsible for setting production targets, safety would be bound to improve, wouldn't it? We'd make sure that safety and production went hand in glove. We'd feel that it was more in our interests then, wouldn't we?'

Tony was listening now because he was thinking of his father. He had heard Syd use the same argument many times, and he remembered him saying that industrial democracy was just as important as the wages battle.

But he had never been interested before, the debate had seemed too theoretical. But now, with his father trapped underground, it was suddenly relevant and urgent. The ideas had become **functional**.⁴⁴

No individualistic solutions here: 'functional' ideas are those which serve the community as a whole. Of course, mining areas are special in having preserved that strong sense of community and, along with it, a legendary industrial militancy. Yet that is the point Hines seems to be making: that where such ties exist the young may learn the lessons of life in a class society without falling prey to the atomised individualism through which the possibility of change is denied. (Only 'may', because Billy Casper too is the young product of a mining community.) They may even begin to grasp those 'theoretical' aspects of their subordination which are the basis of a radical value-system.

The Price of Coal was followed by *Looks and Smiles* (1981), as though to emphasise that for most working class youngsters there is no communal culture to nourish and sustain oppositional attitudes. Karen and Mick travel through an England scarred by unemployment and social decay. Their motorway journey takes them past:

Blood on the road. A kestrel hovering over a scorched bank. A slimy canal. New trading estates with FACTORY UNITS TO LET signs. Silent factories. Empty council houses. Overgrown allotments. A stinking river. Acres of new, unsold can. A busy golf course. Scrapyards. A flock of gulls on a rubbish-tip. Polythene flapping on a barbed wire fence. Litter: in fields, in woods, in streets. A convoy of army trucks.⁴⁷

This aggregation of material and cultural fragments is a vivid image for the 1980s. It testifies, as much as the youngsters' personal hopelessness, to the prevalence of human waste. And that concluding reference to the army trucks hints unmistakably at the coercive power with which the State, responsible for such waste, will increasingly defend itself. Hines has no illusions about the dangers that an alternative value-system will face, if it seeks to challenge the political, as well as the moral, hegemony of capitalism. However, even as they confront the social cost of capitalism in crisis, Hines's later novels register currents of resistance in working class life that have a direct, formative connection with contemporary political developments of great significance. We can be pretty certain how miners like those in *The Price of Coal* would have voted in the ballot that made Arthur Scargill President of the NUM. We can be absolutely certain of how they would have responded to Scargill's call to defend their jobs and communities in 1984. (The Miners' Strike of 84/85 was a perfect example of how a keen collective sense of loss can fuel resistance to further economic and cultural impoverishment.) Leftward tendencies in the Labour Party in the early 1980s were a symptom (often manifested and as often repressed in the past, of course!) of the same frustration and anger felt by George Purse when he is confronted with the brute realities of the class system. The wife and husband in *Unfinished Business* go through a process of learning and growth that derives from and reciprocally endorses the

emancipatory objectives of the Women's Movement.⁴⁸ In all these instances, Hines has given persuasive expression to feelings that have helped reshape the political culture of our society in the last dozen years.

One last example of how the sense of loss can serve a radical purpose is William McIlvanney's *The Big Man*. The terms in which its West of Scotland setting is established reveal a social vision at least as acute and indignant as Hines's:

When the money went, Graithnock turned funny but not so you would laugh. It had always had a talent for violence and that violence had always had its mean and uglier manifestations. Besides the stand-up fights between disgruntled men, there had been the knives and the bottles and the beatings of women. The difference now was that contempt for such behaviour was less virulent and less widespread. Something like honour, something as difficult to define and as difficult to live decently without, had gone from a lot of people's sense of themselves. . . That instinctive moral strength that had for so long kept the financial instability of working-class life still humanly habitable, like a tent pitched on a cliff^{top} but with guy-ropes of high-tensile steel, had surely weakened.⁴⁹

It is against this background of industrial and cultural decay that Dan Scoular, the big man of the title, agrees to be hired for a bare-knuckle fight that will settle a dispute between rival Glasgow crime bosses. He is unemployed, broke and desperate to vindicate himself to his wife by doing something he can at least do well. However, his weeks of training, culminating in the bloody contest itself, convince him that there can be no victory in such a situation:

If there had been a commentary on their fight, he decided, it would have preceded their actions, determining them. They hadn't been controlling events. They were being controlled by them. . . And while they spent themselves against each other, cancelling out each other's force, neutralising the meaning of their joint experience, a parasitical significance had been feeding off them. A balance of power that they would never share in was affected, money of which they would only ever see a fraction shifted places, perhaps someone's life or death was being decided.

There couldn't be triumph in such a winning. Both fighters had lost. Only the promoters had won. He had no honour from it. The terms he had allowed himself to be judged in weren't his. In order to have honour, he had to introduce his own terms, but he didn't know how.⁵⁰

Dan soon discovers how to 'introduce his own terms'. He forcibly takes extra money from Matt Mason (the gangster who has hired him) in order to compensate his defeated and nearly-blinded opponent. This gesture of atonement puts him high on Mason's hit-list and he goes home to Graithnock knowing his life will be in constant danger. Nevertheless, he has learnt how far his own toughness has colluded with Mason's violence and now both sorts of machismo are complementary aspects of a ruthless-

ly competitive society. Wryly reviewing his predicament at the end of the novel, Dan finds consolation in the idea of a class and a community that have always known life as a threat as much as a promise:

He felt the joy of being here, whatever the terms. Tonight or tomorrow it might come. He wasn't unique in that. It was what his father had faced, and countless others. And when he spoke, his voice was an echo of the generations of people who had stood where he was standing."

Dan is able to draw on a communal history that can nourish the moral will. As in Hines's writing, there is an acknowledgement here that working class life can still offer some signposts for a route beyond greed and alienation. Yet Dan's change of consciousness is also—and crucially—an act of transformation. He has had to unlearn his inheritance of sexism and violence while relearning the significance of collective struggle. His stance is finally one of embattled exhilaration, a finely balanced testimony to the need for change whatever its risks.

What I have called the sense of loss is one means by which working class life is represented—as it has been lived—as an experience of deprivation and denial. Registering the cultural as well as the material deprivations which beset working people is a service to them that can often best be performed by those writers, novelists or otherwise, who have seen the class system from below. However, there is more to subordination than the *absence* of something. There are also active values which may reproduce those of the ruling class or represent some kind of alternative to them. I have confined my discussion to a series of novels which offer a challenging contrast between forms of personal accommodation to the ruling value-system and forms of potentially transformative collective feeling. That contrast is both highly specific to the post-war period and part of a much older and much longer story. The shift from insubordinate individualism to the recuperation of class solidarity reflects the enormous change from the complacent consumerism of the Fifties to the social wreckage of the Thatcherite Eighties. At the same time we should not forget that the task which writers like Hines and McIlvanney have undertaken puts them firmly in a tradition of socialist writing the aim of which has always been, and always must be, to identify and encourage the capacity of the working class to transform society.

NOTES

1. *The Uses of Literacy*, Chatto & Windus, 1957, esp. pp. 270-282.
2. Several of Wesker's most characteristic speeches and articles are collected in *Fears Of Fragmentation*, Cape, 1970. 'The Secret Reins', pp. 39-50, deals with the origins and philosophy of Centre Fortytwo.

3. In particular, *One-Dimensional Man*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.
4. The best introduction to the 'British tradition' is mill Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Chatto & Windus, 1958, and in Penguin paperback since 1961.
5. The popularity of reactionary fabulists like Tolkien and Richard Adams is of considerable significance in the cultural context of the last fifteen years.
6. Raymond Williams outlines such an approach in his *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, 1977, esp. pp. 136-141. The cultural sociology he proposes would neither reduce culture to an epiphenomenon of economic activity nor deny its complexity by treating specific cultural formations (institutions, relationships, discourses) as though they were independent of each other as well as of material production. Like E.P. Thompson (see ref. 8), Williams insists on the centrality of 'feeling' to any half-way adequate Marxist criticism of culture.
7. *What Went Wrong?*, Gollancz, 1978, p. 276.
8. E.P. Thompson's critique of Althusser, 'The Poverty of Theory' (in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, Merlin, 1978), contains this valuable reminder of the importance of feeling: '. . . people do not only experience their own experience as ideas, within thought and its procedures, or (as some theoretical practitioners suppose) as proletarian instinct, etc. They also experience their own experience as *feeling*, and they handle their feelings within their culture, as norms, familial and kinship obligations and reciprocities, as values or (through more elaborated forms) within a n or religious beliefs. This half of culture (and it is a full one-half) may be described as affective and moral consciousness.' Thompson goes on to argue '. . . that every contradiction is a conflict of value as well as a **conflict** of interest; that inside every "need" there is an affect, or "want", on its way to becoming an "ought" (and vice versa); that every class struggle is at the same time a struggle over values. . .' (p. 363).
9. Seabrook, *op. cit.*, p. 276.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
11. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Pan, 1960, pp. 176-177.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
13. See the analysis of such consolations in Paul Willis, 'Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form', *Working Class Culture*, eds., J. Clarke, Chas Critcher and R. Johnson, Hutchinson, 1979, pp. 185-198.
14. My term 'insubordinate' deliberately glances at, though it is not to be confused with, Ralph Miliband's '**de-subordination**'. In his 'A State of De-subordination' (*British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 399-409), Miliband uses the word to describe strategies by which workers try to 'mitigate, resist and transform the conditions of their subordination' (p. 402), but he has in mind a species of collectivism, however rudimentary, which 'constitutes a repudiation of notions of "integration" of the working class into present day capitalist society' (p. 403). What I am dealing with, in my discussion of Arthur Seaton and the others, is a reaction to subordination which, though superficially dis-integrative, is so compromised by its opportunism that it amounts to an acquiescence in the capitalist valuesystem. Of course, we are both looking at the same general phenomenon, but from different angles. Miliband stresses the significance of collective accommodations which are, at **the same** time, symptoms of unresolved conflict; I stress the significance of private conflicts which are, at the same time, forms of accommodation. There is no disagreement about the structural character of subordination itself.
15. Sillitoe, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-72.
16. Typical are Frank Dawley in the 'William Posters' trilogy and Michael Cullen in *A Start in Life* (1970). Though Brian Seaton (in *Key To the Door*, 1961),

like Arthur, talks of fair shares for all and Frank Dawley spends some time as a guerilla-fighter in Algeria, their **decalred** principles are rarely grounded in either personal relations or public **commitments**.

In a recent novel, *Her Victory* (1982), **Sillitoe** has chosen a female protagonist whose experience he renders quite sensitively. However, this is at the expense of his overall representation of the working class. Pam's class **affiliations** are shown as something from which she must escape, to be pursued by her incorrigibly **lumpen** husband and his 'Neanderthal' (p. 433) brothers. Her eventual 'victory' comes about through her attachment to Tom, an ex-merchant seaman who was brought up in an orphanage. He discovers that his mother and grandmother were Jewish, becomes an enthusiastic convert to Judaism, and travels to Israel to set up house for Pam and their baby. Most of the novel's considerable length is taken up with the minute dissection of private relationships. Any notion of wider commitments is absent: meaning and purpose are to be found, if at all, in the realm of the personal. Even Tom's devotion to the State of Israel is the result of a spiritual revelation, not a political choice.

17. In 'The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner', 1959.
18. Thirties poverty and its domestic consequences are vividly depicted in Part One of *Key To The Door*, 1961.
19. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, p. 191.
20. Stuart Laing, 'The Morality of Affluence', in *Popular Fiction and Social Change*, ed. Christopher Pawling, Macmillan, 1984, p. 178.
21. *Room At The Top*, Penguin, 1959, p. 123.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
26. *Loc. cit.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
28. *This Sporting Life*, Penguin, 1962, p. 163.
29. *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
33. It is a crowning irony of Mrs. Hammond's predicament as a woman that the one moment of liberation she has experienced was permitted by a global explosion of male aggression—World War Two!
34. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
38. *The Blinder*, Penguin, 1969, p. 27.
39. *A Kestrel for A Knave*, Penguin, 1969, pp. 85-86.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.
41. *The Gamekeeper*, Penguin, 1979, p. 193.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.
43. Frank Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order*, Paladin, 1972, p. 97.
44. For some recent comments on this, see: John Westergaard, 'Class of '84', *New Socialist*, January/February 1984, pp. 30-36 and Gregor McLennan, 'Class Conundrum', *Marxism Today*, May 1984, pp. 29-32.
45. *The Price of Coal*, Penguin, 1982, pp. 22-23.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
47. *Looks and Smiles*, Penguin, 1983, p. 169.

48. Another rendering of working class women's experience, from a powerful feminist perspective, can be found in the novels of Pat Barker. Her *Union Street* (1982) and *Blow Your House Down* (1984) contain many uncompromising images of women and young girls victimised by men. They also show women supporting each other, though always with their backs to the wall and never with much prospect of change in their quietly desperate lives.
49. *The Big Man*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1985, p. 17.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 256.