

‘WHAT THOUGHT OF ‘HEAD OFFICE’ TO
“ONE OFF HIS HEAD”’: ESCAPING
‘CLERKLY LIVES’ IN MIDDLEBROW
FICTION (1859-1945)

by

Nicola Jane Bishop, B.A., M.A. (Lancaster University)

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

Lancaster University, March, 2014

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the literary clerk, a nonentity by most accounts, became so emblematic of urban modernity by the early twentieth century that he served to unite the middle and high brows. While the thesis draws parallels with, and offers challenges to, our understanding of the parameters of modernist fiction, it does so through a detailed study of texts that are defined thus far as middlebrow. This includes the works of Victor Canning, Norman Collins, Keble Howard, P. G. Wodehouse, as well as Shan Bullock, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and Edwin Pugh. These authors address the plight of the clerk, and they do so from personal experience; most converted to full-time authorship after a period of office work. These novelists, then, are the product of a ‘clerkly’ fascination with reading, writing, and the acquisition of cultural capital. The narratives that they offer – filled with tales of clerical hardship – show that their sympathies lie with those who cannot write their way out of the office.

This is a topographical study which identifies a series of ‘escapes’ that clerkly authors make available to their literary clerk. In framing the research in this way, this thesis assesses the validity of the typical clerk type before examining the spaces in which the clerk-character could begin to emerge as a viable literary ‘everyman’. The clerk is thus placed within those spaces which usually define him (the office and the suburb), demonstrating that underneath the façade of conformity, there is a ‘human’ element. This human element is to be found in the subversion of office-time, the pleasurable retreat to the suburb, and, in the discovery of the ramble. This ultimate escape – an adventure in the Home Counties – showcases the moment in which the clerk-character, at last, becomes the clerk-author.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr James Taylor for teaching me to develop and not dismiss ideas, and Professor John Schad for encouraging me to find the better writer within myself.

I also could not have finished this thesis without the continuous and continuing support, dedication, and affection of my first and favourite academic. For every 5am dog walk, every Friday Bolognese, and every late-night proof-read of this work, I thank you, Sam.

To Megan, for showing me the scenic route.

Introduction

There are thousands like him. There they go, hurrying for the bridges, each in his cheap black coat, each with pale face and uneven shoulders: thousands of them. Slaves of the desk. Twopenny clerks. And he is one of them, just a little higher in the clerkly scale perhaps, just a little superior in attainments and status maybe: but unmistakably one of them. A Twopenny clerk. Why, yes. Still he, with all the others, is to be respected. He is doing his best. He is cheerful, manly in his small way, hopeful, amazingly contented. Also he has a soul, this figure that I see in the crowd, and he has an ideal [...].¹

Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne: Diary of a London Clerk* (1907)

The clerical worker captured the imagination of modernity. Following the creation of vast commerce, an expanding banking sector, and the administration of empire, a growing tide of clerks crossed London Bridge from their suburban dwellings, destined for impressive new office buildings in banks and businesses. While London has always been seen as a whirl of movement – Wordsworth, for example, described the city as an ‘endless stream of men and moving things’ – the nineteenth century marked the moment in which that ‘stream’, for so many authors and spectators, became primarily clerical.² Thus Edgar Allan Poe called the ‘tumultuous sea of human heads’ a ‘tribe of clerks’ in 1840; P. G. Wodehouse represented his clerks in 1910 as a ‘human stream’; and finally, in 1922, T. S. Eliot saw the clerks as undone by death, ‘flow[ing] over London Bridge’.³ All three authors had, in fact, themselves been a part of the clerical mass. Michael Heller has recently suggested that by 1911 as many as ten per cent of all male workers in London were clerks,⁴ and there were more who

¹ Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p. 138.

² William Wordsworth, ‘Book VII: Residence in London’, *The Prelude* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1993), p.177.

³ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Man of the Crowd’, *Selected Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, year unknown), pp. 85-6; P. G. Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), p. 20; T. S. Eliot, ‘The Waste Land’, *Collected Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), ll. 61-63, p. 63.

⁴ Michael Heller, *London Clerical Workers 1880-1914: Development of the Labour Market* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), p. 1.

lived in the surrounding suburbs – those whom Norman Collins called the ‘half-urban hordes’ – commuting in each day to office buildings across the capital.⁵

The clerk not only personifies the commercial city but also typifies so many of the social changes that mark the nineteenth century: in particular, increasing suburbanisation and the democratisation of educational opportunities made available through the new Board Schools. It is no surprise, therefore, that in fiction the clerk became a figure of interest – or even, an ‘Everyman’ figure. This clerkly everyman not only suited the needs of a vast clerical audience but he also provided a fascinating, comic, and at times feared, social specimen. As Christopher Breward suggests, the ‘everyman’ was a ‘*delineation* [who was] depressingly uniform in his identity and habits’.⁶ Indeed, the middle classes so carefully avoided the *petit-bourgeois* clerk that the vastness of his class was subtly obscured from discourse. Instead, as Jonathan Wild has put it, the clerk becomes a spectre, lost within two-dimensional satire and stereotype.⁷ This thesis seeks, then, to bring the clerk figure to the fore by examining the clerkly subculture that arose from multiple representations produced both by middle-class observers and the clerks themselves. The focus will be on the construction of ‘clerkly’ spaces such as the office and the suburb demonstrating how the clerk came to reflect more widely the anxieties of everyday or ‘ordinary’ modernity. In doing so, I reclaim the title ‘everyman’ from what Breward called ‘journalistic jettison’ and draw attention to the collective empathy that saw the futility

⁵ Gregory Anderson suggests that there were only 91,000 clerks in 1851. By 1891, as F. M. L. Thompson calculates, the number of male clerks stood at 370,000, an increase of 279,000 from 1861, and by 1911, Heller suggests that at least 250,000 of these clerks lived in the capital alone, with a further 129,430 clerks living in Middlesex, Essex, Surrey and Kent. By 1951, as Ross McKibbin suggests, there were 2.4 million ‘petty clerks and salesmen, insurance agents and shop assistants’ across England. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 1. Norman Collins, *London Belongs to Me* (London: Collins, 1947), p. 9; Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), p. 2; Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), p. 68; Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 14; McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 45.

⁶ Christopher Breward, “‘On the Bank’s Threshold’: Administrative Revolutions and the Fashioning of Masculine Identities at the Turn of the Century”, *Parallax*, 3:2 (1997), p. 112 – my emphasis added.

⁷ Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture 1880-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.

of clerkdom as a suitable symbol for *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and early-twentieth-century concerns.⁸

In placing the clerk at the heart of this narrative, I am suggesting that the dominance of the lower-middle-class clerk is a marker of the social shift that benefitted both authors and readers alike in creating a distinct *petit-bourgeois* hegemony. In this way, the lower-middle-class clerk benefitted most from Virginia Woolf's claims that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed' because, for a time, the self-confessed 'nobody' took centre stage.⁹ As Christine DeVine puts it, 'Mr Polly and Kipps [...] represent no serious threat to the status quo [...] but] their very existence in the popular fiction of the day, written by a well-known and popular author, constitutes in itself such a threat'.¹⁰ In a literary scene divided into two opposing camps – the 'middle' and 'high' brows – the clerk could threaten not only the status quo but the construction of opposition between these two groups (an opposition that has been continued until the present day). Like Carola Kaplan and Anne Simpson, then, I am interested in the 'interpenetrations and intersections' of Edwardian and modernist fictions, and the 'narrative continuities' that can be seen across Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian literatures.¹¹ I argue that modernist authors and popular writers alike were simultaneously drawn to a figure who for some represented the worst aspects of compulsory education, mass publishing, and ephemeral outpourings, but for others championed the freedoms that such modern developments allowed.

In this respect, rather than viewing modernism as a reaction against the middlebrow, I suggest, notably in my conclusion, that modernism eventually furthers

⁸ Breward, "'On the Bank's Threshold'", p. 112.

⁹ See, for example, the number of novels that feature the clerk which were published in 1910 itself – E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, H. G. Wells' *The History of Mr Polly*, Frank Swinnerton's *The Young Idea*, P. G. Wodehouse's *Psmith in the City*, and W. Pett Ridge's *Nine to Six-Thirty*. Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 4.

¹⁰ Christine DeVine, *Class in Turn-of-the-century Novels of Gissing, James, Hardy and Wells* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 117.

¹¹ Carola Kaplan and Anne Simpson, *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p. xvi; Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), p. 4.

middlebrow causes by acting on the criticisms of society frequently levelled by clerical writers. In examining spaces that are first associated with the clerk – such as the office and suburbia – and which later came to epitomise modern living more widely, I argue that the clerk becomes the secret hero of English modernity, making *English* culture a distinctly ‘clerkly’ one. My topographical study of these three spaces or places – the office, the suburbs, and the ramble – sees the clerk at the centre of literary discourse at the early part of the twentieth century. By framing the research in this way, my thesis draws on the growing discourses of both middlebrow culture and place writing. In examining the spaces that shaped the clerk’s daily existence, and the multitudinous representations of those spaces, I will read the sites of clerical normalcy as markers of the *petit-bourgeois* hegemony as well as, in the final chapter, exploring the ability of clerk-writers to avoid stereotyping and develop that hegemony into a symbol of the nation.

Literature Review

This thesis is a work of literary history which thus contributes to a number of fields of scholarly work across both literary studies and historiography in studying the relationship between writers, class, and literary output. Writing in the 1970s, Gregory Anderson observed that the significance of the Victorian working classes had eclipsed scholarly interest in the lower middle classes.¹² At the end of that decade, Howard Davis stated that ‘the “curious neglect” of clerical workers as an object of sociological study [...] has scarcely been remedied’.¹³ These observations remain, indeed, accurate

¹² In America, research into the clerical equivalent has been much more extensive; see, for instance, Albert Blum, *White-Collar Workers* (New York: Random House Press, 1971), William A. Ruch, *White Collar Productivity* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), Mark McCulloch, *White-Collar Workers in Transition* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), Charles Wright Mills, *White Collar: the American Middle Classes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Thomas Augst, *The Clerk’s Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹³ Howard H. Davis, *Beyond Class Images: Explorations in the Structure of Social Consciousness* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 145.

for the next thirty years of academic research. This is partly because, prior to Anderson's first work, *Victorian Clerks* (1976), the clerk was seen as playing a relatively minor role in systems of social stratification – particularly within Weberian and Marxist accounts of the complexity of the British class structure. Notably, then, interest in the clerk arose not out of his own class position but because he was seen as integral to the definition of the *other* classes.¹⁴ As Stephen Mihm argues, Marxist historians sought to identify the moment at which the *petit bourgeoisie*, as Marx predicted, was 'absorbed into one of the two primary classes'.¹⁵

One of the earliest of these accounts was *The Condition of Clerical Labour* (1935) by F. D. Klingender, a Marxist critique of the social, economic and political situation of the clerk. Klingender argued that the clerk had become proletarianised by the 1930s thus contributing to the shrinking of the bourgeoisie that Marx had predicted. David Lockwood, in *The Blackcoated Worker* (1958), first countered this argument with the suggestion that clerical workers, in fact, retained many of the privileges that continued to define them as being apart from the working class – an argument supported by McKibbin in 1998, who suggested that in terms of education, dress, salary and social aspiration, the clerk was definitely middle class. By the 1970s, Anderson's discussion of areas such as pay, lifestyle and unionisation contributed to the growing debate by supporting Klingender's original analysis – findings which Heller has very recently countered in *London Clerical Workers* as falling simply into a '*declinist*' narrative. I shall discuss the trends of pessimism and optimism in more detail later; for the moment, we need only to observe that Klingender and Lockwood began a debate about the position of the clerk which would shape critical literature to the present day.

¹⁴ Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour* (London: Lawrence, 1935); Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); McKibbin, *Class and Cultures*, p. 45; Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*; Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 9. See also Peter Bailey's article on the historiography of the lower middle class – 'White Collars, Grey Lives? The Lower Middle Class Revisited', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), 273-290.

¹⁵ Stephen Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts: A Response to Michael Zakim's "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary"', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (Winter 2006), p. 607.

Geoffrey Crossick's panoramic edited collection, *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870-1914* (1977)¹⁶ was the first to place the clerk within a distinctly lower-middle-class framework, examining the role that had been played by bureaucracy in the creation of class identities. Disappointingly, most of those who contribute a chapter to the volume – including Hugh McLeod, Richard Price, R. Q. Gray, and S. Martin Gaskell – did not go on to produce further work of any substantial length on the lower-middle-class characters they examine.¹⁷ Despite, as Peter Bailey observes, 'providing no arrestingly revisionist success story', Crossick *et al* did draw together the threads of representation as a starting point for further study, even allowing for the lack of impetus that led to the lower middle classes remaining a marginal area of study for the next twenty years.¹⁸ Arno Mayer suggests that this demonstrates the reluctance of academics – particularly those who may have studied at the new polytechnics of the 1970s – to study a class 'in which so many of them originate and from which they seek to escape'.¹⁹

A new tide of scholarly criticism examining the clerical class began in the late 1990s with Bailey's own article 'revisiting' the lower middle class. Bailey draws our attention, once more, to the noticeable gap within existing scholarship of this particular class; as he suggests, 'the lower middle class was hardly likely to precipitate its own E. P. Thompson'.²⁰ 'Compared with those rugged darlings, the working classes', Bailey continues, '[...] the office clerk and the shopkeeper deserved the condescension of posterity'.²¹ As Rita Felski observes, in her criticism of John Carey's contentions, 'the lower middle class has typically been an object of scorn

¹⁶ Geoffrey Crossick, *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).

¹⁷ One contributor to Crossick's book who is an obvious exception is Anderson, the author of *Victorian Clerks* as well as a parallel study in female clerical workers – *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives?', p. 276.

¹⁹ In American historiography, Mihm points to the comparative insecurities of 'deskbound academics' and clerks – both of whom do not engage in production according to the terms of traditional labour – as an ironic factor in the former's dismissal of the latter. Arno Mayer, 'The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Sept. 1975), 409-436; Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts', p. 608.

²⁰ Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives?', p. 276.

²¹ Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives?', p. 276.

among intellectuals, blamed for everything from exceedingly bad taste to the rise of Hitler'.²² Felski writes openly about being interested in the lower middle class *because* it is her own social origin, something rarely confessed in academia, whilst recognising also the inherent contradictions in a lower-middle-class identity:

Being lower-middle-class is a singularly boring identity [...] a non-identity [...] yet as older forms of class polarization and class identification begin to dissolve, the lives of ever more individuals in the industrialized West are defined by occupations, lifestyles, and attitudes traditionally associated with the lower middle class.²³

Given the obvious significance of the lower-middle-class within modern society,²⁴ it is no wonder that Bailey and Felski are critical of works like Crossick's collection; yet, in all fairness, *The Lower Middle Class in Britain* remains the only study which attempts an evaluation of the broad sweep of lower-middle-class identities, however underwhelming its outcome in promoting further research. The handful of works produced after Bailey and Felski's observations in 1999 and 2000 have been more focused – see, for example Geoffrey Spurr's article on the London YMCA, Richard Higgins's discussion of the clerk in the novels of H. G. Wells, and A. James Hammerton's analyses of lower-middle-class marriage.²⁵ Two important works,

²² Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, Vol. 115, No. 1 (Jan. 2001), p. 34. Felski is referring to John Carey's conclusions in *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

²³ Felski, 'Nothing to Declare', p. 34.

²⁴ Michael Zakim highlights the pivotal role of the American clerk as the crux of 'all the new markets in the new market society' – following in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin who 'retroactively became America's first clerk'. His interpretation of why the clerk remains ignored in labour history is based on the idea that the clerk is 'outside an Anglo-American tradition that identified labour as the source of value'. Zakim, 'Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary', pp. 567, 603, 571.

²⁵ Geoffrey Spurr, 'The London YMCA: A Haven of Masculine Self-Improvement and Socialisation for the late-Victorian and Edwardian Clerk', *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 37, Issue 2 (August 2002), 275-301; Richard Higgins, 'Feeling like a Clerk in H. G. Wells', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 50, Issue 3 (Spring 2008), 457-475; A. James Hammerton, 'Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920', *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (July 1999), 291-321; Hammerton, 'The Perils of Mrs Pooter: Satire, Modernity and Motherhood in the Lower Middle Class in England, 1870-1920', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1999), 261-276.

however, have been published since 2006 that specifically place the lower-middle-class clerk at the centre of both labour and literary history.

In the most recent of these, *London Clerical Workers*, Heller argues that previous commentary on the clerk was a narrative of over-simplified decline and fall, and that actually there are grounds for understanding the growth of the clerical industry and the feminization of clerical work as creating not only a change but one that substantiated the clerk's place in the middle class.²⁶ This view, reinforced by the work of Weber and Bourdieu, brings us back to the traditional focus of the older economic histories by engaging, once more, in the debate over the working- or middle-class credentials of the clerk.²⁷ Heller's study, while critiquing the findings of earlier historians, such as Anderson, has methodologically much in common with his predecessors – as he acknowledges – particularly with respect to source base and statistical analysis.²⁸ While this is a revision of 'declinist' or 'pessimistic' narratives, it does remain fixed within the traditional terms of debate, allowing the clerk only to be either working or middle class. And while Heller places the *London* clerk at the centre of his story, which many before him did not, his method of telling that story remains traditional.²⁹ In this way, Heller continues, as so many have before him, to make the category of 'lower middle class' a *non*-identity; merely giving the clerk a boost into the middle class 'proper'. Heller thus not only rescues the clerk from the 'shame' of a lower-middle-class-ness but, in doing so, implies that we can congratulate ourselves on becoming a middle-class nation. Where my study diverges most from Heller's is in the emphasis on an understanding of class that is based not only on social and economic factors but on *cultural* capital. In this sense, I place emphasis on the very

²⁶ Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, pp. 11-12.

²⁷ See also R. Guerriero Wilson, *Disillusionment or New Opportunities? The Changing Nature of Work in Offices, Glasgow 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998). For a further account in opposition to Anderson and Wilson, see Paul Attewell, 'The Clerk Deskilled: A Study in False Nostalgia', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 2.4 (1989), 357-87.

²⁸ Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 11.

²⁹ Anderson, for example, focused on Manchester and Liverpool clerks in his earlier work, and many of the sources in his broader study reflect this.

educational and aspirational values that created a recognisable and distinctive *lower-middle-class* identity, and one which is worth studying in its own right.

The second, and most relevant, study is Jonathan Wild's *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture* (2006). Wild's analysis draws on *fictional* representations of the clerk which make him central to our cultural and social understanding. Indeed, Wild's study answers Michel Crozier's criticisms of British historians in *The World of the Office Worker* (1971), which argues that the cultural and social implications of black-coated workers are neglected because to British academics the term 'clerk' is defined only in economic terms.³⁰ Wild's study of the clerk-character within middlebrow fiction is a detailed chronological catalogue of both the representational and socio-historical rise of the clerk (and his 'subsequent death'); his extensive research uncovered many of the novels discussed in this thesis.³¹ Wild also explores aspects of lower-middle-class cultural identity which were first raised in Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) but with more optimistic conclusions.³² While Carey's chapter on 'The Suburbs and the Clerks' is particularly illuminating and offers a thorough, albeit brief, analysis of the position of the clerk with regard to cultural improvement, Wild suggests there is a broad scope of clerical representations, ranging from the most-recognised 'tame cat' to what he sees as the 'übermensch clerk'.³³ This thesis has taken to heart comments made in Wild's afterword about the status of the clerical class in realist fiction (and contemporary society) and made the questions raised by his study the starting point for analysis. My focus, however, is topographical, seeing not only the position of the clerkly class itself as crucial to the modern social and cultural norms, but also the spaces which were occupied by the clerk as paramount in forming distinct constructions of Englishness.

³⁰ Michel Crozier, *The World of the Office Worker* (London: Chicago University Press, 1971), p. 29.

³¹ Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 8.

³² Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*. This study is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

³³ See, for instance, Wild's comments on Mr Hall Pycroft in Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Stock-Broker's Clerk' who is a "manly and morally upright clerk" (1893). Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 89.

Following in the footsteps of Wild and Carey, this thesis also draws upon recent studies of middlebrow fiction – a field which, as Jonathan Rose suggests, ‘has lately won new respect among scholars’.³⁴ Rose’s own study, *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes* (2001) – written at the end of a decade of early exploration into middlebrow fiction but predating the very recent surge of popularity – still fuels debate within this field.³⁵ Sharing some commonalities of approach with Carey’s study, Rose explores the divide between high modernism and autodidactic working-class authors. His chapter entitled ‘What was Leonard Bast really like?’ is clearly of interest in any study of lower-middle-class authorship, and his conclusions will be discussed further in the first chapter of this thesis. More recently still, the AHRC-funded ‘middlebrow network’ has marked the entry of the middlebrow into the academic mainstream, and has broadened the range of authors and periods studied.³⁶ Globally, the study of middlebrow culture has reached the forefront of critical discussion which means that much of the resultant work has been directed towards detailed case studies of nationality, gender, and periodization that have hitherto been ignored.³⁷

³⁴ Jonathan Rose, ‘Review of *Priestley’s England: J. B. Priestley and English Culture*’, *History*, Review of New Books, 37.1 (2008), 26-27.

³⁵ Christopher Hilliard responded in 2005 with a critique of Rose’s use of class as the only delineator between modernist and ‘plebeian’ literary styles – or, as Hilliard puts it, while ‘class and privilege satiate the social history of literature, [...] it is unhelpful to interpret the reception of modernism as class conflict continued by other means’. Hilliard accuses Rose of using early-twentieth century representations of modernism as a metaphor for contemporary strife within American academic circles. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001). Hilliard, ‘Modernism and the Common Writer’, *The Historical Journal*, 48, 3 (2005), pp. 787, 771.

³⁶ The Middlebrow Fiction Network is an AHRC-funded resource for those studying novels by middlebrow writers. See their website for a detailed description of the middlebrow, as well as a bibliography of middlebrow work – www.middlebrow-network.com.

³⁷ See, for example, Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) and Jonathan Hess, *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010). Discussions of the feminine middlebrow were broached earlier, following works such as Teresa Mangum’s *Married, Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). Recently there has been a second wave of this trend, with new research including Jaime Harker’s *America the Middlebrow: Women’s Novels, Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship Between the Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), Humble’s *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, Melissa Sullivan’s *Revisioning Middlebrow Culture: Virginia Woolf, Rose Macaulay and the Politics of Taste, 1894-1941* (Umi Dissertation Publishing, 2011), and Erica Brown’s *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel: Elizabeth von Arnim and Elizabeth Taylor* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013). See also Hillary Hinds, ‘Domestic Disappointments: Feminine Middlebrow Fiction of the Interwar Years’, *Home Cultures*, 6, 2 (2009), 199-211.

The debate begun in the Edwardian period continues to shape contemporary views on the middlebrow. Woolf's 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' (1924) – written as a rebuttal to Arnold Bennett's own dissection of (her) modernism – is still often cited in middlebrow studies, although the considerations raised by Nicola Humble about the neglected “‘facts and forgotten associations’” which created a ‘fluid and flexible literary community’ are still overlooked.³⁸ Thus the quarrels that were begun in Edwardian literary circles have, as Kate MacDonald suggests, been allowed to dominate contemporary criticism.³⁹ Hilliard, for example, continues this controversy by devoting much of his article on modernism and the common reader to ‘unpick[ing Jonathan] Rose’s claim’ that ‘working-class intellectuals were especially predisposed against modernism’.⁴⁰ Like the historiography of the lower middle class, research into the middlebrow thus stands on the outskirts of an academy that tends to find engagement with it to be rather too personal.

Defining the Clerk

As clerical work developed throughout the nineteenth century, the clerk-character went from working alone as a personal assistant to entering vast bureaucratic halls filled with row upon row of identical desks. Much emphasis has been placed on the clerk as a figure who merges seamlessly into this mass to become only a two-dimensional character, one who typifies much but who means very little. Thus, the clerk's stereotypical form – viewed in works as varied as Dickens's *David*

³⁸ Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, p. 24.

³⁹ Kate MacDonald, ‘Edwardian Transitions in the Fiction of Una L. Silberrad’, *ELT*, 54, 2 (2011), p. 217.

⁴⁰ Hilliard suggests instead that the aversion to modernist styles was a literary judgement, rather than a class one, and subsequently included middle-class critics. For further discussion on Carey's conclusions see Jeremy Jennings and Tony Kemp-Welch's Introduction to *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-25. Hilliard, ‘Modernism and the Common Reader’, p. 772.

Copperfield (1850),⁴¹ the Grossmiths' *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), Forster's *Howards End* (1910) and T. S. Eliot's 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1917) – has been read as a standardised representation of life as a lower-middle-class nobody. Instead of dwelling on these caricatures we will look, as did Storm Jameson in 1929, at the depth of the characters; for, as Jameson says of Wells, 'no single work [...] leaves us with so vivid a sense of having lived through a complete stratum of society as does *Kipps*'.⁴² This study will argue that the works of the clerical authors, while often sharing commonalities with their middle-class peers on representations of their environment, present a different clerk-character – one who is nuanced, three-dimensional, and a dominant protagonist, so much so that he becomes a major literary type or figure *for* modernity.

At this point, it is pertinent to define more closely the use of the word 'clerk'. I argue that he is not only identifiably lower middle class but that the fictional clerk became representative of the *whole* of the lower middle class. In *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, Carey reiterates the argument of W. H. Crosland, author of the highly sceptical study *The Suburbans* (1905), that 'the clerks' had 'virtually come to constitute society'.⁴³ Mark Clapson likewise calls the term 'clerk' a 'pejorative catch-all term' for the lower middle classes.⁴⁴ And even social historian Crossick goes so far as to state: 'I shall make no apology in what follows for concentrating on the clerk as a representative example of the lower middle classes'.⁴⁵ This begs the question, then,

⁴¹ Though Dickens is well-known for his plentiful (and, as Wild suggests, obsessive) use of clerical characters, he will not be studied in depth during this thesis. This is, in part, because Dickens is responsible for the dominant stereotype across his 104 clerks, most of whom are secondary characters. Most of his clerks' names heighten the impression of a clerkly caricature – for example, Chuffey, Nicodemus Dumps, Guppy, Minus, Morfin, and Newman Noggs. More practically, whilst this thesis ranges through texts from 1859-1945 (most notably in the final chapter), the focus is on the second wave of clerical characterisation that occurred during the so-called 'bureaucratic revolution'. George Newlyn, as cited in Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 11.

⁴² Storm Jameson, *The Georgian Novel and Mr Robinson* (London: Heinemann, 1929), p. 4.

⁴³ Higgins likewise applies a broad definition in his article 'Feeling Like a Clerk in H. G. Wells'. He calls Kipps both a 'clerkly character' and, at times, more specifically, a clerk. This conflation can also have roots in transatlantic translation (as I suspect in this case) because an American shop assistant like Kipps would have been, and would still be called a store clerk rather than, in this case, a draper. Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p.58; Higgins, 'Feeling Like a Clerk', p. 461.

⁴⁴ Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs: Brave New Worlds, Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Post-war England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 6.

⁴⁵ Crossick, *The Lower Middle Class*, p. 97.

as to how the term 'clerk' should be defined, but also how far that definition becomes fixed.

The earliest uses of the word in the eleventh century were related to posts held within the religious community; however, the only lasting connection this religious cleric has with our nineteenth-century clerk is that both were distinguished by their literacy. In the modern era, the technical definition of the clerical worker is very broad – to quote the *Oxford English Dictionary* he is,

[o]ne employed in a subordinate position in a public or private office, shop, warehouse, etc., to make written entries, keep accounts, make fair copies of documents, do the mechanical work of correspondence and similar 'clerkly' work.⁴⁶

Again we find the adjective 'clerkly' serving as a generic term to cover a broad range not only of professional duties but socio-economic characteristics. Identifiably 'clerkly' features, as Carey suggests, are all represented in Wells' Mr Polly, as well as being recognisable in the lower-middle-class protagonists of many of his other novels.⁴⁷ The scope of the term begins to expand beyond those who are technically clerks. In fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists several words deriving from the noun 'clerk' – of which clerkage, clerkdom, clerkery, clerkess and clerkish are all nineteenth-century terms that indicate a wider cultural diffusion.⁴⁸ The term 'clerkish', for example, describes any characteristic that is 'suggestive of a clerk'; it demonstrates not only the extent to which clerkly culture was embedded in wider

⁴⁶ "clerk, n.", Oxford University Press [20 June 2011],
<<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/view/Entry/34212?rskey=P25cjy&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>

⁴⁷ For example, Mr Lewisham of *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) is an overworked teacher, while Mr Kipps from *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul* (1905) and Mr Hoopdriver in *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) are draper's assistants.

⁴⁸ Of these words clerkage, clerkdom, and clerkery can be used either to broadly describe the duties of a clerk or to represent a collective body of clerks. Clerkess is the less-used term for a female clerk; secretary or typist becomes more usual by the twentieth century. Clerkish as an adjective, describes clerkly characteristics, being defined as 'suggestive of a clerk' – "clerk, n.", Oxford University Press [20 June 2011].

society but the emphasis placed on a set of visually prominent signs.⁴⁹ In a broader sense, the terminology of typical clerk-culture will also be assessed in this thesis; in chapter two, for example, the resonance of words such as ‘suburban’ will be closely examined.

There is, then, a certain element of fluidity in this thesis, reflective of the fluidity within turn-of-the-century stereotypes and beliefs about the clerk. In this way I will, like both Carey and Crossick, refer to several lower-middle-class characters who are not technically clerks but who represent the broader ‘clerkly’ culture. This is also a culture in which the gender of the clerk begins to lose fixity. At the beginning of the ‘bureaucratic revolution’ the clerk was, as in the works of Dickens, educated to a suitable degree and thus explicitly male. By the end of the nineteenth century, as George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893) indicates, the increasing necessity for bureaucracy, and contemporaneous debates about the place of lower-middle-class-women workers, meant that new roles were being created to make use of the new female workforce. The impact of this change is examined in close detail in Anderson’s seminal *White-blouse Revolution* (1989), which argues that the changes in bureaucratic formation contributed to debates on a clerical masculinity that was already in a state of crisis. My thesis takes the male clerk as its subject and, in doing so, offers a commentary on the fluctuations in gender *representation* across the period of study. This commentary is, however, secondary to the examinations of fictionalised escapes from clerical life and, as such, discussions of gender are interwoven into the topographical foci where relevant. The female clerk does not feature in this thesis because the ‘clerkly culture’ which was established at the end of the nineteenth century, and from which stereotypes were drawn, was dominated by male clerks – as reflected in the development of gender-specific terms like ‘secretary’ once female workers began to join the market.

⁴⁹ See, for example, E. M. Forster’s assertion of Leonard Bast’s ‘ilting step of the clerk’. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 41.

The basis of this male ‘clerkly culture’, I will argue, can be found in two, sometimes opposing, forms. The first is what could be termed an ‘outsider’ representation of clerkly culture, concerned with furthering a stereotype that is substantiated through language, appearance, and suburban architecture; these characterisations are often drawn by middle-class critics. The second, ‘insider’ perspective is an expression of the aspirational values and beliefs that were fostered by those within the lower middle classes, most recognisable in the firm belief in social mobility, the desire for (cultural) self-improvement and education, and the importance of the projection of a certain type of lifestyle. The blurring of fine lines of distinction between these two types of representation occurs, as this thesis charts, when the clerks themselves begin to use the fictional codes that their non-clerkly adversaries establish. In doing so, these stereotypes – which are, by their nature, negative – become destabilised by the clerks who themselves write novels with clerical protagonists.

One example of this that coincides with constructions of clerical masculinity can be found in the stature of clerkly characters. Like Jameson’s everyman-reader Mr Robinson, the clerk is, generally speaking, a ‘little man’ – just like the solicitor’s clerk (a ‘little ginger-haired man’) to whom poor Edward Malone, of Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World* (1912), loses the fair Gladys.⁵⁰ In Agatha Christie’s short story ‘The Case of the City Clerk’, Mr Roberts is described as ‘a small, sturdily built man of forty-five, with wistful, puzzled, timid eyes’, and is referred to three times as a ‘little clerk’.⁵¹ Likewise, Collins describes the clerks in *London Belongs to Me* (1945) as ‘smooth, precise little men wearing stiff collars and horn-rimmed spectacles’.⁵² Conan Doyle, Collins, and Christie demonstrate the absorption and unquestioning repetition of stereotypical depictions by outsider commentators. If we look at those writers who were clerks we can see how this type became widespread in the literary imagination.

⁵⁰ Jameson refers to clerkly Mr Robinson as ‘little’ no less than ten times within the seventy-five page long essay. Jameson, *The Georgian Novel*; Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 260.

⁵¹ Agatha Christie, ‘The Case of the City Clerk’, *Parker Pyne Investigates* (New York: HarperCollins, 1934), p. 68.

⁵² Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 13.

One of Irish author Shan Bullock's clerks, Mr Ruby, for instance, is a 'poor, troubled, homely little man', Wells' Mr Polly is a 'short, compact figure' and Edgar Finchley, prolific clerk-author Victor Canning's creation, is, in the very first six words of the novel, defined as 'forty-five, short'.⁵³ Adventurer Professor Challenger, also of *The Lost World*, provides a more typical image of the Edwardian male ideal. Challenger is the ultimate model of Imperialist hyper-masculinity; and when Edward meets him for the first time, he comments, 'it was his size which took one's breath away'.⁵⁴

Carey argues that the construction of the weak and effeminate clerk is, to some degree, challenged by 'Hall-Pycroft-type-clerks', as found in Conan Doyle's 'The Stockbroker's Clerk' and Wells' *History of Mr Polly* (1910).⁵⁵ Yet, while these muscle-bound, athletic types can be found, their incongruity is what draws our attention to them. Wells, in particular, despite being responsible for the 'strong young stockbroker's clerks' that bully Uncle Jim, places a dismally downtrodden lower-middle-class type as his titular character – the 'puny little chap' Polly.⁵⁶ As Bailey suggests, 'Victorian writers faced with the disquieting irruption of a new breed of petty bourgeois shop and office workers devised a *parodic discourse of littleness*, whose feminized tropes rendered the clerk as socially insignificant as the sequestered Victorian woman'.⁵⁷

This 'social insignificance' is demonstrated in the conflation, then, of the clerkly and the middlebrow; the Edwardian trend of interpreting middlebrow fiction as a discourse of 'littleness' is apparent across literary criticism. As Hilliard argues, the 'ordinary reader' becomes synonymous with the 'little man' – 'that species so favoured by interwar commentators'.⁵⁸ And yet, I argue that there is a more positive,

⁵³ Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1917), p. 7; H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 20; Victor Canning, *Mr Finchley Discovers His England* (London: Pan Books, 1970), p. 7.

⁵⁴ Conan Doyle, *The Lost World*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 64.

⁵⁶ And as Carey suggests, it is his 'failures alone, among his characters [that] have warmth and life' – see, for instance, Kipps, Mr Lewisham, Mr Polly and Hoopdriver. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly*, pp. 228 and 90; Carey, *Intellectuals and Masses*, p. 141.

⁵⁷ Peter Bailey, 'White Collars, Grey Lives', p. 272 – my emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Hilliard, 'Modernism and the Common Writer', p. 771.

and in some respects literal, interpretation of the small clerk; as Clive Bloom suggests of Edwardian literature more broadly, ‘the little man replace[d] the hero’.⁵⁹ I would argue that Bloom, though, is wrong to argue that the little man simply ‘replaces’ the hero, rather than *becoming* or redefining the hero; for the Rubys, Pollys and Finchleys of Edwardian fiction do not fit in with traditional definitions of the hero but are instead the heroes of ordinary life.

The authors

Since this thesis is primarily a study of fiction, there should be a description of how this source material has been identified and interpreted. Logistically, this has involved research of a somewhat unorthodox nature; while many hours have been spent in the British Library and the National Library of Scotland, there has been still more research undertaken in second-hand bookshops, browsing market stalls, and in charity shops. This is partly because it is difficult to ascertain whether there are clerical characters or clerkly types from the title of a novel alone (although reading the entirety of William Freeman’s *Dictionary of Fictional Characters* (1963), while tedious, helped), but also because there is much pleasure to be had in owning these books. Most of them are early editions, often because they have not been reprinted since Edwardian clerks themselves, after a hard day at the office, sat in a quiet corner reading them. Discovering works which contain the amateur ‘rambler’ – discussed in detail in chapter three – has been limited only by personal funds; there are so many to be found in second-hand and antiquarian bookshops across the country it has been difficult to control the desire to buy them all.⁶⁰ Much of this research has, therefore, been conducted ‘on the ground’, as it were, but I have also made use of several

⁵⁹ Clive Bloom, *Literature and Culture in Modern Britain, 1900-1929* (London: Longman, 1993), p. 27.

⁶⁰ For example, a title search for the word ‘ramble’ in the Copac catalogue (www.copac.ac.uk) returns 2751 hits. This includes those which distinctly market themselves as ‘ramble-narratives’, generally written by amateurs but not the many local area and county guides, which also frequently include descriptions of ramble journeys.

nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature catalogues, including John Sutherland's *Stanford Guide to Victorian Literature* (1989) and Michael Cox's *Dictionary of Writers and their Works* (2001), whilst the footnotes of Wild, Rose, and Carey have led me to many authors who have received little critical attention elsewhere.

Some of the authors in this thesis enjoy near-canonical status; Wells and Gissing, for example, are ambiguously placed but frequently discussed. Arnold Bennett, William Pett Ridge, Frank Swinnerton, Shan Bullock and Edwin Pugh, on the other hand, are more likely to be cited within specifically middlebrow studies.⁶¹ Far from canonicity stands the largely obscure but prolific writer Victor Canning,⁶² as well as many clerks who wrote only one or two works of anecdotal literature, many of whom feature in chapter three. Most of the authors studied were clerks, even if only briefly, during their youth. Bennett, for example, worked from the age of sixteen in his father's solicitor's office, later becoming a clerk in London; and Bullock was a civil service clerk in Somerset House before transferring to the office of the public trustee, a post which he held until his retirement.⁶³ Pett Ridge spent many years working a six-day week as a clerk in a railway clearing house whilst also attending evening classes at Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institute.⁶⁴ Swinnerton was a clerk-receptionist at J. M. Dent, where he later assisted in the launch of the Everyman's Library, and Pugh worked in a lawyer's office for eight years.⁶⁵ Canning was a clerk in the education

⁶¹ For further research on Arnold Bennett see John Shapcott (ed), *Arnold Bennett: New Perspectives* (Stoke-on-Trent: Arnold Bennett Society, 2007), and Robert Squillace, *Modernism, Modernity and Arnold Bennett* (London: Associated University Press, 1997). While Bennett received prolific attention between 1930 and 1970, these are two of the only general studies since the 1980s. There has only been one critical work focused explicitly on Shan Bullock – Richard Mills's *Violent Imaginations: The Ulster Novel, 1900-1996* (University of Ulster, 1996) [electronic resource], and one on William Pett Ridge (which also mentions Edwin Pugh): Vincent Brome, *Four Realist Novelists: Arthur Morrison, Edwin Pugh, Richard Whiteing, William Pett Ridge* (London: Mildner and Sons, 1965). The one further study of Edwin Pugh is Sally-Ann Baggott's thesis – 'The Cockney at Home: Class, Culture and the City in the Works of Edwin Pugh' (University of Birmingham: Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2005). For information on Frank Swinnerton, see Irene Campbell, 'Frank Swinnerton: the Life and Works of a Bookman' (University of Warwick: Unpublished PhD thesis, 1992).

⁶² While Canning is obscure in literary circles, he did receive great critical acclaim during the 1970s for his dark thrillers, several of which were made into film – including Alfred Hitchcock's *The Family Plot* (1976). His main clerk-character, Mr Finchley, received a small revival in interest when the novel *Mr Finchley Goes to Paris* (1938) was recorded as a BBC Radio 7 dramatization featuring Richard Griffiths in 2008.

⁶³ Patrick Maume, 'Shan Fadh Bullock', *DNB*.

⁶⁴ George Malcolm Johnson, 'William Pett Ridge', *DNB*.

⁶⁵ Robert Lusty, 'Frank Swinnerton', *DNB*; Damian Atkinson, 'Edwin William Pugh', *DNB*.

office from the age of sixteen until he made enough money to become a full-time writer;⁶⁶ and Wells began his working life as a draper until, like many other lower-middle-class authors, he became a pupil teacher.⁶⁷ Jerome K. Jerome also dabbled in clerical work as well as journalism before becoming a professional writer, as did Graham Greene, who began work in an office as an unpaid intern.

For middle-class critics, a clerical origin was generally enough to undermine any author's claim to be treated seriously. Jerome, for instance, was mockingly referred to as 'Mr Jerumky Jerum' by *Punch* and criticised for his 'vernacular' and 'forced and vulgar' use of 'Yankee humour' as well as his slippages into 'clerkly' language.⁶⁸ His many readers were not so sneering, with more than 202,000 copies of *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) being sold by 1909, making it publisher Arrowsmith's most prized novel in the 3s. 6d. series.⁶⁹ In *Joan and Peter* (1918) Wells is cynical about the critical reception facing many authors who were of a lower social background and subsequently wrote about lower-middle-class life: 'the social origins of most of the crew were appalling', his middle-class character ironically remarks, '[indeed] Bennett was a solicitor's clerk from the potteries. Wells a counter-jumper'.⁷⁰ Wells the counter-jumper was first-generation lower middle class, as were most of this group of clerkly authors. Their fathers were of the skilled labouring classes – Bullock, Canning, Gissing, Ridge, Pugh, and Swinnerton being the sons of, respectively, a tenant farmer, a coach maker, an impoverished chemist, a theatre props maker, and a railway porter. These artisanal roots suggest that the educational reforms of the late-nineteenth century were increasing social mobility with the office serving as a bridge between the two classes. This does not necessarily mean that those working-class roots were forgotten. Pugh and Ridge, along with Arthur Morrison (another clerk-turned-writer), were part of the late nineteenth-century 'Cockney School' of writers.

⁶⁶ www.victorcanning.com [accessed 27.01.11]. There is very little information available on the biography of Victor Canning aside from this fan site, which cites Canning's sister as the source.

⁶⁷ George Gissing also spent some time as a pupil teacher, as did Jerome and D. H. Lawrence.

⁶⁸ *Punch*, 3 Jan. 1891.

⁶⁹ Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 31.

⁷⁰ Wells, *Joan and Peter* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1933), p. 195.

Indeed, in recording the usage of the ‘Cockneyisms’ of the characters in their novels, Pugh and Ridge were central in the construction of the familiar contemporary style attributed to London’s east-enders.⁷¹ Ridge’s lower-class characters were portrayed as defiant, proud and unrepressed, as the heroine of his most popular work *Mord Em’ly* (1898) shows. Ultimately, however, both writers turned their attentions to the suburban lower middle classes, finding in their new subjects a ready readership with a disposable income and a penchant for literature.

Not *all* of the works studied in this thesis, however, are written by and aimed at clerks. In order to place the writings of the clerk-authors within the wider critical context, I discuss some novels that I consider exemplify the widespread diffusion not only of the clerical stereotype but of a clerkly subculture. If the novels written by clerks are often a complicated mix of sentimentality and bitterness, dependent on their experiences of clerical work, those written by the slightly more comfortably middle class (authors such as Crosland, the Grossmiths, Forster) are equally complex compounds of mockery, patronisation and pity.⁷² In part, these representations are based on the fine line drawn between the middle class ‘proper’ (Crosland *et al*) and the clerical classes themselves.⁷³

The middlebrow novels in this study have not, for the most part, achieved critical acclaim; they are novels which were once popular, to varying degrees, but which now exist mainly within British Library out-of-print collections. The scope and breadth of a study involving many novels which have, in the past, been difficult to locate, and thus are often under-appreciated, should contribute to a wider

⁷¹ Most of Morrison’s work dealt with the cruelty of poverty-stricken east-end life, whereas Pugh and Ridge moved away from this. Despite criticising other Cockney authors for their bias towards the negative aspects of East End life, Pugh’s own works were largely ‘over-sentimental and unrealistic’ – Atkinson, ‘Edwin Pugh’, www.oxforddnb.com [accessed 28.01.11].

⁷² The Grossmiths’ father was the chief reporter of *The Times*, while Forster was the son of an architect. All three were educated at preparatory schools. W. H. Crosland, like George Grossmith, and, briefly Forster, was a journalist and newspaper editor.

⁷³ George Gissing has a more unusual relationship with the clerkly classes; drawn into lower-middle-class life by a woman named Nell, who brought only ruination and poverty, he casts his clerkly characters as pathetic figures who invoke both pity and scorn. See Wild’s chapter on George Gissing in *Rise of the Literary Clerk* for a detailed discussion of Gissing’s changing attitudes towards clerks.

understanding of several works which have so far escaped academic attention.⁷⁴ These novels mark the moment at which French naturalism coincided with a generation of authors weary of Victorian realism, and the resultant fiction is a product of, as Humble argues, innovation and change.⁷⁵ The instinctive reaction, however, has often been to dismiss the more diverse influences of many of these novels – instead, most are designated works of ‘classical realism’ – a term which itself is considered a criticism in the twentieth century. Yet Luc Herman’s Marxist definition of classical realism – ‘embod[ying] bourgeois ideology and oppressively engender[ing] a subject position that will not call capitalism into question as a mode of production’⁷⁶ does not always fit here. What many of these novels present is actually an, often subtle, confrontation with capitalist bureaucracy itself. These novels fall far short of a revolutionary call because they are grounded in the despair found in a context which cannot be altered or overcome; instead we read a narrative of inactivity.⁷⁷ If, as Barthes argues, classic realism offers a ‘character, unified and coherent, [as] the source of action’, then the clerk-figure is not a classic realist protagonist.⁷⁸ Indeed, moments of action, of optimism, or even of clarity, are usually countered by an ending without resolution and an identity beyond grasp.⁷⁹ In clerical fiction, instead of what Herman describes as ‘the disruption of identity and the subsequent return to order’ of the realist plot, we invariably have hesitant, indeterminate endings – the fate of the clerk.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ The recent wave of digitalisation coinciding with the rise of the e-book has made, even during the period of this thesis, many of these novels much more widely available; works that are out of copyright are a popular market for new digital publishers.

⁷⁵ Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Luc Herman, *Concepts of Realism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House Inc., 1996), p. 206.

⁷⁷ Lynne Hapgood calls, for example, Shan Bullock’s Robert Thorne a “‘thorn’ in the side of the system’ and a product of Bullock’s ‘radical’ vision. Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture, 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 187.

⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, as cited in Herman, *Concepts of Realism*, p. 206.

⁷⁹ For example, Mr Ruby in Bullock’s *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (1917), runs away to Gibraltar, then returns to an oppressive clerical life; Mr Lewisham in Wells’ *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) wants to be an author throughout the novel, but never makes it. In *The Broken Honeymoon* (1908) by Edwin Pugh, the main character marries without particularly desiring it, goes on his honeymoon, and his wife leaves him. In George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936), Gordon Comstock battles fiercely against the ‘money-code’ but ultimately has to give in to the demands of his growing family.

⁸⁰ Herman, *Concepts of Realism*, p. 206.

The Readers

One of the most interesting aspects of clerical fiction is that pessimistic illustrations of the clerk did not seem to deter a clerkly readership. In part, this is a result of changes in literary culture that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century when, as MacDonald argues, middlebrow fiction ‘focused on the domestic and on ordinary life mirroring the lives of the anticipated readers’.⁸¹ This mirroring of reality in clerical novels reflects, then, an assumed clerical audience. Likewise, literary historians have demonstrated that the clerkly audience was an avidly literate one.⁸² The clerkly class thus becomes part of the definition of what we understand as an established middlebrow readership – as MacDonald further states:

In the British Edwardian period the emergence of the middlebrow is closely connected with the increase in numbers of the clerk, the office girl, and the salaried lower middle classes in suburbia. It is associated with evening classes, self-improvement, increasing mobility and earnings.⁸³

Clearly clerks read but what is more ‘striking’, as Leah Price observes, is that once clerks become a large potential audience ‘diatribes against certain kinds of printed

⁸¹ See, for example, the title of Bobby’s novel in H. G. Wells’ *Christina Alberta’s Father* – ‘Ups and Downs: A Pedestrian Novel’. MacDonald, ‘Edwardian Transitions’, pp. 214, 216; Wells, *Christina Alberta’s Father* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), p. 184.

⁸² As MacDonald suggests, middlebrow fiction was ‘channelled by publishers into reprint library series, designed to sell at a low price and in large quantities to the new generations of the educated middle class and lower middle classes’. Leah Price further argues that ‘clerical workers were perceived as the first truly mass audience for fiction, newspapers, [and] magazines’; she also draws our attention also to the – so far little-studied – phonographic reprints of both popular and educational works that were directed specifically at clerks able to read this shorthand format. John Baxendale suggests that clerks were among those in a class that was ‘expanding in numbers, whose next generation became the suburbanites and, as Humble argues, the “middlebrow” readers of the 1930s’. MacDonald, ‘Edwardian Transitions’, pp. 214, 216; Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 38. John Baxendale, *Priestley’s England: J. B. Priestley and English Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 13.

⁸³ MacDonald, ‘Edwardian Transitions’, p. 216. See, Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, p. 13 for the description to which Baxendale is referring.

matter [popular fiction] assume that it's being read by clerical workers'.⁸⁴ Clerks are frequently portrayed as avid consumers of cheap works, both by critics – see, for example, Crosland's chapter on 'Cheap Classics'⁸⁵ – and by sympathisers. One of the first descriptive markers used by many middlebrow authors is a close and detailed examination of their clerk-characters' bookshelves. Thus we read that Bullock's Mr Ruby has cheap copies of 'Carlyle's *Frederick*, Macaulay's *Essays*, *Josephus*, *The Decline and Fall*, Shakespeare, Byron', and Wells' Mr Polly scours cheap book sales in order to build up an enormous collection: 'hundreds of books [...] old, dusty books, books with torn covers and broken covers, fat books whose backs were naked with string and glue'.⁸⁶ Mr Aked, elderly clerk in Bennett's *A Man from the North* (1898), even has a 'fine lot of French novels' whose 'vivid yellow gratefully lightened a dark corner' as well as spending a good deal of time reading George Gissing novels in the reading rooms of the British Museum.⁸⁷ In fact, in 1905, the City of Westminster listed clerical workers as the vocational group using its libraries more than any other.⁸⁸ The rise of cheap publishing, that followed the 1842 Copyright Act, meant that, in due course, series such as Nelson's New Century Library (1900), Grant Richard's World Classics (1901), Collin's Pocket Classics (1903) and Dent's Everyman Library (1906) all sold well-known works for about a shilling. As Waller states, 'it was a reasonable guess that the [readership] included the literate young of the lower-middle and aspiring professional classes'.⁸⁹

We must, of course, be careful when trying to understand readership of any kind. As Mary Hammond suggests, 'we cannot assume that a particular author or genre meant a particular thing to its readers based either on textual analysis alone, or on textual evidence combined with an analysis of an assumed or intended audience'.

⁸⁴ Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture*, p. 38.

⁸⁵ Crosland dismissively states: 'the suburban library-purchaser has taken to book-buying simply and solely because the books are cheap and fit most sweetly into dainty bookcases'. W. H. Crosland, *The Suburbans* (London: John Long, 1905), pp. 189-90.

⁸⁶ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 13; Wells, *History of Mr Polly*, p. 119.

⁸⁷ Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), p. 85.

⁸⁸ Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations*, p. 52.

⁸⁹ Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations*, p. 59.

She goes on to argue that people read across genres, and against the ‘marketing grain’ particularly in an age of cheaper editions and the growth of borrowing libraries.⁹⁰ If I make the assumption that clerks read clerical fiction it is, in this case, based on the level of detail about clerkly life illustrated by the authors. Arguably this depth of analysis appeals to few others than those who have likewise experienced life as a clerk. In this case, I am not equating cost too closely with sales; rather by examining the *fictional* clerk I am taking a look at his *literary* bookshelves, under the assumption that the clerk-author would reference works that he would expect a clerk-reader to know. For the same reasons, I do not examine the work of reviewers too closely in this thesis; this is, in part, because reviewers were more likely to be drawn from the established middle classes, but it is also an attempt to shift the focus from canonical writers towards popular ones – reviews of the latter are rarer. As Jameson says, it is the ‘respectable little [suburban] man of quiet manners’ who is best placed to survey the contemporary literary landscape, rather than the critic who ‘keeps his head buried in the sand of his own back garden’.⁹¹

Aims and Objectives

This thesis will argue that the dominant version of clerks as pitiable, pathetic ‘nobodies’ was in fact challenged by a more nuanced form of depiction created by the clerks themselves. I suggest that clerks were an important cultural symbol of the everyday lives of many, and that in fiction they were figures that could be enjoyed by an audience that empathised with and understood the trials that they faced, and the rewards they sought. This theory is tested in the examination of the spaces the clerk

⁹⁰ Hammond commends Rose’s research into reader’s memoirs, but argues that there is still a necessity to analyse publishing data because it can uncover the ‘hidden forces at work’. These forces, she continues, ‘determined not only what was available and to whom, but also influenced the selection of one book or edition over these where these were coexistent’. Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 11-12.

⁹¹ Jameson, *The Georgian Novel*, pp. 1, 6.

inhabited and the escapes he made from the constraints of clerical life. As I argue, the clerk's flights into the suburbs and countryside enabled him both to challenge the office-bound stereotype and to act *out* of character. In these moments of escape, however fleeting they may seem, the clerk began to construct an identity that made him not a type but an everyman. Woven across the thesis and examined in each of these three spaces is the impulse that drove the clerk towards expressing the essence of this everyman status in literature. And so we see, in the office, the suburb, and the ramble, both actual or physical flight and imaginative or creative flight.

Key to this thesis is the idea that we have become a lower-middle-class nation – not only in that we are a nation of office workers but because our dominant cultural identity is a 'clerkly' one. In a sense, therefore, the nation is a metaphorical office and we are all clerks. The values and lifestyle of the clerk have helped to draw the parameters of modern cultural and social meaning which have become, in some respects, an embodiment of Englishness. (Note, because of the London-centric vision of clerkly life, as well as the publishing industry, the term 'Englishness' must be used rather than 'Britishness'). The familiarity of the tedious nine-till-five existence, compounded by an unsympathetic and monotonous retreat into an odious suburban dwelling, remains a well-recognised narrative well into the twenty-first century. Modern audiences, who work in offices and live in suburbs, can continue to relate to the comedy of characters such as the late-Victorian Charles Pooter. There remains, indeed, an appetite for mocking the clerical character – the popularity of Ricky Gervais's award-winning series *The Office* (2001-02) shows many aspects of this modern attitude that, I will argue, began with the Victorian and Edwardian treatment of the same class.⁹² *The Office* was set in Slough – the modern suburb berated by John Betjeman in 1937 as not 'fit for humans now', with its 'bald young clerks' who have

⁹² And the American adaptation of *The Office* is just one indicator that clerkly interests have become integral to Western culture. See also, David Nobbs's novel, *The Death of Reginald Perrin* (London: Gollancz, 1975), which was made into a television series in the 1970s (*The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*), directed by Gareth Gwenlan and John Howard Davies (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1976-79) and reproduced in 2009 as *Reggie Perrin* (directed by Tristram Shapeero and Dominic Brigstock (Objective Productions, 2009-2010)).

‘tasted Hell’ – and Gervais’s characters are supposed to epitomise the daily grind in a way that, at times, becomes too close for comfort.⁹³

These contemporary links, while not the focus of this thesis, are essential in our understanding of the clerk as a figure who can transcend both his period and setting and who is thus not ‘limited’ to Edwardian middlebrow fiction. They also parallel the notions of escape discussed in this thesis; as anyone who has seen such television programmes as *Escape to the Country* and *Location, Location, Location* can attest – it is the city office-worker who most often needs to flee.⁹⁴ The wide-ranging time-frame of this study allows me to mention briefly both the end of the early clerical culture – the small-company clerk reminiscent of many of Dickens’s characters – and the almost global bureaucracy that developed by the 1930s. While this seems to cross many historical boundaries, the broad scope of this study allows threads of continuity to be identified across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, in some respects, into the twenty-first. This reflects my contention that while the clerk is Victorian in origin, he is a figure that remains almost unchanged until at least the 1930s and who is, in a variable form, present still. The wider implications of lower-middle-class taste and culture, viewed particularly in the continuing ambiguity toward suburbia, shows how deeply the clerk and his characteristics have penetrated English identity in a way that makes us uncomfortable still.

In order to limit the scope of this study there must, though, be some chronological boundaries. Although this thesis does extend as far back as 1859, and as far forward as the 1940s, there is particular focus on clerical fiction between 1880 and 1920. I am not, therefore, claiming to cover in depth all of the social, political and economic changes of this period. Clearly the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth saw complex and challenging situations unparalleled in British history. One premise of this thesis, however, is that the most striking feature of

⁹³ John Betjeman, ‘Slough’, *John Betjeman’s Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 1962), p. 22.

⁹⁴ *Escape to the Country* dir. by Jon Nutter et al. (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2002-present) and *Location, Location, Location* dir. by Matthew Elmes, Andrew Jackson et al. (Ideal World Productions, 2000-present).

clerical representation in literature during this period is the exceptional levels of *continuity*, not change, and for this reason I do not discuss either world war in detail. In this omission, I am taking the lead from the novels themselves; most of which pay little attention to the wars. Instead, the rapidly expanding bureaucratic sector, increasing mechanisation, and suburban commentaries dominate as contemporary concerns.⁹⁵ In much of the middlebrow fiction between 1914 and 1920, the War receives little attention; in part because authors were providing realistic escapism – the description of ‘ordinary’ life without war – but also because initially for many the realities of life continued: work at the office, the commute, suburban life, and the family.⁹⁶

The 1940s provide a chronologically sensible point with which to conclude for two further reasons. The first of these is the arrival of the motor car. Once the clerk could afford a car, his concept of space (and escape) would change forever. Suburban architecture began to change as off-street parking factored as a design consideration, and the late-Victorian villas and Edwardian terraces which had stood for so long as symbolic of the vast colonisation of suburban London began to wane. Likewise, the ramble altered dramatically once the era of mass car ownership began. While attempts to popularise the bicycle tour filled some of the void left by the freedom of the ramble, the changing technological and social culture of the 1940s meant that rambling fast became anachronistic.

The second reason for ending in the late 1940s is that the conventional clerkly character begins to disappear from fiction. In fact, using the term ‘clerk’ to typify certain characteristics becomes out-dated, partly because there is no longer a coherent sense of clerical identity. To put it another way, the male clerk vanishes into the figure

⁹⁵ The ramifications for clerks and clerk-authors during the First World War, are discussed in Wild’s article, ‘A Merciful, Heaven-sent Release?’, *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (2007), 73-94. For a chronological social and literary history of the clerk see also Wild’s book, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939*.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Bullock’s *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces*, published in 1917, which does not discuss the war. As Elizabeth Bowen wrote in the postscript to *The Demon Lover* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945): ‘These are all war-time, none of them *war* stories’. There are, as Bowen suggests, important tales of war, but there are also tales written during a war, which may not be explicitly about the war, or even mention it, but which still teach their reader much about the time they were written.

of the secretary and the typist, or unceremoniously merges into a generalised office-worker. One of the last clerks in this study is Mr Josser, of Collins's *London Belongs to Me* (1945), who, rather appropriately, retires in the first chapter, after forty-two years as a clerk. This, I suggest, is the end of the 'tribe of clerks' which Poe had identified back in 1840. By the second half of the twentieth century the word 'clerk' no longer plays a role either in the language of the office or in the novel.

Synopsis

The first chapter posits the office as a space that shaped the clerical psyche and represented the stifling monotony of 'clerkly' work. I also begin to draw out elements of escape that permeated the everyday and challenged routine working life. Fundamentally, my argument is that the clerk's experience was not an enjoyable one, but that the clerk-authors do not dismiss the clerk *himself* because of this – as many middle-class critics did. From a theoretical perspective, this chapter will engage with Rose's *Intellectual Life of the Working Classes* and Paul Jordan's *Author in the Office* (2006), in order to explore the legitimacy of creative freedom during office hours. This chapter examines several areas of what I term the 'emotional' experience of the office as represented in fiction: namely, the effects of mechanisation theory, the psychological impact of clock-watching, and the internalisation of discipline. In focusing on these aspects of the office space, I examine how the clerk's seemingly oppressive environment led him away from clerical work and into the world of authorial success between 1893 and 1945. In doing so, this clerk-author began to challenge the formation of an office-worker 'type' and began to elicit empathy and hope, rather than pity for his clerical hero.

In chapter two, I discuss how suburbia came to represent all that was deemed disagreeable in middlebrow culture, middle-class emulation, and political conservatism. I also offer a rebuttal to C. F. G. Masterman's comment that 'no one

fears [...] the suburbans; and perhaps for that reason', he suggests, 'no one respects them. They only appear articulate in comedy, to be made the butt of a more nimble-witted company outside'.⁹⁷ This chapter draws on the contemporaneous commentaries of H. J. Dyos and Masterman, as well as the more recent cultural work of Carey and the socio-economic analyses of F. M. L. Thompson, David Thorns and Roger Silverstone. I also engage with the work of Franz Coetzee, Tom Jeffery and David Smith, by analysing the assumption that the suburbs encouraged political conservatism and arguing that the suburban clerk has a place within the discourse of socialism. More generally, therefore, in chapter two, I dispute the well-known suburban type – as epitomised in the Grossmiths' *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892) and Crosland's *The Suburbans* – by showing how the suburbs became an environment which inspired many of its clerical inhabitants to produce enjoyable and insightful fictional narratives as well as expressing themselves politically outside of traditional Villa Toryism. Through the exploration of works such as Howard's *Smiths of Surbiton* (1905), Bullock's *Robert Thorne* (1907) and *Mr Ruby Jumps the Tracks* (1917), as well as Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and *Coming Up for Air* (1939), I argue that the suburbs were an exciting environment both creatively and politically.

My last chapter focuses on the London clerk and his escape on a ramble through the Home Counties. Here I discuss the ramble as a personal and life-altering journey frequently chronicled by clerks, either as a literary work, or as part of a non-fictional narrative, which provided a sense of self-fulfilment as well as offering inspiration to other clerks. In this last chapter, I place the literature of rambling alongside the nineteenth- and twentieth-century fascination with the pastoral idyll, and locate the clerk within discussions of both rural and national identities. Rebecca Solnit's history of walking, *Wanderlust* (2001), as well as Melanie Tebbutt's 2006 article on northern clerk-hikers, build on the older academic studies of rurality by W. J. Keith, Malcolm Chase and Martin Wiener, in order to define notions of walking, rambling, and hiking that are, in this chapter, examined as integral to the clerk's

⁹⁷ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 56.

experience.⁹⁸ In this way, rambling becomes opposed to the more modern term ‘hiking’ being associated, as it is, with a rugged, dangerous, more physically demanding leisure activity. Instead, the clerical ramble is constructed as a carefree and almost spiritual exploration of southern England that involves a pilgrimage to medieval sites, loosely following the example of early chroniclers, such as Cobbett and Defoe. This immersion in history amongst the last sites of a pre-industrial pastoral idyll enhanced the clerk’s engagement with national character and identity, as well as providing respite from the office and domestic and social tensions in the suburb. The central premise of the chapter is that the ramble acted not only as a valuable form of escape from the monotony and boredom of clerical life but also as a means to re-invent a lost sense of masculinity.

For the class-conscious clerk, these sites of escape represent a challenge to a rigid system of social status that was, to varying extents, successful. The suburban home, whilst appearing, from the outside, indicative of one’s social and financial position, was to some extent experienced from within as a space free of class constraints. Most successful in terms of a deconstruction of class position is the ramble – the clerk becomes freer while rambling because class becomes less visible in a ‘natural’ setting. More importantly, however, than the clerk’s various flights and escapes, is the clerk’s transition from nobody to protagonist. This crucial transformation is demonstrated not only through the portrayal of the clerk character in these novels but also by assessing the democratisation of authorship and the development across multiple fictions of the clerical everyman.

Finally, I must establish, as others who have studied the clerk tend to do, my own outlook on the clerk. Like Woolf, I argue that there is ‘a [strange] feeling of

⁹⁸ See Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrialist Spirit 1850-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), W. J. Keith, *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1980) and *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), as well as Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (eds), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) and Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novels, 1900-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

incompleteness and dissatisfaction' within fiction at the turn of the twentieth century, and I suggest that the centring of the clerk within novels by both middlebrow and modernist writers contributes towards this.⁹⁹ This in itself raises two further questions; why did both sets of (opposing) writers feel drawn towards the clerk, and *why is it* that their narratives unite in the representation of the futility of clerkly life? By engaging with the misery expressed through clerical characters in novels both by former clerks and middle-class observers, I do not mean to imply a dismissal of the clerk, nor an ignorance of the power of stereotyping. This is not a negative narrative; instead, my thesis is separated into two parts in order to give a more balanced examination. The first will look at how far the 'typical' representations of office and suburb have been dominated by those outside the lower middle classes and see where the clerical authors placed themselves in relation to these stereotypes. The second will explore alternative ways of assessing the literary clerk suggesting that it is in the clerk's escape – or his holiday – that we see how far the clerk is liberated. In this second section we begin to find novels that do not end in Woolfian 'incompleteness and dissatisfaction' but rather in a counter-discourse of adventure, rejuvenation and hope.

⁹⁹ Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, p. 4.

Chapter One: The Office

We live and let live, and assume that things are fairly well jogging along elsewhere, and that the ordinary man must be trusted to look after his own affairs. I quite grant—I look at the faces of the clerks in my own office, and observe them to be quite dull, but I don't know what's going on underneath.¹

E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910)

In the classic British sitcom *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989), General 'Insanity' Melchett declares that his right-hand man and pre-war employee of 'Pratt and Sons', Captain Kevin Darling, is 'a pen-pushing, desk-sucking, blotter-jotter'.² Darling, who in one episode of the series is excited by an evening spent unloading two shipments of paper-clips, is, to Captain Blackadder's irritation, usually to be found about thirty-five miles safely behind enemy lines. Darling is a clerk-type³ – effeminate, weak-minded, weak-bodied, and utterly subservient – and a product both of the 1980s and of a century of sneering at pen-pushers.⁴ In 1936 George Orwell coined the phrase in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, a novel saturated with lower-middle-class-dom and the protagonist's fear of 'pen-pushing in some filthy office' but the imagery had long permeated literary depictions of clerical workers.⁵ As early as 1907 Shan Bullock

¹ Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 137.

² Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, *Blackadder Goes Forth* dir. by Richard Boden (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1989).

³ Note obvious parallels with J. M. Barrie's clerk, Mr Darling, of *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911); both are weak-minded office workers who embrace a life of safety at the expense of adventure.

⁴ In modern British terminology, while 'clerk' as a popular reference has become almost obsolete, the term 'pen-pushing' headlines our criticisms of bureaucracy. The term became particularly popular in the 1980s and has risen once more into proliferation, often used by those critics of a large state. In the last four decades these comments have ranged from those in *The Guardian* about 'assiduous pen-pushers' (23 Oct. 1972), *The Sun* on the increasing number of 'pen-pushers' hired in the NHS (3 Dec. 2003), and in *The Telegraph* about the 'growing army of pen-pushers across the EU' (11 Aug. 2008).

⁵ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 48. The term has become particularly popular amongst historians, and rarely is it offered as a compliment. See, for example, references as varied as Jonathan King's *Great Moments in Australian History* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 2009) – 'what would those pen-pushers back in Brisbane know about fighting', p. 387; *Diodorus Siculus, Books 11-12.37.1: Greek History, 480-431 BC* trans. by Peter Green (Texas, U.S.A.: University of Texas Press, 2006) – 'Diodorus... [was] a flat and foolish pen-pusher', p. 1, and Richard Evans's citation of the 'tendentious Jewish pen-pushers', in his *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 191.

refers to his eponymous protagonist, Robert Thorne, as one of ‘many little pen-drivers – fellows in black-coats, with inky fingers and shiny seats on their trousers’.⁶ Indeed, William Reeve’s study of German drama suggests that Klesel (the main clerk character in Grillparzer’s *Ein Bruderzwist in Habsburg* (1873)) is ‘the culmination of a literary type – the *federfuscher*, or pen-pushing secretary’.⁷ This German incarnation of the pen-pusher has a number of commonalities with our London clerk. He is lower-middle class, literate, and aware of the tenuousness of his position within a hierarchical society. In his case, the pen is not mightier than the sword but rather symbolic of the newly literate masses, particularly those, like the clerk, who no longer fit neatly into a society divided into manual labour and an educated elite.⁸ Even traditional lines drawn between the producing and non-producing work forces begin to blur as the ‘bureaucratic revolution’ brought about an unprecedented expansion in the production of paperwork itself.

Within the literary world, while highbrow authors despaired of what they saw as the prosaic outpourings of a numb and mechanised incoherent mass,⁹ clerks-turned-writers like Bullock, Frank Swinnerton, Edwin Pugh and Edwin Hodder, happily explored the misery of bureaucratic automation and the sheer monotony of clerical work. There have been studies of the pen-pusher himself but the second part of Orwell’s quote has remained largely undiscussed – that is, the ‘filthy office’ which shaped its clerkly inhabitant. This chapter will examine in detail the space of the office following the ‘bureaucratic revolution’; in particular, it will focus on literary portrayals of the implementation of mechanisation theory, the concept of clock-

⁶ Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne: Diary of a London Clerk* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p. 176.

⁷ William C. Reeve, *Federfuscher/Penpusher from Lessing to Grillparzer: A Study Focused on Grillparzer’s Ein Bruderzwist in Habsburg* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), taken from abstract.

⁸ Although, interestingly, as Reeve observes, in some early nineteenth-century literary/dramatic representations, intellectual capability meant a lower-class secretary or civil servant often enjoyed triumph over their masters. This is a similar portrayal to those in high positions in contemporary public office – see, for example, political sitcoms such as *Yes Minister*, dir. by Peter Whitmore, Sydney Lotterby, and Stuart Allen (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1980-4). Reeve, *Federfuscher/Penpusher from Lessing to Grillparzer*.

⁹ See John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Amongst the Literary Intelligentsia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002).

watching, and attempts to subvert office time.¹⁰ In doing so, I explore how the clerk arrived at literary pen-pushing, examining the clerk's environment and the nature of his work and charting this widespread, and long-lasting, representation of office misery. This chapter also begins to explore the connection between the modernist conviction that the clerks were 'subhuman' because they were part of the office 'mass' and the apparent agreement of clerk-authors.¹¹ As such, this chapter does not seek to counter popular impressions of the office as a space of drudgery but instead to examine the forces behind the cultural significance of the figure of the pen-pusher.

In framing the first chapter this way, I offer a version of the literary office that is fundamentally oppressive but without which the clerk's *escape* (the ultimate focus of this thesis) would not have taken place.

A Brief History of Office Histories

Several recent works have begun to establish office work at the centre of both popular and academic concern.¹² First, Michael Heller's recent book, *London Clerical Workers* (2011), includes a chapter titled 'The Clerk, the Office and Work' which sees the office as central to defining the socio-economic status of the clerk.¹³ Whilst Heller claims he will discuss the 'actual experience of work for the male clerical worker', his

¹⁰ Here, the implementation of mechanisation *theory* is stressed as opposed to the practical application of mechanisation itself which, as I shall discuss further, took much longer to achieve in Britain than in many European countries and America. See A. McKinley and R. G. Wilson's use of the phrase 'hesitant mechanisation' in "'Small acts of cunning': Bureaucracy, inspection and the career, c. 1890-1914" in *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 17 (2006), p. 658.

¹¹ As Jonathan Rose argues, Carey's 'blunt populist' study accuses writers as diverse as George Gissing, H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound and Graham Greene of viewing the 'typical clerk [as] subhuman, machine-like, dead inside' – several of whom, as I argue, had a rather more nuanced understanding of clerkly life. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 393.

¹² This is true also of American academia – see, for example, Sharon H. Strom's *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class and the Origins of Modern Office Work in America, 1900-1930* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994) which includes detailed discussions of the history of office management during this period.

¹³ Michael Heller, *London Clerical Workers 1880-1914: Development of the Labour Market* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011).

subheadings follow traditional analyses – employer-employee relations, career progression, pay structures, labour division and clerical turnover. In this respect he is following in the economically-minded footsteps of Gregory Anderson, Michel Crozier, David Lockwood and, especially, F. D. Klingender.¹⁴ Heller makes a largely quantitative assessment of office life, contributing to the long-running Marxist debate over the proletarianisation of the clerical workforce – what Graham Lowe refers to as the ‘proletarianization thesis’.¹⁵ Thus, his short section on ‘working atmosphere’ is based on discipline, rules and regulations, which is similar to Ingrid Jeacle’s brief examination of bank clerks in Victorian England¹⁶ as well as the studies dealt with in more detail in my introduction.¹⁷ The ‘debates regarding remuneration for such repetitive work’, as Christopher Breward puts it, appear to outweigh the examination of the work itself.¹⁸

Jonathan Rose’s chapter in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (2001), ‘What was Leonard Bast Really Like?’, reads the office as an intellectually-inspiring environment, based on a series of memoirs written mainly by former-clerks-turned-political-figures. Noticeably, this is part of his widespread study of the *working*

¹⁴ Anderson also goes into detail on many aspects of office work including recruitment, conditions, status, salaries, and clerk-employee relations. Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), Michel Crozier, *The World of the Office Worker* (London: Chicago University Press, 1971), David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: a Study in Class Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), F. D. Klingender, *The Conditions of Clerical Labour in Britain* (London: Lawrence, 1935).

¹⁵ Lowe, ‘Class, Job and Gender in the Canadian Office’, *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 10 (Autumn, 1982), 11-37.

¹⁶ Jeacle examines findings under the following subheadings: recruitment; rules and regulations; paternalism and social activities, and draws the conclusion that the banks clerks of Hoares had a fairly good time of clerking. Indeed, bank clerks seem to have had most critical attention of late possibly because the larger banks have very detailed archives. Ingrid Jeacle, ‘The Bank Clerk in Victorian Society: the Case of Hoare and Company’, *Journal of Management History*, Vol. 16, Issue 3 (2010), p. 317.

¹⁷ Heller does mention sports clubs within companies, which is less economically focused, and is also something that Klingender discusses as part of the ‘corporate firm spirit’ in *The Condition of the Clerical Labour* in some detail. See also Heller’s article on the topic, ‘Sport, Bureaucracies and London Clerks 1880-1939’, in *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 25, Issue 5 (2008), 579-614. For further discussion on clerks and sport clubs see Geoffrey Spurr, ‘The London YMCA: A Haven of Masculine Self-Improvement and Socialization for the Late-Victorian and Edwardian Clerk,’ *Canadian Journal of History*, Vol. 37, Issue 2 (Aug. 2002), 275-301, and Chris Hosgood, ‘Negotiating Lower-middle-class Masculinity in Britain: The Leicester Young Men’s Christian Association, 1879-1914,’ *Canadian Journal of History* (Aug. 2002), 253-273 – both of which are focused on lower-middle-class participation in YMCA sports. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, pp. 45-9.

¹⁸ Christopher Breward, ‘“On the Bank’s Threshold”: Administrative Revolutions and the Fashioning of Masculine Identities at the Turn of the Century’, *Parallax*, 3:2 (1997), p. 117.

classes, once more placing the clerk within the traditional proletarian/bourgeois framework.¹⁹ Rose argues against the presumption that office workers were intellectually void by suggesting that, in fact, a large number of them overcame the forces that demanded bureaucratic diligence in order to pursue creative projects. The clerk, Rose says, was in the perfect position to write, not only because he was equipped in a most literal sense with all that he needed but because the fellowship of other clerks provided intellectual stimulation whilst helpful and paternal bosses encouraged success. I shall develop the idea of the creative clerk in the final section of this chapter but I first address the systematic and forced distinctions between the literary and commercial worlds that are widely commented on in both contemporaneous descriptions and current criticism, and which sit uneasily with Rose's argument.

In *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (2005), Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell suggest that the 'model of the author is defined in contradistinction to the clerk', making, as they see it, the fictionalisation of office life by clerks and former-clerks the ultimate and most unlikely subversion of bureaucracy.²⁰ The point at which text is transcribed onto the page, and the pivotal role that the clerk (and later, secretary, typist, and stenographer) plays in this act, is characterised as merely copying rather than authorship. Price and Thurschwell cite, as an example of this, Roland Barthes's argument that he learnt to type because the process of hiring a typist created 'enslavement when writing is precisely the field of liberty and desire!'.²¹ This separation of the 'headwork' and 'handwork' which Barthes sought to overcome was, as Jonathan Wild suggests, part of the 'crucial classif[ication of] the office as an environment hostile to art and the artist'.²² Wild explicitly defines 'office' fiction – with particular reference to Walter Besant's *All in a Garden Fair* (1883) – as being

¹⁹ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 393-438.

²⁰ Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 2.

²¹ Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries*, p. 3.

²² Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries*, p. 3; Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 17.

bound up in the debate surrounding the ‘separation of the artistic and business worlds’.²³ Likewise, Price and Thurschwell suggest that the modern office has been equally proactive in ‘defin[ing] itself against literature’ just as (particularly modernist) literature defined itself as in opposition to the mass-production of bureaucracy.²⁴ As a result, the paradox of office fiction is that it defines itself explicitly through the *rejection* of the office and the *desire* for authorship, whilst simultaneously merging and divorcing the two worlds which the author knows best: office work and the world of the aspirant novelist.

Another study which explores this genre is Paul Jordan’s *The Author in the Office* (2006). Whilst the focus of Jordan’s research – twentieth-century literature of Argentina and Uruguay – is, of course, very different from nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Britain, the concepts discussed in his cultural history are useful in this instance. Jordan’s background is unlike that of the traditional commentators on British labour history; he places emphasis on the theoretical nature of bureaucracy and what ultimately draws its workers towards creative outlets. As he states in his introduction, and as I shall explore further in this chapter, ‘[the office worker is] poised between the creative and the routine [he] reflect[s] – and reflect[s] on – the fundamental conflict between individual autonomy and the need to survive within the system’.²⁵ This becomes particularly important regarding the internalisation of mechanisation theories, as we shall see. Also of note is, as Stephen Mihm suggests, that the concepts of routinisation (as well as mechanisation itself) which challenged individual autonomy have received very little critical attention – he asks: ‘Did they not suffer some measure of alienation as their work became ever more routinized, ever more standardized, and ever more monotonous? The answer, I would argue, is a resounding “yes”, but the historical profession’s lack of interest up until now suggests

²³ Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, p. 17.

²⁴ Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries*, p. 2.

²⁵ Paul Jordan, *The Author in the Office: Narrative Writing in Twentieth-century Argentina and Uruguay* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), p. 1.

that not everyone agrees'.²⁶ In fact, whilst many historical studies have outlined the changes in procedures and practices within commercial culture, few have examined, like Jordan, the psychological effects of the routinisation of clerical work.²⁷

This chapter will offer a reading that has more in common with the cultural histories of the office (Jordan, Rose) than the traditional ones (notably Klingender and Heller), in offering an interpretation of the *experience* of the office. At the heart of this analysis stands the powerful feeling of dread during the Monday morning commute and the joy of camaraderie or the dismay at the drudgery. These themes are crucial in establishing the reasoning for the following chapters in this thesis, which is simply that the clerk was attempting to *escape* the monotony of his usual existence or, more specifically, the office. This chapter examines the extent to which an office mentality permeates the clerical psyche, making, in many ways, an emotional escape far more difficult than a physical one. As Jordan observes, office workers frequently channel their energies into fiction that re-creates the office environment complete with clerical protagonists and bureaucratic concerns.²⁸ This chapter begins the examination, then, of the tension between clerk-writers who succeed as authors and the clerk-characters that they create who do not.

Landscapes of Bureaucracy

The moment in which the office threshold is first crossed is noticeably negative. For example, in 1898 Arnold Bennett describes a hoard of clerks entering the office as 'grave and unconsciously oppressed by the burden of the coming day [...] continually appearing out of the gloom of the long tunnelled entrance and vanishing into one or

²⁶ Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts: A Response to Michael Zakim's "The Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary"', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (Winter 2006), p. 608.

²⁷ With the exception of David Kynaston who, in the third of his four volumes on *The City of London*, asks: 'What was life actually like *inside* these mainly dark, ill-lit buildings?'. He goes on to examine the memoirs and records of many clerks (mainly in banking). Kynaston, *The City of London: Illusions of Gold 1914-1945*, Volume 3 (London: Pimlico, 2000), p.271.

²⁸ Jordan, *The Author in the Office*, p. 1.

other of the twelve doorways'.²⁹ For P. G. Wodehouse's Mike, in *Psmith in the City* (1910), his first commute marks the end of a lifetime thus far spent in a close-knit village community. We read of the clear disparities between these two worlds:

The city received Mike with the same aloofness with which the more Western portion of London had welcomed him on the previous day. Nobody seemed to look at him. He was permitted to alight at St Paul's and make his way up Queen Victoria Street without any demonstration. He followed the human stream till he reached the Mansion House, and eventually found himself at the massive building of the New Asiatic Bank, Limited.³⁰

The passivity with which he approaches the bank ('permitted to alight', 'follow[ing] the human stream') echoes C. F. G. Masterman's words in *The Condition of England* (1909), where he famously describes the commuter as being 'sucked into the City at daybreak [and] scattered again as darkness falls'.³¹ This journey effects a daily metamorphosis; with the jarring, mechanical routine establishing the move from comfortable suburban life to urban, professional, anonymity.

For Mike, facing a future away from the safety of his former middle-class upbringing in Shropshire, the impersonal city is particularly disconcerting. The commute is a space of transition, or a metaphorical 'no man's land', which is ultimately destabilising. The commuter crowd is also an exclusive one; only those who are familiar with their surroundings and their route are part of the 'human stream', which is, of course, ironically dehumanising. As Masterman says: 'It is in the City crowds, where the traits of individual distinction have become merged in the aggregate, [that] the impression (from a distance) is of little white blobs of faces borne upon little black twisted or misshapen bodies'.³² Bullock's Robert Thorne, who, like

²⁹ Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), p. 22.

³⁰ P. G. Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), p. 20.

³¹ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 57.

³² Masterman, *Condition of England*, pp. 95-6.

Mike, is venturing into the 'City' from a rural home – namely, the Devonshire village of Helscombe – finds the buzz of activity equally alarming. Those 'multitudes hurrying by, relentless [and] urgent' within the commuter crowds, are not only, Robert fears, other clerkly hopefuls – or 'those bright youths whom twice a week I met at the College' – but those who have already been accepted into the 'multitudes'.³³ Mike and Robert are young bachelors living in lowly lodgings but for older clerks, who were used to being suburban patriarchs, the social reality of the commute meant sliding several rungs down the hierarchical ladder. Bullock's clerk Mr Ruby is described by his daughter as 'poor father trotting off' to work, whilst her lover adds, '[and] toddling home at night as limp as flax'.³⁴

The clerk is stripped of his identity through the process of the commute and thus prepared for his entry into the office. Wodehouse's Mike describes workers in the New Asiatic Bank as being of 'a state of some confusion [and] moving about in an apparently irresolute manner'.³⁵ The pull of the commute directs a moving mass towards a stationary target but, once arrived, these workers must separate and find their own way towards their labour. Likewise, at the end of the day, the throng of office workers leaving in Forster's *Howards End* are the 'city exhaling her exhausted air', a dissemination of unnatural office toxins that is flushed out in one movement across the suburban landscape.³⁶ In *Robert Thorne*, Bullock speaks angrily of the 'workers hurrying to business' and 'trudging back' in the evenings: 'always carrying a bag and umbrella to and fro through mean streets – always in a rut – a mechanical, ignorant thing – [the commuter is] a man walking in fetters and darkness'.³⁷

The commute itself is remarkably well-theorised in recent studies without much attention being paid to its origins. Sociological discussions of the impact of the long-distance commute are easy to find, as are manuals advertising commute-avoidance – the debates about productivity and working from home are a topic of

³³ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 11.

³⁴ Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1917), p. 198.

³⁵ Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City*, p. 20.

³⁶ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 103.

³⁷ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, pp. 172, 219.

contention for many large companies – and in literature the commute has never been more popular, both as a creative space and an inspirational setting.³⁸ The emergence of the nineteenth-century ‘commuter’ is inextricably connected to the same economic forces that led to the growth of the clerical workforce and yet its history is remarked upon infrequently and generally within broader suburban studies.³⁹ The ‘human stream’ crossing London Bridge every morning and evening were the product of the new offices that housed an enormously expanding sector, and an intimidatingly sizeable one: Richard Dennis suggests that the daytime population in the square mile around St Paul’s and the Bank of England was 360,000, compared to there being only 27,000 residents.⁴⁰

These new office buildings themselves are the most obvious markers of the late-Victorian period ‘white-collar revolution’, and the immense workforce that had to be allocated functioning office space on an industrial scale.⁴¹ As John Booker says of banking:

³⁸ See for example, Sarah Lurie’s study *The Morning Commute: the Moderating Effects of Locus of Control and Organization Commitment of Employees’ Perceived Commuting Strain* (2008), Tory Johnson’s, *Will Work from Home: Earn the Cash Without the Commute* (2008). In literature, see Lois Bonde’s erotic novel *Late Night Commute* (2003), Stephanie Dickinson’s *The 30-Second Commute: A Non-fiction Comedy about Writing and Working from Home* (2009), and in poetry, Patricia Edith’s *The Commute* (2006), and Eva McDonough’s *Travelling through Rhyme: Poetry Written During My Commute* (2009).

³⁹ More on which in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ As John Armstrong suggests, prior to 1870 the middle classes were normally based in very close proximity to their shop counting house or office – often indeed, living above their place of business. Armstrong, ‘Transport and the Urban Environment’, *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, Issue 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 231. Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 12.

⁴¹ The first dedicated offices were built in Europe in the 1800s for those for whom the ‘office’ had formerly been a desk or designated space in the home at which to conduct business. Some clerks were lucky enough to work in carefully-planned and designed offices (see, for example, in Liverpool when luxurious office complexes were developed during the period of late nineteenth-century prosperity), others – particularly within the emerging public sector – were often renovations of older buildings and were ill-fit for purpose. See Gideon Haigh’s *The Office: A Hardworking History* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2012) for a wonderful romp through all office developments from the 14th century to the present day. Eric and Mary Graehl Sundstrom, *Work Places: The Psychology of the Physical Environment in Offices and Factories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 31.

[...] gone were the small houses with low ceiling and uncleaned windows, the elderly chief clerk, and the sense of cosy security. Palatial buildings with 'plate glass, polished counters, and young men smirking behind' made everyone the loser.⁴²

And yet, as Booker suggests, whether in old buildings formerly occupied by Dickensian clerks or in vast new Edwardian warehouses dedicated to efficiency, the office-space was rarely inspiring.⁴³ Literary clerks in older buildings bemoan the cluttered conditions but clerks in modern office spaces were confronted with a functionality that was likewise stifling. In Bullock's *Mr Ruby Jumps the Tracks*, we read of a 'long crowded room wherein [Mr Ruby] sat, so bare and *business-like*, with its floor covering of brown linoleum, its painted walls [and] its litter of papers [...]'.⁴⁴ This 'litter of papers' is the most emphatic reminder of the clerks' purpose regardless of office design – paper-pushing. As Mihm points out, this opens up the paradox of the 'symbolic power of paper and promises' (upon which a capitalist economy was so reliant), and the powerlessness of the individual clerk buried amidst the ephemera of the office: 'bills of exchange, bills of sale, bills of lading and ordinary bills; promissory notes, bank notes, notes of hand, and just plain notes; balance books, registers, account books, inventories, deeds, liens, mortgages'.⁴⁵ In fiction, Bennett in *A Man from the North* has his protagonist Larch muse on the same issue: 'This little man with the round face dealt impassively with thousands of pounds; he mortgaged whole streets, bullied railway companies, and wrote familiarly to lords'.⁴⁶ Masterman

⁴² John Booker, *Temples of Mammon: The Architecture of Banking* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 178.

⁴³ Paul Attewell first undermined the narrative of skilled Victorian clerk-artisan turned twentieth-century automaton in 1989. He argues that the work of Klingender, Crompton and Jones, Lowe et al, posits the Victorian clerk in an overly favourable light, which, when faced with feminization, Taylorism, and technological advances, 'reduce the clerk to a narrow machine-minder'. Instead, Attewell suggests that the tedium associated with clerical work across the twentieth century is actually true also of conditions even for the earliest clerks. Attewell, 'The Clerk Deskilled: A Study in False Nostalgia', *Journal of Historical Sociology* (Dec. 1989), 357-388.

⁴⁴ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 8 – my emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts', p. 610.

⁴⁶ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 27.

also draws attention to this anomaly: 'small, crowded offices, under artificial light, doing immense sums'.⁴⁷

Instead of the dynamism of capital, however, it is 'brownness' that dominates in Bullock's eyes – the 'atmosphere of stale tobacco, dust and stuffiness, with its three windows diffusing a soiled light'.⁴⁸ The soiled light is a particularly striking image, the office tainting the only hint of nature in an otherwise man-made and 'business-like' space. We see something similar in *The Young Idea* (1910), where Frank Swinnerton describes his clerk's office as a 'dusty wilderness', even in the sunlit summer months;⁴⁹ a season in which, as Edwin Pugh comments in *The Broken Honeymoon* (1908), 'the office grew hourly more close and stuffy though we opened wide the windows [which] seemed merely to admit so much more added noise and heat and stench'.⁵⁰ Robert Thorne's first office is similarly unimpressive, despite his working in the Civil Service: '[it was] small, poorly lighted by one window and needed cleaning [...] the carpet was thin and shabby, the hearthrug worn through in the middle'.⁵¹ His building has a 'large drab-painted hall' with 'long, narrow, gloomy' passages and 'thin and shabby carpets' – a result of the conversion of grand old buildings as state bureaucracy grew.⁵² Clearly, each author places emphasis on the reader visualising a particular set of conditions, a narrative trait which is not dissimilar to the sketching out of urban or rural poverty in novels by Dickens or Hardy. Graham Thompson talks of the 'poetic and meticulous' detail of *Bartleby's* office, in Herman Melville's famous short story, which Thompson sees as symptomatic of the importance of the 'mapping of [the office] space'.⁵³ And this is reflected across clerical fiction with each author giving an extended description of their clerk's environment and thus a broader picture of what comprises 'the office'. And so we

⁴⁷ Masterman, *Condition of England*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Frank Swinnerton, *The Young Idea: A Comedy of Environment* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1910), p. 233.

⁵⁰ Edwin Pugh, *The Broken Honeymoon* (London: John Milne, 1908), p. 119.

⁵¹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 37.

⁵² Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, pp. 34-36.

⁵³ Graham Thompson, "'Dead Letters!...Dead Men?': The Rhetoric of the Office in Melville's 'Bartleby, the Scrivener'", *Journal of American Studies*, 34, 3 (2000), p. 399.

read of the clerk's working conditions – but we do not read of the luxury that Anderson describes in, for example, wealthy businesses in Manchester and Liverpool with their vast dining rooms, kitchens, and even in-house barber shops.⁵⁴ Instead, the 'mapping' of the office overwhelmingly reports gloomy conditions and a disheartening environment that parallels the tasks undertaken within. Even further, we see the conflation of the office space, duties, and personality; as such, we see a great number of middle-aged clerks.⁵⁵

Although the buildings in which the clerks are housed are often bleak and badly repaired,⁵⁶ there are some hints of positivity – most of which rest on the few young characters who strive to find collective respite. We read of clerks warming by the fire and opportunities for tea and gossip, echoic of the 'physical and social intimacy' that McKinley and Wilson identify in banking prior to 1914.⁵⁷ See, for example, Bullock's *Robert Thorne*, where the office workers relax in the absence of their boss: 'Mr Cherry had not returned. In his chair the sallow-faced young man sat before the fire, his feet in the fender and he smoking a pipe over the morning paper'.⁵⁸ The paternalism of older clerks towards their young charges extends so far as to turn a blind, or at least sympathetic, eye towards minor youthful indiscretions. Thorne is also reliably informed by a young colleague on his first day that Mr Cherry does not mind his clerks slipping out to participate in a 'tea club' in another room at three-fifteen,

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ One such visual marker of this tendency towards middle-age, is the frequency with which clerical characters are portrayed as balding. See, for instance, Charles Pooter's concerns about personal grooming ('my hairdresser tells me I ought not to brush my hair too much just now'), J. M. Barrie's Mr Darling, clerk-father in *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911) – a tale about perpetual childhood – who would 'pass for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off', Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, who 'with a bald spot in the middle of [his] hair' is concerned about women discussing 'How his hair is growing thin', and Victor Canning's clerk Mr Finchley, with his 'tonsure that surprised you when he raised his hat'. Bullock's *Robert Thorne* (1907) is full of references to balding clerks: Thorne's father has a 'bald forehead', his colleague Mr Willard has a 'flat, bald crown', and his fellow clerk-lodger, Nixon, is 'quite bald'. George and Weedon Grossmith, *Diary of a Nobody* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 117; J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan and Wendy* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 164; T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 14; Victor Canning, *Mr Finchley Discovers His England* (London: Pan Books, 1970), pp. 7, 250; Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, pp. 2, 17, 57.

⁵⁶ And not only in literary accounts – see, for instance, the clerks who Kynaston cites who talk about 'gloomy building[s]', 'black dust', 'piled dog-eared papers', 'fly droppings' and 'scrappy old offices'. Kynaston, *City of Gold* (Vol. 3), pp. 271-274.

⁵⁷ McKinley and Wilson, "'Small Acts of Cunning'", p. 658; Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 39.

⁵⁸ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 38.

despite his being very particular about professionalism.⁵⁹ A similar relationship exists between Bennett's Larch and Mr Aked. This cosiness is particularly fostered by those middle-aged clerks – such as Cherry and Aked – who have not ascended the clerical ladder but who are content to remain within fatherly over-sight of their (presumably fairly numerous) protégés.⁶⁰

These changes are certainly visible in office fiction in the marked transition between the inner-outer office arrangements (managerial/clerical) in Bullock's novels, and the large-scale and open-plan office space depicted in later works with the replacement of solid walls with glass and mesh. The particular indignity of the open-plan office was, of course, the ease of surveillance which had hitherto been negotiable.⁶¹ In Forster's *Howards End*, Margaret Schlegel ventures into her husband's office and is faced with the next stage of office management:

There was just the ordinary surface scum of ledgers and polished counters and brass bars that began and stopped for no possible reason, of electric light-globes blossoming in triplets, of little rabbit-hutches faced with glass or wire, of little rabbits.⁶²

The rabbit-clerks who, it seems, are housed with little concern for their welfare do, in fact, benefit from several new developments; it is, however, the dehumanisation of the 'little rabbits' to which Forster draws our attention. And he is not the only author to do

⁵⁹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 43.

⁶⁰ See Jeacle's brief summary regarding paternalism within Hoare's bank in 'The Bank Clerk in Victorian Society', pp. 320-321.

⁶¹ There has been some discussion about the role of Bentham's panopticon in the implementation of discipline with the reform of the office layout; see in particular, the proceedings and digital versions of papers given at 'The Office as an Interior' conference (Bern, October 16-18th 2013) – online links available at the Swiss Federal Archives Youtube website. Whilst most commentators draw on Foucauldian thought on the subject of surveillance and the panopticon, this can complicate discussions of the office since, as McKinley and Wilson note, 'nineteenth century institutions did not all share the same social architecture as the prison, nor the same intensity of surveillance'; something which Foucault did not elaborate on. As Thompson suggests: 'The first thing to note about the office is that it is perhaps surprising that it remained outside the orbit of Foucault's attention in his studies of surveillance and the "carceral city"[...] against the clear facts that the office and its various functions are tied so closely into capitalist development'. McKinley and Wilson, "'Small acts of cunning'", p. 671; Thompson, "'Dead letters!... Dead Men?'", p. 398.

⁶² Forster, *Howards End*, p. 175.

so. Bullock's clerk, Oliver, remarks, 'Look at us, a hundred and twenty Men clerks all in a bunch like sheep in a pen'.⁶³ In 1935, historian Klingender describes clerical conditions as consisting of 'monster office[s] in which vast numbers of clerks are *herded* together for their daily work'.⁶⁴ And where clerical workers did not benefit from new office systems of design (scenes that are replicated across British clerical fiction have little in common with the idealised steel-structured buildings and modernised typing pools found in many European and American businesses during the pre-war era), the clerks inside did not always benefit from a gentler pace, nor a more individualistic attitude. In fact, the conservatism of British businesses towards the technologies of the twentieth century – namely, the typewriter, telecommunications and the new systems of data processing and filing – made the clerk *himself* a subject of mechanisation.⁶⁵ As McKinlay and Wilson suggest, clerks were still expected to increase their output in order to cope with increasing demand but to do so they had to become 'large scale data process[ors]' who 'performed in *manual* bureaucracies'.⁶⁶ Put simply, the office worker was 'mechanised' even before machines were introduced into the office. The majority of the pre-war novels studied in this chapter examine this particular development; the adoption of piece-work processes which saw the clerk further deskilled and consequently dehumanised – treated, if you will, as a clerical machine.⁶⁷

Even the building of new open-plan offices did not guarantee the improved conditions of clerical workers, nor dispel Victorian concerns over clerical ill-health, the effects of which are often recounted in fiction. In Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902), William Price, the clerk of the Edward Street works, is described as

⁶³ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 42.

⁶⁴ Klingender, *Condition of Clerical Labour*, p. 61 – my emphasis added.

⁶⁵ McKinley and Wilson, "'Small acts of cunning'", p. 658.

⁶⁶ McKinley and Wilson, "'Small acts of cunning'", p. 658 – original emphasis.

⁶⁷ Heller suggests that piece-work was not a force for dehumanisation or mechanisation of clerks; however, his conclusions are mainly drawn from the infrequent movement of clerks between departments which he suggests added variety. Individual tasks in departments are not mentioned other than his discussion of the radical changes of rational divisions of labour. More convincing is the argument that with the vast expansion of the sector at the turn of the twentieth century, demand required efficiency and speed as a by-product, making the strain of repetitive tasks more apparent than previously. Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, pp. 54-8.

‘tall, thin, and ungainly in every motion [... with] the look of a ninny’ because he works in a ‘long narrow room, the dirtiest Anna had ever seen’.⁶⁸ Price works in the office of a pottery, barely separated from the factory floor itself and Bennett’s depiction highlights the similarities between two environments which are usually seen in opposition. Something similar is happening in *Robert Thorne* when Thorne characterises his office workplace as ‘the Mill’ that keeps on ‘grinding’:

Clank went the great Mill, wheel inside wheel, levers and cranks and safety valves everywhere, and now it whirled madly, and now smoothly ponderously did it grind: and there sat I in the Clearing-room, knee deep in the wheat and the chaff.⁶⁹

Here Bullock undermines the separation between the manual and non-manual work, suggesting, of course, that the quantities of paper work created and distributed by the Tax Office are akin to the manufacture of a product. In conflating manufacturing and bureaucratic industries, Bullock suggests that vast office spaces hold their own dangers, which are greater than the manual/clerical divide would imply. Indeed, the processes of paper-pushing were, in some ways, more dangerous because they were not always recognised as such. In Sundstrom’s discussions of American offices, she states: ‘office workers of the 1900s seldom benefitted from the welfare programs that factory workers enjoyed [because] programs to relieve harsh physical labour took priority’.⁷⁰

In office fiction a typical narrative event is the illness, and often death, of a clerkly-type. Witness, for example, Mr Josser’s pleurisy in *London Belongs to Me* or elderly Mr Aked, in *A Man from the North*, who blames his failure as an author on his

⁶⁸ Bennett continues: ‘The ceiling, which bulged downwards, was as black as the floor, which sank away in the middle till it was hollow like a saucer. The revolution of an engine somewhere below shook everything with a periodic muffled thud. A greyish light came through one small window’. Bennett, *Anna of the Five Towns* (London: Methuen and Co, 1919) [Kindle Edition], n.p., location 503.

⁶⁹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, pp. 214, 140.

⁷⁰ The changes to office conditions came much later, Sundstrom suggests, in the 1930s and 40s. Sundstrom, *Work Places*, p. 31.

‘impaired digestive apparatus’ and dies of double pneumonia.⁷¹ Michael Zakim cites a wide range of “desk diseases” that include ‘giddiness, liver problems, bladder and urinary infections, a swimming of the head, deafness, stomach and bowel disorders, piles and strictures’ all of which were ‘disproportionately ascribed to sedentary men’.⁷² Other clerk characters have underlying ‘symptoms’ – Gissing’s titular character in *Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (1899), for example, is ‘conscious of internal troubles which seem to menace his mechanic health’. Brogden puts these ‘troubles’ down to a ‘nervous disorder’ or ‘something connected with his stomach’.⁷³ Likewise, P. G. Wodehouse’s suicidal clerk, Mr Meggs is ‘a martyr to indigestion’, a ‘chronic dyspeptic’ and a compulsive purchaser of ‘patent medicines’.⁷⁴ D. H. Lawrence depicts all of the clerks who work at Jordan’s Surgical Appliance Factory with Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers* (1913) as being physically unhealthy in some way: from Mr Jordan himself, who is ‘red-faced’ and ‘rather stout’ to the ‘old, decaying clerk’ chief and ‘thin, sallow’ Pappleworth, Morel’s boss. Indeed, Paul Morel himself is particularly sickly and prone to bouts of illness.⁷⁵ As Mihm quips:

It went without saying that [‘haemorrhoids, flatulence, blindness, deafness, lethargy, pimples, pallor, and most alarming of all, “masturbatory insanity”’] did not afflict strapping young men felling trees in the forests or machinists crafting a steam engine. These “manly” men might suffer a sore back, perhaps, or a severed limb, but haemorrhoids? Hardly [...] Only members of the clerking class did, or so people wished to believe.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 29.

⁷² Zakim, ‘Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary; or, a Labor History of the Nonproducing Classes’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (Winter 2006), p. 574.

⁷³ George Gissing, *A Freak of Nature, or, Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1990), p. 23.

⁷⁴ P. G. Wodehouse, ‘A Sea of Troubles’, in *The Man With Two Left Feet* (Library of Alexandria: 27 Dec. 2012) [Kindle Edition], pp. 128-9.

⁷⁵ D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 94, 101, 103.

⁷⁶ Mihm, ‘Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts’, p. 612.

It is not just popular opinion and stereotype that diagnosed the clerical figure as unhealthy; there is some evidence that the clerk did suffer as a consequence of his environment. As one article in *The Times* (1912) attests: '[one office was] 120ft. by 20ft. in which 150 clerks were packed'.⁷⁷ In conditions like these, the journalist continues, 'consumption among clerks [...] was two and a half times that of the miner'.⁷⁸ Anderson also notes that the 'incidence of phthisis among clerks was particularly heavy [...] due to the damp and draughty conditions, inadequate sanitation and especially overcrowding'. In fact, Anderson observes that of the 8,334 deaths among commercial clerks between 1900 and 1902, 2,282 were from phthisis.⁷⁹ This was most noticeable in the contemporary concerns over the poor health of Boer War recruits and the consequent encouragement of office workers in joining the Volunteers during peace time.⁸⁰ And so as Oliver says to Robert Thorne: "'Volunteering is good sport and a little drill might put your chest on the right side of you'".⁸¹

A Mechanised Workforce

Dangerous conditions and vocational diseases were not the only similarities between the blue and white collars – there were also similarities in organisation as the influence of Frederick Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) spread from the factory to the office detailing formal mechanisation, often interpreted as an adoption of increasing automation. Indeed, Dan Clawson suggests that Taylorism sparked the 'hitherto unheard of expansion in the size of bureaucracy' which would undermine the position the clerk had formerly held as a skilled worker.⁸² As the commercial and state demand for bureaucracy grew, Taylorism provided a way of

⁷⁷ 'The City Clerk's Diet', *The Times* (30 October 1912), p. 6.

⁷⁸ 'The City Clerk's Diet', p. 6.

⁷⁹ Anderson, *Victorian Clerks*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ See Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, pp. 82-3.

⁸¹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 46.

⁸² Dan Clawson, *Bureaucracy and the Labor Process* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1980), p. 219.

streamlining the mass of clerical workers that, in turn, enabled further expansion until, as Alexandra Lange suggests, ‘the paper record could become a useful substitute for the man himself’.⁸³ While it is important to bear in mind that Taylor’s *Principles* remained, at best, an idealised vision of efficiency and were rarely fully implemented, the tone of his theories nonetheless became ingrained in clerical culture. Guides for clerical behaviour – both those aimed at the clerks and, to a lesser extent, those written by employers – were not a new phenomenon. Indeed, many guide books were published throughout the nineteenth century and they certainly contributed to the ‘clerkly culture’, as Zakim has suggested, which led to the conflation of ‘business maxims [... and the] character of general wisdom’.⁸⁴ These self-educational manuals covered not only technical skills but respectable behaviour and whilst they were held in generally high-regard no single volume became quite so financially influential with employers as did Taylor’s *Principles*. And so we commonly find in fiction representations of the impact of Taylor’s ideologies – see, for example, Victor Canning’s *The Wooden Angel* (1938):

He was a clerk, one of a hundred in a huge rambling building where individuals were not represented so much by their personalities as by their tasks. To his director he was less Francis Jago than the servant of the scholarships system, he was the file that held all the information about the scholars, he was a reference that could produce at a command the dates of committee decisions, and he was an instrument which with pencil and shorthand notes could suck in a letter or a report and an hour later produce it typed and neatly paragraphed for signature.⁸⁵

Francis Jago is merely the embodiment of the clerk-process and a product of administrative efficiency rather than a skilled professional. As might be expected, the

⁸³ Alexandra Lange, ‘White Collar Corbusier: From the *Casier* to the *cités d’affaires*’, *Grey Room*, No. 9 (Fall 2002), p. 62.

⁸⁴ Zakim, ‘Business Clerk as Social Revolutionary’, p. 591

⁸⁵ Victor Canning (Julian Forest, pseud.), *The Wooden Angel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), p. 134.

clerical authors see Taylorist bureaucracy in terms of dehumanisation rather than efficiency – what else would we expect from workers who were increasingly directed towards piecework or replaced by new technologies? When Bennett’s character Richard Larch, for example, moves from Yorkshire to London to work as a clerk for ‘Messrs. Curpet and Smythe’, his first observation is that he has ‘become part of a business machine of far greater magnitude than anything to which he had been accustomed in Bursley’.⁸⁶ This machine, then, is also a distinctive feature of life in the metropolis where, naturally, business is not conducted on such a small scale. Likewise, Bullock’s Robert Thorne defines himself as part of a bureaucratic engine: ‘One day was much like another [...] I felt sometimes like a machine, grinding out its daily portion, mechanically turning leaves with cold grimed fingers.’⁸⁷ Thorne is truly an automaton; he fears he has lost all humanity, becoming simply a cog in the wheels of bureaucracy. Comparisons can easily be drawn between Thorne’s ‘cold grimed fingers’ and T. S. Eliot’s ‘dead’ crossing London’s Bridge – those who spent their day as ‘eyes and back / turn[ed] upward from the desk’.⁸⁸ McKinley and Wilson draw attention to contemporary concerns with what had been the most privileged of clerical industries – banking – and point in particular to the reduction of ‘individuality and organisational innovation’ that occurred as a result of the ‘central pressure to routinize administrative procedures’.⁸⁹ They cite an anonymous writer in 1920 who states: ‘the more brilliant a youth may be, the more he is made to feel like a mere cog in the wheel’.⁹⁰ This is a particularly interesting observation given that so many of the clerk-writers expressed frustration at mechanisation; we must always bear in mind that these ‘brilliant [...] youths’ are those for whom a life without intellectual stimulation was most keenly felt. As Swinnerton puts it in *The Young Idea*, ‘There was order, and

⁸⁶ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 27.

⁸⁷ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 73.

⁸⁸ Charles Monteith comments on the fixed regularity of Eliot’s own office routine, even in his later years at Russell Square. T. S. Eliot, ‘The Waste Land’, *T. S. Eliot: Complete Poems and Plays*, pp. 62, 68; Monteith, ‘Eliot in the Office’, *Grand Street*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Spring, 1990), p. 92.

⁸⁹ McKinley and Wilson, “Small Acts of Cunning”, p. 664.

⁹⁰ McKinley and Wilson, “Small Acts of Cunning”, p. 664.

commercial prosperity, and close, though not hard, work [;] he was allowed everything but individual expansion'.⁹¹

Even as late as Norman Collins's *London Belongs to Me* (1945), we see this old-fashioned 'manual mechanisation' in terms of data-copying and filing – Mr Josser still sits on his high stool propping up the unyielding ledgers 'with a piece of blotting-paper and a lump of rubber' – operating alongside more modern technologies.⁹² The final office scene sees Mr Josser come out of retirement in order to replace the young men lost to the war effort. As he climbs his old stool, Mr Josser talks aloud to the son he has lost, saying 'you're the one who ought to have been coming back'.⁹³ Immediately embarrassed, Mr Josser looks about the office and realises his indiscretion is unnoticed: 'No one had heard him. The electric adding machine on the centre table was whirring and chattering, and it drowned everything'.⁹⁴ Mr Josser is the anachronism in the corner, sat at the desk that 'had been unoccupied since he left it'.⁹⁵ The electric adding machine represents the perilousness of the long-term position of this ledger-top clerk; he is forced into retirement to make way for young clerical hopefuls who have, in turn, been lost to the machine of war.⁹⁶ Twice in the novel, at the beginning and again at the end, Collins describes Josser as a 'walking ledger' (once as 'four large ledgers with a pair of striped trousers underneath them' and later as 'the ledger walking towards him [that] had suddenly become human') suggesting that, in fact, Josser only survives because he has, in a sense, been mechanised.⁹⁷

At the turn of the twentieth century architectural, artistic, and ideological conventions all converged in the design of the office building. Many cities saw the entry of modernist architectural forms that echoed the productivity of purpose

⁹¹ Swinnerton, *Young Idea*, p. 63.

⁹² Norman Collins, *London Belongs to Me* (London: Collins, 1945), p. 633.

⁹³ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 633

⁹⁴ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 633

⁹⁵ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 632.

⁹⁶ The International Labour Review of 1936 suggested that 'skilled employees and those in the prime of life have suffered from the competition of female and adolescent labour' because young people are preferable when using modern technologies. This cycle was repeated with the development of computer technology at the end of the twentieth century, and continues as developments are made. 'Modern Machines Take Charge of the Office', *The Queenslander* (16 Feb. 1938), p. 13.

⁹⁷ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, pp. 14, 632.

required by Taylor's streamlining. Lange suggests that, visually, the production of typewritten documents became a kind of assembly line and the new skyscrapers mirrored giant filing cabinets as a reminder of growing bureaucratic power.⁹⁸ Ultimately the more paper that was pushed the more successful the establishment could appear, with the steel-framed towers that glistened across the skyline – notably in America – demonstrating the power of bureaucracy. Within these structures sat, of course, the little clerk-machines – a recurrent subject of discussion in both literature and the press.⁹⁹

Clerk-machines is, perhaps, the best term for this generation of clerks. As Lowe argues, male clerks were often protected from the impact of new technological developments by the creation of a 'stratum at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy' composed entirely of female workers, most of whom were employed with the explicitly intention of working *with* the new machines.¹⁰⁰ However, literary portrayals emphasise a change, if not in equipment, then at least in mentality, reflective of the fact that instead of working alone in a small offices these transitional clerks witnessed the transformation towards open-plan offices and piece-work. As a result, they were in fact mechanised *themselves*. And even if they did not use the new machinery, witnessing the success of stenography and typewriting nonetheless created a tension which was not, in the end, unfounded; clerical machines were eventually replaced *by* real machines after the First World War – most notably in the copying of documents – but prior to the War the clerk had to be able to copy as *well* as a machine.

⁹⁸ Lange, 'White Collar Corbusier', p. 63.

⁹⁹ The quantity of letters discussing the displacement of male clerks in newspapers and periodicals corresponds with the opposition that Rhoda Nunn and Mary Bartlett experience when setting up their clerical school for women during this period in George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893).

¹⁰⁰ For further literature on women in the clerical workplace see Lowe's book, *Women in the Administrative Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987), Gregory Anderson, *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850-1914', in Angela John (ed), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 1986), and Julie Berebitsky's *Sex and the Office: A History of Gender, Power and Desire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012) which offers a reading of the American female clerk. See also Klingender, *The Condition of Clerical Labour in Britain* (1935), and Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (1958), both of which discuss the 'status-decline' in clerical work once women become employed. Lowe, 'Class, Job and Gender', pp. 18, 20.

Jeacle cites a memo from 1933 that states: ‘I must again point out to my staff that more care must be taken when writing up passbooks. Mess Hoare requires *good writing*’.¹⁰¹ In the instance of ledger-top copying, then, we see that while formal mechanisation was not always a threat, this did not prevent copying itself becoming a task that required faster production due to increased demand but with comparable attention paid to detail. McKinlay and Wilson suggest that because of British cautiousness towards full mechanisation – or the direct replacement of men with machines – levels of control and surveillance actually *increased* because ‘the clerk’s body was the technology upon which the bank’s efficient functioning depended’ and, as a consequence, ‘control of the body’ or the *human-machine* became essential.¹⁰² Anecdotal incidences of particular employers being very strict on even the private lives of their clerks – again, particularly within the banking industry where trust was so central to reputation – are easily found; employers clearly believed that they had the right to extend this control beyond the office. In *Punch*, and as early as 1884, a satire of banking regulations includes the new commandment, ‘thou shalt not marry on less than £150 a-year’ – a ruling echoed in the guide to ‘Our Great Banks and How to Enter Them’ produced in 1894 for *Boys Own Paper*.¹⁰³ Hoare’s Bank also had a long series of rules that forbade, amongst other things, debt, marriage, smoking, and conducting business without a top hat.¹⁰⁴ And in *Pick-Me-Up* a satirical sketch outlines an angry employer chastising a clerk for growing a beard: ‘I can’t permit you to grow a beard in office hours. You must do that in your spare time’.¹⁰⁵ In fiction, we see that on his first day Robert Thorne is presented with a copy of the ‘office Regulations’, many pages of which are dedicated to ‘expounding [his] personal conditions of service’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ McKinley and Wilson cite a number of sources that discuss the longevity of hand-writing skills particularly in provincial banks. Jeacle, ‘Bank Clerk’, p. 319 – my emphasis added; McKinlay and Wilson, “‘Small acts of cunning’”, p. 660.

¹⁰² McKinlay and Wilson, “‘Small acts of cunning’”, p. 661.

¹⁰³ *Punch*, ‘Ye Banks and Brays!’ (Nov. 29, 1884), p. 257; *Boys Own Paper*, ‘Our Great Banks: IV Colonial Banks’ (Sept. 29, 1894), p. 823

¹⁰⁴ Jeacle, ‘The Bank Clerk’, pp. 318-9.

¹⁰⁵ ‘There is a time for everything’, *Pick-Me-Up*, Issue 53 (Oct. 05, 1889).

¹⁰⁶ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 37.

In these pressured times of office reform, the concept of a mechanised workforce became both revered and feared. H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), for example, presents a vision of workers and managers evolving as two separate species – with the worker-Morlocks living in a savage, underground work. These fears found expression in the twentieth century in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* of 1927 (produced two years after William Henry Leffingwell, founder of the National Office Management Association, adapted Taylor's studies of work-force efficiency for an explicitly bureaucratic audience in *Office Management*), with its dramatic city-landscape in which the workers toil without respite under the gaze of a panoptical central bureaucracy. It seems only natural, then, that writers such as Bullock and Bennett are writing in opposition to this soulless clerical existence – particularly as they had experienced it. Swinnerton too expresses this situation in *The Young Idea*:

Galbraith was competent, was unsparing in labour: but he was in danger of becoming nothing but a clerk by sheer enforced conformity to rule. And Galbraith, even though he would have scorned as puerile the idea of impressing the world with his personality, wanted to feel that whatever capabilities he had were being exerted. He wanted work that he should find difficult; and he got routine labour that demanded only care. It was the sort of muffled tragedy of a clerk's life that was beginning to show its influence upon him [...].¹⁰⁷

Clerical work was changing fast – Lockwood cites the 'International Labour Review' of 1936 which states that 'in the old-fashioned office, even the office boy felt that he was *somebody* [...] but the invoice clerk who now works a book-keeping machine all day is nothing but an impersonal unit'.¹⁰⁸ A write-up of the Review, in an Australian periodical, draws attention to the psychological consequences of the new 'organisation methods' in office work, particularly when viewed in the light of an 'instinctive desire

¹⁰⁷ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker*, p. 90; *The Queenslander*, 'Modern Machines Take Charge of the Office' (Feb. 16, 1938), p.13, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18902901> [accessed 15.12.13].

for importance'.¹⁰⁹ The author suggests that the introduction of machinery creates a hierarchy in which employees are aware of their status as either designated for managerial success or 'meant exclusively for [an] unimportant function' and attached to an 'inferior post'.¹¹⁰ In this sense, as the 'Review' suggests, machine workers need not be trained in anything other than the piece work for which they are employed, and therefore prospects for promotion are entirely limited. In many ways these descriptions echo Walter Benjamin's concept of *Erfahrung* – 'the alienated experience of the worker bound to routine attendance on a machine' – which was in stark contrast to the hyper-stimulation of the metropolis.¹¹¹ In internalising the principles of Taylorism, the dehumanised clerk becomes victim to what Georg Lukács calls a 'rational mechanisation [that] extends right into the worker's "soul"'.¹¹² One extreme example of this can be found in fiction in Wodehouse's short story 'A Sea of Troubles' (1917) when Mr Meggs, the overtly clerkly figure, plans his suicide with mechanical precision: 'a man cannot be a clerk in even an obscure firm of shippers for a great deal of time', Wodehouse writes, 'without acquiring system'. 'And so we find him,' the passage concludes, 'seated at his *desk*, ready for the end'.¹¹³

Not only was mechanisation symptomatic of the duties carried out, the rigid structure of the working-day also impressed a deep-rooted sense of routine. Wodehouse comments on the subtle addiction of this new-found regularity in *Psmith in the City* as Mike begins his banking career: 'he would come at ten and go at five, and the same everyday [sic], except Saturdays and Sundays, all year round, with a ten days' holiday.' At first, as Wodehouse explains, '[t]he monotony of the prospect appalled him'; however, 'He was not', we read, 'old enough to know what a narcotic

¹⁰⁹ In literature, examples of this 'desire for importance' can be found in the schemes for betterment of many of the secondary clerk characters – see, for example, Gaffrum in *The Young Idea* who says, 'Think I'd go, on the halls? I'm goin' to write a lil book... Dashin' Donald, the Dexter Diamond'. 'Modern Machines Take Charge', p. 13; Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 66.

¹¹⁰ 'Modern Machines Take Charge', p. 13.

¹¹¹ Walter Benjamin, as cited in Scott McCracken, *Masculinities, Modernist Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 9.

¹¹² Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London: Merlin Press, 1968), p. 88.

¹¹³ Wodehouse, 'A Sea of Troubles', p. 130.

Habit is'.¹¹⁴ Likewise Bullock's Robert Thorne opines, 'routine had gripped me. I was being moulded into a pattern [...] stiff and bloodless as an office ruler'.¹¹⁵ Thorne watches an older clerk, Mr Cherry, addicted to Wodehouse's narcotic, who is almost obsessive in his routine: 'everything had its own place, green pencil beside red, and blue between red and black, scissors paired with paper knife, pins lying head to head, inkpots square to a fraction of an inch'.¹¹⁶ Mr Cherry is a model of Taylorist discipline whose obsessive attention to professional duty undermines youthful exuberance. Poor Edgar Finchley, Victor Canning's clerk-creation, is chief clerk for ten years without a single holiday because his ageing superior Mr Bardwell 'never took a holiday and he fostered the practice among his clerks'.¹¹⁷ In *The Young Idea*, as the title suggests, Swinnerton explores the tension between the idealism of youth and the realities of adult responsibility. At first his clerkly protagonist, Galbraith, fears that he is 'in danger of becoming nothing but a clerk by sheer enforced conformity to rule' but by the end of the novel he relishes the stability of his clerk-hood and not only conforms to office discipline but becomes an advocate for the company, swiftly rising up the ranks.¹¹⁸ Swinnerton's cynical suggestion is that Galbraith's only option is the internalisation of mindless routinisation and the redirection of this intelligence towards company goals. Galbraith, with his superior education and his slightly elevated family position, can recognise the forces that are turning him into a clerk-type but even this self-awareness ('his long[ing] to be in the great fight with all his heart')¹¹⁹ cannot override the discipline to which he has been trained.

¹¹⁴ As a bank clerk, Mike works much shorter hours than many fictional clerks – for example, Richard Larch must work nine-thirty to six, with half-days on Saturdays – yet it is the constancy that frightens him. Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City*, p. 25.

¹¹⁵ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 140.

¹¹⁶ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 38.

¹¹⁷ Canning, *Mr Finchley Discovers His England*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 63.

¹¹⁹ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 68.

Clock-watching

In 1925, William Henry Leffingwell, founder of the National Office Management Association and author of *Office Management: Principles and Practice*, argued that ‘clerks who use the clocks as a pace-maker or time-maker accomplish much more than those who fail to mark the passage of time’.¹²⁰ The term ‘clock-watching’ itself has, however, distinctively literary roots: the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists one of the earliest uses as Monica Dickens’s novel *One Pair of Feet* (1942) and by 1945 concern had become widespread enough for H. G. Wells to describe it as ‘a common failing of human beings at work’.¹²¹ Before the term itself was coined there are many references, like Leffingwell’s, to the conceptualisation of time as a crucial and determining feature of not only the working day but also of a clerical life.¹²² Note, for instance, that both Bennett’s Richard Larch and Bullock’s Robert Thorne hear the chime of a clock as they stand outside their new workplaces on their respective first days – in Larch’s case, that of the Law Courts, whilst Thorne hears Big Ben.

References to the clock as the focus of the working day are widespread in literary portrayals of clerical life, where the clock signifies not only mechanisation but the conflict between the passage of time and the stasis of narrative. In Swinnerton’s *The Young Idea*, clerks Hilda and Galbraith are trapped in inertia and they can only watch the clock as time slips away: ‘there seemed to be no sound beside that which the clock made as it added to the flying seconds’.¹²³ Swinnerton calls it the ‘muffled tragedy of a clerk’s life’, a tragedy echoed by Eliot’s Prufrock, who declares: ‘In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse’.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Lange, ‘White Collar Corbusier’, p. 64.

¹²¹ Wells, ‘42 to ’44: *A Contemporary Memoir upon Human Behaviour during the Crisis of the World Revolution* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1944), p. 38.

¹²² See also E. P. Thompson’s ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, which discusses the impact of the development of fixed time and the availability of clocks and watches as crucial to the regulation of factory work. Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 21; Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p.33; Thompson, ‘Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism’, *Past and Present*, No. 38 (December, 1967), 56-97.

¹²³ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 64; Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, p. 14.

Discussions about the artistic portrayal of time – and even of the clock itself – in modernist works are easily found but comparable comments on wider fiction are scarce.¹²⁵ Rather than simply following realist ‘clock time’, or ‘public’ time (as Jesse Matz refers to it), clerical novels demonstrate an awareness of something essential to modernity more widely; namely the distinction between time on the clock and the personal experience of time.¹²⁶ In this sense, the novels feel more modern than they have, perhaps, been given credit for – they do, in many ways, move closer to Henri Bergson’s ‘*duree*’ than might be expected.¹²⁷

In Bullock’s *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces*, for instance, the novel opens with clerk Mr Ruby defying the call of the clock. Inspired by the spring air, for the first time in his ‘twenty-six years of patient grinding’, Ruby considers subverting office time: ‘Ten o’clock striking. He was late. Yet he did not care’. He meanders away from his daily route and gazes at the dockworkers by London Bridge as they unpack exotic imports. In the fifteen minutes Ruby is absent, his mind is transported to an Algiers of ‘mosques’, ‘camels’, ‘orange groves’ and the ‘burning desert’.¹²⁸ This new routine occurs several times over the proceeding days but wherever he strolls Ruby is confronted by clock faces; each day after ‘linger[ing] a few minutes under the clock: [he] yielded to force of habit at last, and joined the stream of workers making across the Bridge’.¹²⁹ Once in the office, we read also of the constant reassertion of office-time, even though there is no mention of a clock in Ruby’s detailed description of his workplace.¹³⁰ Instead, the internalisation of ‘the long official day’ suffices to prompt the clerks in their behaviour:

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Peter Childs, *Modernism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2008), Randall Stevenson, ‘Chapter Three’, in *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), and J. X. Cooper, *Modernism and the Culture of Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹²⁶ Jesse Matz, ‘Hulme’s Compromise and the New Psychologism’, in E. Comentale (ed.), *T. E. Hulme and the Question of Modernism* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Press, 2006), p. 113.

¹²⁷ M. A. Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (McGill Queen’s University Press, 1996), p. 82.

¹²⁸ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, pp. 6-7.

¹²⁹ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 41.

¹³⁰ This is true also of Lawrence’s description of Paul Morel’s working day in *Sons and Lovers*, which sets out each hour of the clock and the activity that takes place without mentioning the clock itself. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*, pp. 107-8.

The long official day dragged on. By four o'clock, when the room rose for fifteen minutes to break into social hubbub over tea and biscuits, Ruby was almost his old self again. By five excitement was dead in him, and he sat clearing his table with the precision of a machine. At a quarter to six he had finished work.¹³¹

His journey home is similarly clock-centric with no possible lapse between the moment that work is ended and the carefully calculated arrival time: 'If he is ten minutes late at business he may suffer reprimand. Let him be half an hour behind time of an evening and Catherine is watching at the gate'.¹³² Ruby's desire to 'break out' is a reaction to the demands of rigid clock-watching, and his inability to 'let [himself] go now and then'.¹³³ In *The Wooden Angel*, Francis Jago is likewise oppressed by the sensation of time passing: 'if only he could break away, and yet that was so difficult, and for every day that he let go by it became more difficult still'.¹³⁴

This obsession with being on time, felt most strongly in beginning a day's paid labour, contributed to what George Beard identified as the neurosis of modernity. In *American Nervousness* (1880), Beard 'blamed the perfection of clocks and the invention of watches for causing nervousness wherein "a delay of a few moments might destroy the hopes of a lifetime"'.¹³⁵ Orwell talks of the 'ant-like men' in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) who are commuting with the 'fear of the sack like a

¹³¹ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 10.

¹³² As early as 1889 one commentator in *The Times* went so far as to attribute further ill-health to the obsession with clock-awareness, calling many clerks 'suburban dyspeptics' because '[they] eat breakfast with time-tables in their minds and their eyes on the clocks'. A discussion of the garden as a key site for the expectant wife can be found in Gail Cunningham's article, 'Houses in Between: Navigating Suburbia in Late Victorian Writing', in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2004), 421-434. Note, in David Nobbs's series *The Fall and Rise of Reginald* (or in the later series *Reggie*) Perrin, comment is made on Perrin's inability to arrive at work less than eleven minutes late (or twenty-seven minutes in the later series) because of a series of rail company blunders. Perrin's late arrival home is poignant as he increasingly returns to an empty suburban home – a result of his wife's frenetic social calendar. Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 31; *The Times*, as cited in *Young Folks Paper*, 12 Oct. 1889, p. 227.

¹³³ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 31.

¹³⁴ Forest, *The Wooden Angel*, p. 134.

¹³⁵ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 15.

maggot in [the] head'.¹³⁶ Again, Charles Pooter, who obsessively follows the punctuality of the young clerks in his office in *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), is thoroughly embarrassed when he happens to be late for the first time in his career on the very day that employee arrival is being monitored by his superiors.¹³⁷ As Georg Simmel commented in 1900, modern life had become synonymous with the 'universal diffusion of pocket watches' and consequently, perfect timing.¹³⁸ Note how the narrator in *Robert Thorne* intervenes, at one point, to paint a picture of the typical clerk describing him as one of the 'thousands' who 'tim[es] his rate of progress by the public clocks' as he walks to work.¹³⁹

Attempts, then, at separating public and private time in order to boost productivity, invariably fail as the fictional clerk, ground down by constant observance of the clock, starts to drift into a dreamlike reverie both in the office and at home.¹⁴⁰ And so, we read of Robert Thorne's subversions:

All was done by the clock that faced Mr Hope upon the wall. At five minutes past ten we were in our seats; forty minutes we had for luncheon; not sooner than five minutes to four we washed and changed our jackets [...] Often I had the impulse to thump the table, to dance on the hearthrug, to fling Tax lists at someone's head, to shout obscenities down the telephone [...] Yet perhaps not. I kept a heart in me, something of a soul. I had glimpses of the river and the barges, the cabs going down the Embankment, the sky sometimes and the sun. Even in my office coat I could think of Nell.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 70.

¹³⁷ George and Weedon Grossmith, *Diary of a Nobody*, pp. 37-8.

¹³⁸ Georg Simmel, as cited in Kern, *Culture of Time and Space*, p. 11.

¹³⁹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 137.

¹⁴⁰ A clear example of this can be found in Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams* (1907). The main character, whom the reader is led to believe is painstakingly completing a fictional masterpiece, is actually lost in a drug-fuelled mania that produces nothing but incoherent scribbling.

¹⁴¹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 140.

Time on the clock in these novels thus becomes a poignant marker of the clerk slipping, often reluctantly, into a clerical career. Despite Thorne's subtle subversions of office time he cannot help but observe the time passing. Mihm discusses the tension between the emphasis on the self-made man – which often led young men into clerkhood with 'entrepreneurial aspirations' – and the reality of 'the dead-end job'.¹⁴² In this sense, he argues, these failed capitalists are not marked by financial ruination or bankruptcy, but the symbolic nature of conformity to the 'time clock'. The younger clerk-characters, such as Robert Thorne and Richard Larch, who initially dedicate energy to schemes for self-improvement, give in eventually to the lure of the career. This final acceptance is grounded in what McKinlay and Wilson (amongst others) have identified as 'the emergence of the career as a central feature of the experience of Victorian clerks'.¹⁴³ In clerkly fiction the clerical career is reduced, however, to two popular types: the disgraced youngster who fails to make permanent clerk-hood (possibly chasing less suitable/stable pursuits) and the elderly clerk who achieved stability and subsequently stopped aiming higher. The first of these is commented upon in Arthur Machen's *Hill of Dreams* (1907) when aspirant-writer Lucian muses on his friend Bennett (a loosely-veiled depiction of Arnold) and the popular reaction to his giving up a thousand pounds a year for the sake of art:

For example, there was young Bennett [...] the two young fellows compared literary notes together. Bennett showed some beautiful things he had written, over which Lucian had grown both sad and enthusiastic [...] But when Bennett, after many vain prayers to his aunt, threw up a safe position in the bank, and betook himself to a

¹⁴² Mihm is discussing, as Zakim before him, an American context, but there are parallels that can be made in a broader sense with Britain, particularly those which draw on the development of a bureaucratised commercial economy. In America, whilst yeoman farmers offered the model of masculinity against which clerical foibles were compared, the British equivalent was based upon two divergent images; the upper-class sportsman and the working-class physical labourer. Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts', p. 612.

¹⁴³ McKinlay and Wilson discuss the various ways in which bank clerks, in particular, were carefully controlled. They were, for example, not able to work in any other bank should they terminate (or have terminated) their contracts at one establishment, detailed logs were kept of clerical behaviour and skill, and inspectors classified workers and decided if they should receive an annual increment or not. McKinlay and Wilson, "'Small acts of cunning'", 657-678, p. 658.

London garret, Lucian was not surprised at the general verdict [...] the general opinion was that Bennett was a hopeless young lunatic [...] But he had deliberately chosen [...] to chuck his chances away for the sake of literature.¹⁴⁴

Heller calls the real danger of the career the ‘potential failure to deliver promotion and social mobility, [thus] thwarting years of hard work and pent up aspirations’.¹⁴⁵ This other clerk-type can be seen in the comments of a journalist in 1959: ‘[pen-pushing] invites contemplation of an elderly figure perched on a high stool in some Dickensian office condemned to copy, with hope and ambition long since dead’.¹⁴⁶ This act of copying seems to be central to the despair of the career-clerk; the sheer pointlessness of painstakingly transferring data that is the product of someone else’s accounting skill. And, as Wilson and McKinlay suggest, the opportunities for lower grade clerks were very limited; most had to be satisfied with yearly increments which, with increasing mechanisation, were no longer guaranteed but subject to inspection and productivity.¹⁴⁷

The protagonists of the clerical novel are thus defined through a pivotal moment in which they decide to either accept or reject the career dream. Regardless of their final decision (or destiny, as it often becomes) the promise of the career is dangled in front of all young clerks. Note how, at the outset of his clerical life, Robert Thorne believes in rising through hard work: ‘I should strive in my office and gain reward for good service [...] have a house somewhere, with steps to the door and mahogany furniture in the rooms and gilt mirrors standing behind ormolu clocks’.¹⁴⁸ Thorne measures success in terms of ormolu clocks because clerkliness is for life, evidenced by the presentation of the mantel clock upon retirement.¹⁴⁹ This largely

¹⁴⁴ Arthur Machen, *Hill of Dreams* (Swansea: Parthian Books, 2011), location 667-669 [Kindle Edition].

¹⁴⁵ Heller, *London Clerical Workers*, p. 53.

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 17 April 1959, p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Wilson and McKinlay, ‘Small Acts of Cunning’, p. 665.

¹⁴⁸ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, Tom Baldwin’s receipt of a ‘doleful clock’ and his reluctance to tell his wife that ‘everybody got a clock when they retired’ in former-clerk R. C. Sherriff’s *Greengates* (1936). Sherriff, as cited in Haigh, *The Office*, p. 551.

aspirational understanding of the clerical career was encouraged by institutions because, of course, it fostered loyalty, hard work, and discretion. In Bennett's *A Man from the North* aspirant writer Larch is lured away from his authorial desires by progression at work. And so, when his boss, Mr Curpet offers him 'the position of cashier in the office, at a salary of three pounds a week [...] the disappointments of unsuccessful authorship suddenly ceased to trouble him'.¹⁵⁰ In fact, he even begins to doubt his talents for writing, momentarily questioning whether he is a more gifted businessman.

In Collins's *London Belongs to Me*, Mr Josser is presented with a 'handsome marble' mantel clock to mark his retirement – ironic considering he no longer needs to 'clock-watch'. Instead the clock's 'low pulsating *booong*' only serves to remind him of the forty-two years that have passed whilst he was a clerk.¹⁵¹ His boss condescendingly remarks, "no more waiting about in the rain for the same old tram to take you home again", a comment which the reluctant retiree resents:

Why shouldn't he wait about in the rain for trams if he wanted to? Waiting for trams in the rain suddenly seemed entirely delightful and proper. It was part of the old order of things that he had wanted to go on for ever and ever.¹⁵²

Josser is lost not only to public-time but public-space; he no longer needs to travel, to engage with city life, or to fit in with a scheduled day. Ironically, after an eventful trip home on his last day with his presentation clock, it no longer works – just like Josser:

There it stood on the mantelpiece – handsome, dominating, useless [...] Something had gone wrong with the striking part. Every few minutes, the clock roused itself as

¹⁵⁰ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵¹ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 13.

¹⁵² Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 20.

though it were going to play a full carillon, then paused for a moment and uttered a single hollow boom before relapsing into silence.¹⁵³

At the end of the novel, and as the war demands more workers, Josser's return to his office as a much-needed worker (and a 'somebody again') is marked by a detailed description of his joyful return to commuter transport.¹⁵⁴ He is woken, for example, by the 'alarm clock' and he eats his scrambled eggs 'with one eye on the presentation clock'.¹⁵⁵ His earlier reluctance to retire and his regret at being a clerk for so long cause an uneasy paradox which seems to symbolise clerical work in fiction. While not wanting to leave – and in returning at the end of the novel to his 'old familiar' desk – there is in that moment of exit, nonetheless, resentment directed at his career: 'It was no longer Mr Frederick Josser, retired, who was standing there. It was the ghost of Mr Josser, junior, the courageous young clerk who was getting married on twenty-five shillings a week and his prospects'.¹⁵⁶ Josser, junior, is the fictional contemporary of Bullock's Thorne, Pugh's Smallpiece, and Bennett's Larch; they are the young clerks for whom time equates to hope and ambition.

In Bullock's *Robert Thorne*, Mr Hope – note, his name – after thirty-seven years of service, is likewise forced to retire from the Tax Office and, just like Josser, he receives due token of a finished career. After all of his years of working in the same office, Mr Hope is distraught at the minimalism of his goodbye:

September came, and one morning in it Thomas woke up an official no more. The previous day there had been a little celebration in the Tax Office – a gathering in the Principal's room – a fulsome speech by the Principal, and a presentation to Thomas of a revolving chair and a *marble clock* [...] His career was ended.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁴ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 628.

¹⁵⁵ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 628.

¹⁵⁶ Collins, *London Belongs to Me*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 268.

Following a lifetime of routine Mr Hope's first morning of retirement sees him '[sitting] down to breakfast at the stroke of half-past eight on the presentation clock'.¹⁵⁸ Conformity to the work-day schedule and the rigidity that has dominated, in this case, for thirty-seven years of a career, is too much to overcome. Indeed, as Robert observes of his superior, Mr Hope has internalised Taylorist principle to the letter:

[W]hat Mr Hope was, as man and citizen, does not matter I think. Before everything, in everything, he was an official. He lived for the office. It had his heart, filled his thoughts. Through the most of thirty years he had slaved devotedly; had shaped himself and been shaped into an almost perfect part of the machine. He never made a mistake. He knew every strand of the ropes. He seemed tireless. He was order itself. Like a planet he moved in eternal routine. You might set your watch by his doings.¹⁵⁹

The point at which the fictional clerk's career ends is, perhaps, the clearest example of the pathos of these novels. There is a sense of inaction reminiscent of Michael Hollington's modernist '*non-event*'; a trait which is manifestly 'rooted in modernist feelings about time' and which counters the Victorian realist understanding of chronological and narrative progression.¹⁶⁰ In both Hope and Josser we also see, though, something symptomatic, perhaps, of what Lukács calls the 'worker's soul' that struggles to exist without rationalisation – for both Hope and Josser lose their sense of identity when they retire.

¹⁵⁸ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 268.

¹⁵⁹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 141.

¹⁶⁰ Michael Hollington, 'Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time', in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature* (London: Penguin, 1991), 430-442, p. 431.

Escapes

Jonathan Rose is sceptical of our ‘mechanised clerk’ figure, claiming that he is merely a projection of the modernist conviction that the ‘the typical clerk was subhuman, machine-like, dead inside’.¹⁶¹ However, I take issue with Rose’s suggestion that ‘the clerks themselves [...] offer a radically different portrayal of Edwardian office life’, and would argue instead that clerical authors’ representations are frequently as negative as highbrow depictions. As Attewell suggests, despite what contemporary historians argue, ‘unflattering images’ of ‘dull, routinized, narrow and mind-deadening’ came, in fact, ‘from the pens of clerks themselves’.¹⁶² As Mihm writes: ‘given the monotony and tedium of these desk jobs, is it any surprise that clerks would fantasise about doing something else?’ – a statement he substantiates with evidence of the many attempts made by clerks to steal money.¹⁶³ Indeed, whilst this thesis counters negative impressions of clerical life more generally, my reading of the office within the novels shapes the topographical nature of this study. The impression that clerk-writers like Swinnerton are cultivating has much in common with modernism’s clerical type and yet the mind-numbing mechanisation and the monotony of routine is being driven by an *insider*, ‘middlebrow’ perspective. These writers are not, then, attempting to mimic modernist writings (in fact, most predate them) but rather to reflect the reality of office experience from the beginnings of the bureaucratic revolution. In contrast to Rose’s vision of an enjoyable office experience, I see office work as having been mundane and oppressive thus prompting the clerkly escapes which feature in the later chapters of my thesis. Central, then, is my sense that the

¹⁶¹ For a critical response to Rose’s interpretation see Christopher Hilliard, ‘Modernism and the Common Writer’, *The Historical Journal*, 48, 3 (2005), 769-787. Hilliard argues that Rose is merely using the narrative of working-class versus modernism to fight his own battles in contemporary American academic culture. Hilliard’s aim is thus to dispute the suggestion that working-class readers were the only readers to oppose modernism. Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 393.

¹⁶² Attewell, ‘The Clerk Deskilled’, p. 360.

¹⁶³ The clerk’s ‘propensity for criminal malfeasance’ which Mihm identifies in American examples can easily be verified by searching ‘clerk’ in British nineteenth-century newspaper archives; most of the articles stored under this search term are of crime notices and court listings. Mihm, ‘Clerks, Class, and Conflicts’, p. 613.

office can be depicted as being dull *without condemning its inhabitants to a life of dullness* – thus overriding the conflation of the office and the office worker as equally dull.

Javier Trevino suggests that it is outside the office that the clerk sought individual expression:

the white-collar personnel of the enormous file, that uniform mass working in a soundless office or salesroom where the day itself is regulated by an impersonal time schedule, sought to derive meaning and gratitude from their leisure time.¹⁶⁴

Trevino is discussing sociologist C. Wright Mills' work, and in this instance, Mills' particular argument that the work ethic of the middle classes becomes a leisure ethic within the lower middle classes. While there were clear differences between Britain and America, the process of bureaucratisation occurred at a similar rate and with some shared consequences – one of which is, indeed, the representation of the office as a soulless environment.¹⁶⁵ As Trevino argues, 'the white-collar people relentlessly pursue pleasure outside work only to be bored at work and restless at play'.¹⁶⁶ As Robert Thorne puts it, 'God help us, we all nowadays help at grinding in some mill or other, and it is to escape from it all that we crave, in our times of leisure'.¹⁶⁷

Rose's suggestion that the office is a positive space is based, in fact, on a similar ethic.¹⁶⁸ His contentions are largely substantiated by the memoirs of clerks who, like Bullock, Swinnerton et al., manage to dedicate parts of their day in and out of the office to broadening their intellectual pursuits. Rose concludes that this overrides interpretations of the office as dull and posits the office space as an

¹⁶⁴ Mills also said, notably, that 'it is to the white collar world that one must look for much that is characteristic of the twentieth century'. A. Javier Trevino, *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills* (London: Sage, 2012), p. 83; C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. ix.

¹⁶⁵ For further discussion of American white-collar workers see Introduction, footnote 7.

¹⁶⁶ Trevino, *The Social Thought of C. Wright Mills*, p. 83.

¹⁶⁷ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 217.

¹⁶⁸ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 406.

enjoyable one. However, his suggestion that clerical work was not as tedious as it sounds is based on a ‘number of young and eager minds, all reaching out in different directions’, by which Rose means not only those young clerks who forge an alternative career path but those who engaged in intellectual pursuits during bureaucratic lulls. This has much in common with Mills’s arguments that in a world of work that is monotonous, fruitful occupation must be found by either subverting office time, or in the newly designated leisure time.¹⁶⁹ Opportunities for ‘skylarking’, as Bullock calls it, are varied in the novels, though, and dependent on individual cases. Robert Thorne’s first appointment in the civil service sees him working under a kindly older clerk who allows his charges to slip off for tea in front of the fire. Later, as he is promoted to the ‘Clearing-room’ these opportunities are lost: ‘Discipline was strict. Work was constant, endless. No time now for skylarking or discussion, or reading the news’.¹⁷⁰ Alternatively, for example, Wodehouse’s clerk Mike finds that while discipline is strict, his workload is not intellectually taxing: ‘There was nothing much to do except enter and stamp letters, and, at intervals, take them down to the post office at the end of the street’. ‘The nature of the work’, as Mike continues, ‘gave [him] plenty of time for reflection’.¹⁷¹ Richard Church, in his autobiography *Over the Bridge* (1956), tells a similar tale:

‘You must attend to your work in office time,’ said an acid voice at my elbow. It was that of the tiny invalid with blue, transparent eyelids and thin moustaches that drooped from beneath his nose like two stalactites. That statement was an axiom which I tried bravely to practice during the twenty-four years spent in the Civil Service; bravely, but with sadly intermittent success.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Clearly, the overwhelming reliance on ‘schemas’ that can be found in many of H. G. Wells’ fictional portrayals, and Rose’s research (as well as that of Dowe), and in Church’s autobiography, suggests that clerks who were determined to be well read put a lot of energy into finding the time.

¹⁷⁰ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 140.

¹⁷¹ Wodehouse, *Psmith in the City*, p. 25.

¹⁷² Richard Church, *Over the Bridge* (London: William Heinemann, 1956), p. 220.

Richard has just purchased an ‘eighteenpenny copy of Palgrave, bound in Sultan red leather’, and it is towards this book that his attention is diverted. And yet his time in the office, while strict in terms of work-discipline, is also enjoyed because of the ‘multitudes of cultured men whom [he] met [...and who] served [him] in those first years in lieu of a university’.¹⁷³

As Rose suggests, the pursuit of ‘culture’ and, no doubt, other diversions, was aided by the community in which the clerks worked. The camaraderie created in an office of fifty or a hundred young clerks, living in the city, and often for the first time, is commented on in nearly all of clerical novels. In Robert’s building, the basement serves as a luncheon room and it is on his first day, when feeling ‘depressed, lonely, small’, that he is cheered by ‘the laughter, the friendly badinage, the merry sound of knife and fork’ of ‘fifty or sixty’ clerks eating together.¹⁷⁴ The other ‘new boy’ to start working at the Land Registry on the same day as Richard Church becomes his ‘post-prandial confidan[t]’, and on their first pay-day they go ‘together to Denny’s bookshop in the Strand and spend some of [their] earnings’.¹⁷⁵

Clearly, then, opportunities for companionship and intellectual discussion made an impression on clerks and clerk-authors alike. But any assumption that this overrode frustrations with the tedium of office work and the concerns of office workers would be mistaken – as is the suggestion that these opportunities were available to all clerks. And so if we can, as Rose suggests, ‘conclude that many Edwardian clerks were intellectuals [because] their memoirs are simply too numerous and too enthusiastic to dismiss entirely’, we must also bear in mind that it was the tedium of office life that provided the motivation for the intellectual life.¹⁷⁶ When clerks attended ‘lunch-time organ recitals’, or ‘surreptitiously read a study book or a novel’, they were escaping from the rigours of routine.¹⁷⁷ To return to Church’s experience, we read that,

¹⁷³ Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 221.

¹⁷⁴ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁵ Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 220.

¹⁷⁶ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 407.

¹⁷⁷ Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 221; Rose, *Intellectual Life*, pp. 408-9.

These hours [at reading rooms and organ recitals] offered us manna in the wilderness; for in spite of my vigorous appetite for life, I found the assault of the crowded streets and the inexorable stoicism of the Civil Service life somewhat merciless. I have not been trained for this combination of forces which both aimed at *subduing individuality* and to grind it small, to make it an ingredient of the vast civic structure.¹⁷⁸

Church's 'manna in the wilderness' – his reading and companionship – once contrasted with the grinding down and 'subduing [of] individuality', gives a much more negative account of the office. In placing the clerk within Rose's narrative of an inspiring, intellectual environment, we can thus lose sight of the 'grind' of bureaucracy and the anonymity of life both within the capital and in a large institution. I am not, by extension, disputing the success of intellectual clerks; indeed, their commitment to creative pursuits becomes all the more laudable given the constraints of being a clerk.

Here, however, we come to the paradoxes within clerical intellectualism. Having seen something of the ways in which clerks undermine their clerkly duties in order to pursue their creative desires it is now worth exploring the way those who go on to become authors write about the clerical life. Interestingly, they invariably focus on clerical characters who spend their every waking moment dreaming of themselves becoming authors. Thus, having escaped the office, and having become successful as writers, our clerks place their clerk-characters back into the setting which so dismayed them; in other words, they write themselves back into the clerkly predicament and invariably their clerk-characters do not escape.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps, in depicting the plight of the clerk, these clerk-authors demonstrate how far the principles of routine mechanisation have permeated even their imaginations.

¹⁷⁸ Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 221 – my emphasis added.

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, Richard Larch in *A Man from the North*, Gordon Comstock in George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and Lewisham in H. G. Wells' *Love and Mr Lewisham*.

As Jordan observes of Argentinian fiction, when clerical figures break free of habitual office toil they continue to focus, in this instance through their literature, on the office itself.¹⁸⁰ And so despite the fact that the clerk-*writers* do escape the office, their clerk-*characters* remain merely aspirant writers who ultimately give up on their dreams and face a future of clerkdom. If we return, then, to the author-clerk we see that the relationship between the two sits uneasily. Rose's argument that 'those clerks who did leave behind literary works probably also had the drive and imagination to rise above the kind of office routine that would have anesthetized others'¹⁸¹ does not take into account the contrast between the representation of an anesthetized workforce and the liberation of its creators. None of the novels in this study, therefore, feature a clerical protagonist who successfully becomes an author, despite nearly all of them being written by clerks who succeed to varying extents in this way.¹⁸² In this sense, the author-clerk is a kind of paradox; for to become an author is, by definition, to *not* be a clerk.

There is no less paradox if we consider the *reader*-clerk. As Price and Thurschwell suggest, the office setting in fiction at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the early-twentieth centuries was very much targeted at a clerical readership.¹⁸³ It is difficult to see how a clerical readership could appreciate stories that are saturated with office drudgery and thwarted escapes but, there is really no other plausible target audience. These are not social condition novels per se; they are not intended to incite sympathy or a specifically political or economic response.¹⁸⁴ They are narratives that elicit understanding from those who have ventured down the same road, and who sample daily the complexities of clerical life. The author-clerks are thus giving a voice to all clerks in railing against the hopelessness of their

¹⁸⁰ Jordan, *The Author in the Office*, p. 2.

¹⁸¹ Rose, *Intellectual Life*, p. 407.

¹⁸² I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

¹⁸³ Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries*, p. 38.

¹⁸⁴ While *Robert Thorne* begins with a cry for help for the hapless clerical masses, it is a narrative device designed to give credibility to its author as a *fellow* clerk, rather than to elicit awareness from an ignorant middle class. Indeed, this is, in part, linked to the relationship between the lower-middle-class and the middle-class proper – the lower middle class were not positioned far enough away to encourage a response.

condition. In this sense, these ‘realist’ novels require ‘realist’ readers who will appreciate the candour of the narrative and, ultimately, accept the failure to non-escape. In positioning the office as a ‘realist’ setting, therefore, the novelists are, at least, empathising with the fate of the reader/clerk.

There were those, however, who at least attempted to offer alternative fictional escapes. In Agatha Christie’s ‘The Case of the City Clerk’, for example, the protagonist is so desperate to challenge the conditions of clerk-dom that he visits the investigator Mr Parker Pyne in an attempt to find adventure, even potentially dangerous adventure – ‘just to get out of the rut’.¹⁸⁵ Again Bullock’s Mr Ruby is so desperate to escape the office (‘that long bare room with its grimed windows, its bit of sky, no sunshine in it, no spring, no freedom!’)¹⁸⁶, that he runs away to Gibraltar – where sunshine should abound. This flight is ultimately calamitous as Mr Ruby falls foul of social decorum aboard the boat and then into disfavour with his boss, his wife and his family upon his return; however, initially, Mr Ruby is inspired by the thought of a sea-journey as rejuvenating – of both his desire for freedom and, importantly, his lost masculinity. Observing the ship-workers from London Bridge, Ruby exclaims, ‘Men’s work that [...] splendid work out in the air and the sunshine of that glorious morning’.¹⁸⁷

We return, then, to Bullock’s constant use of capitalisation when discussing ‘Men-clerks’. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, in any examination of the office space within clerical fiction various constructions of manliness are in play. Ruby’s understanding of the exotic, for example, is in part underpinned by a Victorian construction of masculinity that elevated the adventure genre above more domestic forms of literature, but it is also focused on the idea that physical labour is ultimately manlier than clerical work.¹⁸⁸ Note how Robert Thorne quits his job at the Tax Office

¹⁸⁵ Agatha Christie, ‘The Case of the City Clerk’, *Parker Pyne Investigates* (New York: HarperCollins, 1934), p. 69.

¹⁸⁶ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 40.

¹⁸⁷ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁸ Joseph Kestner argues that the adventure novel becomes ‘particularly intense’ after 1880, spreading in appeal, as John Peck suggests, ‘to a much broader audience than just boys’ – Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (Ashgate Publishing, 2010) [e-book], p. 3; See also, Martin

and migrates to New Zealand at the end of the novel because he feels that by throwing himself into agricultural labour he can recover his masculinity. Indeed, he explains his decision to his boss as an attempt to ‘try to be a man’.¹⁸⁹ As Oliver, Robert’s office-mate, declares: “‘D’you think if we were men we’d be content to sit here toasting our toes at an office fire? Not likely! We’d be out there doing something – policemen, or driving a bus or something.’”¹⁹⁰

The popularity of mass-produced, imperial fiction amongst clerical types is well-documented; as Kelly Boyd suggests, for those in ‘cramped musty offices, the tales of adventure had a particular appeal’.¹⁹¹ It also fed into what Price argues was the desire for a ‘narrative of masculine mobility [...] increasingly foreign to desk-bound clerks in dead-end jobs’.¹⁹² Wells’ Mr Polly, for example, reads the ‘penny dreadfuls’ so he can ‘imagine himself riding mustangs as fleet as the wind across the prairies of Western America, or coming as a conquering and adored white man into the swarming villages of Central Africa’.¹⁹³ Here clerical fiction shades into imperial fiction and there is, as Allan Quatermain, in Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885) states, ‘not a petticoat in the whole history’ of imperial fiction.¹⁹⁴ Clearly, the popularity of the adventure genre with a clerical audience is a reaction against the idea of the clerk as a feminised man.¹⁹⁵ And it is the clerkly authors who most dramatically allow adventure to creep into their narratives. As Martin Burgess Green argues of Kipling and Wells, ‘their works are full of characters who think they are, or want to be, adventurers but who ludicrously fail to measure up to that idea’; and yet, he continues, they become adventurers ‘by grace of the writer’s favor’.¹⁹⁶

Burgess Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale: An Etiology of a Major Genre* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁹ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 289.

¹⁹⁰ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 41.

¹⁹¹ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and Boys’ Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 21.

¹⁹² Price and Thurschwell, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Culture*, p. 8.

¹⁹³ H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr Polly* (London: Collins, 1969), pp. 25-26.

¹⁹⁴ Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines* (Herts.: Wordsworth Children’s Classics, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁹⁵ More on which in the following chapters.

¹⁹⁶ Green, *Seven Types of Adventure Tale*, p. 209.

The clerk's desire for foreign adventure was not just a fictional device. John Tosh, for example, mentions an incident in which 13,000 out-of-work Manchester clerks applied for Manitoban farming work advertised by the YMCA.¹⁹⁷ This was a move promoted by middle-class observers: Lord Northcliffe, for example, discusses the 'London suburban clerk, who has stood the dull imprisonment of tube, typewriter, and bed-sitting-room until nature has burst his bonds', a figure remarkably similar to Bullock's 'pale-faced youth eating bread and cheese in a suburban bed-sitting-room'.¹⁹⁸ Their salvation, as Northcliffe suggests, is emigration to Canada – he states that those embarking on this adventure 'catch [...] on to the Canadian way of life with [...] rapidity'.¹⁹⁹ Frank Musgrove suggests that, increasingly, emigrants were white-collar, educated and middle class, and that this tide was growing: 'by the 1870s they were 15.2 per cent [of all male migrants], but in the 1890s they were 26.5 per cent'.²⁰⁰ I would argue that many of these clerks are driven by a dream of a masculinity that is located beyond the office. As Tosh suggests, 'empire and frontier with their need for manly qualities functioned as an answer to the gender insecurity of the middle-class clerks who felt threatened by the emergence of women in the labour market'.²⁰¹ The impact of female clerks is beyond the remit of this thesis, but it is worth noting that women in the office do not necessarily feature as a motivation for fictional escape; rather it is the mundane nature of the work which propels the clerk.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ The specific date is not mentioned, but Tosh is discussing the turn of the twentieth century – Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: Essays on Family, Gender and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 204.

¹⁹⁸ Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 271.

¹⁹⁹ Viscount Alfred Harmsworth Northcliffe, *Lord Northcliffe's War Book: With Chapters on America at War* (London: George H. Doran, 1917), p. 61.

²⁰⁰ Frank Musgrove, *The Migratory Elite* (London: Heinemann, 1963), p. 19.

²⁰¹ The number of women clerks, as Zimmeck suggests, increased eighty fold between 1850-1914. Tosh, as cited in Jopi Nyman, *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction* (Rodopi B. V. Edition, 1997), p.53; Zimmeck, 'Jobs for Girls', *Unequal Opportunities*, pp. 153-78.

²⁰² In Collins's *London Belongs to Me*, for example, Jossier is critical of some of the young typists, respectful of 'elderly Miss Unsett', and, in gladly returning to work during war time – when male clerks were even more reduced in numbers – seems to be unconcerned about the gender implications. Robert Thorne's future wife, Nell, works as a female clerk, and, while her parents are against it because she is middle class, Robert himself encourages her not to 'put up with such treatment' as one her fellow female spinster clerks insists on, on the grounds that 'men would not [and] why should women?' – Bullock, *Robert Thorne*, p. 91.

Emigration itself is rare as a subject for clerical fiction and, as in Mr Ruby's case, it usually ends in a submissive return to the office environment.²⁰³ There are, however, as we have seen, a number of very specific kinds of escape attempted by the clerk. The first is simply by fictionalising the office experience, a process which often appears to subvert office-time itself but which is, in fact, an evasion of office reality. This scenario can be viewed as a sabotage of the highly efficient and structured world of bureaucracy, whilst simultaneously the subject matter shows how deeply those structures have permeated the clerical imagination. The second, and slightly more rebellious step, is when clerical authors create clerical protagonists who do manage to escape. These works are designed, as Jordan says, to 'challenge and give heart to [fellow white-collar] readers'.²⁰⁴ In these novels, then, the clerk-author is creating a type of dream-fulfilment fiction wherein the clerk-character overcomes the office-reality and discovers an alternative (and generally more masculine) role – see, for example, Bullock's *Robert Thorne*. Finally, we begin to see in emigration the powerful drive to escape the office physically; to find a space that allows freedom from the restrictions of mechanisation and the structures of employment.

The subsequent chapters will explore two such spaces that offer an insight into the clerk outside of the office as we start to strip bare the clerkly stereotype and examine the individuality and creativity of a figure usually masked by caricature. In searching for an alternative to the mechanisation of daily work the clerk that Breward identifies as pursuing 'the most mundane forms of mass entertainment and consumption [...] as befitted those whose lives were spent at the accounts ledger and calculating machine' starts to fall apart; in its place, and in the final chapter, we see the clerk as belonging to a new cultural space.²⁰⁵ First, however, we see the trend for fictionalising, which has become apparent in an office environment, nurtured within

²⁰³ Or, even worse, as in the case of Willie Price in Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*. Price intends to emigrate to Australia but on learning of his father's embezzlements and his lover's marriage to another man, he commits suicide on the day everyone expects him to sail from Liverpool. No one ever discovers his body at the bottom of an abandoned pit shaft and so those in Five Towns suppose him to have had a successful migration.

²⁰⁴ Jordan, *Author in the Office*, p. 1.

²⁰⁵ Breward, "'On the Bank's Threshold'", p. 111.

the home as the clerk takes on, in literature, that peculiarly contested twentieth-century cultural space – the suburbs.

Chapter Two: The Suburbs

“Child!” – his eyes were still closed, – “the suburbs, even Walham Green and Fulham, are full of interest, for those who can see it. Walk along this very street on such a Sunday afternoon as to-day. The roofs form two horrible, converging straight lines, I know, but beneath there is character, individuality, enough to make the greatest book ever written [...] How many houses are there in Carteret Street? Say eighty? Eighty theatres of love, hate, greed, tyranny, endeavour; eighty separate dramas always unfolding, intertwining, ending, beginning, - and every drama a tragedy. No comedies, and especially no farces! Why, child, there is more character within a hundred yards of this chair than a hundred Balzacs could analyse in a hundred years.”¹

Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (1898)

Mr Aked, clerk and ‘literary aspirant’ in Arnold Bennett’s *A Man from the North*, is determined to write the first ‘Psychology of the Suburbs’. His speech, quoted above, is the most oft-cited commentary on fictional suburbia – see, for example, the opening of Kate Flint’s chapter, ‘Fictional Suburbia’ (1986) and Roger Webster’s introduction to *Expanding Suburbia* (2000), both of which call it evidence of a ‘plea’ for study of the literary suburb.² Aked’s rebuttal to his niece’s comment that ‘suburbs are horrid’ is the first of his many lectures on the suburban landscape. And captured by Mr Aked’s passion is young Richard Larch, equally aspirant as an author and newly-employed as the elder clerk’s secretary in the undertaking of this great work. Aked’s view that ‘the suburbs *are* London’, was not, however, the prevalent one at the turn of the twentieth century. Consider, for example, the equally frequently cited counter-description from W. H. Crosland’s *The Suburbans* (1905):

¹ Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1911), pp. 100-101. Note, Balzac was a clerk for a while.

² Kate Flint, ‘Fictional Suburbia’, in Peter Humm, Paul Stigant and Peter Widdowson (eds.), *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History* (London: Routledge, 2003); Roger Webster, *Expanding Suburbia: Reviewing Suburban Narratives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 5.

You have a big city, with the proper sections, commercial, residential, and fashionable, appertaining to a big city, and outside that – inexorably ringing it round – you have the eternal and entirely God-forsaken suburbs. Put together, they make the country which is the very saddest and most dreary and least delectable on all the maps. It is a country devoid of graciousness to a degree which appeals.³

Not for Crosland the ‘theatres of love, hate, greed, tyranny, [and] endeavour’ despite, ironically, the suburbs acting as muse for his own work. Instead, he manages to be dismissive of the suburban experience, as well as its occupants, for the length of an entire book. His negativity, however, is much more representative of nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first century commentaries on the topic. Maligned, then, by those who identify more with the metropolis or the rural idyll, the suburb stands as a contamination of both. And yet, the place of *London* suburbs, specifically, within early-twentieth-century fiction demonstrates the centrality of suburban living even at the turn of the twentieth century. Thus the ‘psychology of the suburbs’ is inherent in the works, not only of Bennett, but of H. G. Wells, Shan Bullock, E. M. Forster, and George Orwell, as part of what John Lucas calls the ‘chill authenticity’ of suburban fiction.⁴ And it is a distinctly London-centric vision of suburbia for all of these novelists; underneath the quasi-tragic clerkly experience there is a relentless love affair with London that stretches out optimistically towards its suburbs as the protagonist matures. As Wells puts it in *Tono-Bungay* (1909), ‘the whole illimitable place teemed with suggestions of indefinite, and sometimes outrageous possibility, of hidden but magnificent meanings’.⁵

While middlebrow fiction places London’s suburbs at its heart, critics, on the other hand, saw suburbia – in many ways like the middlebrow itself – as responsible for the erosion of the formal boundaries of landscape and society. The destruction of

³ W. H. Crosland, *The Suburbans* (London: John Long, 1905), p. 15.

⁴ John Lucas, *Arnold Bennett: A Study of His Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 22.

⁵ H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (London: Odhams Press Ltd., [1908] n.d.), p. 84.

the much-loved Home Counties around London, and the growing sprawl of the metropolis into the outer lands of suburbia was portrayed by many as an invasion. Arthur Conan Doyle describes ‘long brick-feeler[s]’ and ‘monster tentacles’, ‘here and there, curving, extending, and coalescing’ (or, as E. M. Forster calls it, ‘creeping’) into the countryside.⁶ Suburbia was often the subject of fiction; from humour to horror, the suburb seemed to spark a response and it was usually negative.⁷ In *The War of the Worlds* (1898), Wells went so far as to imagine the destruction of London’s suburbs, although he also sympathised with the ‘damn little clerks’ enough to rebuild their habitat at the end of the novel.⁸ Where Bennett (through Aked) offers an alternative narrative is in the conceptualisation of a suburban environment that could pique interest, turning young and creative minds, like Larch’s, into *bone fide* writers. This is Larch’s dream, as it was for many clerks seeking to escape, as we have already seen, the office and the daily drudgery of bureaucracy. Once Larch hears Aked’s mantra of the suburbs, he recognises the muse that he has thus far unsuccessfully sought in the metropolis, and turns his attentions instead to what W. Pett Ridge calls the ‘romance[s] in every house’.⁹

This chapter argues that the suburban environment is not, as Crosland would have us believe, a culturally vapid and intellectually closed space but a haven of familiarity, intimacy, and, consequently, a literary cosmos of pathos, tragedy, and humour. I do not suggest, however, that the suburban setting is necessarily a romantic one; just as Aked talks of the ‘love, hate, greed, tyranny [and] endeavour’ to be found in the suburbs, I argue that suburban fiction maps a very various ‘space’. In positing this argument, this chapter initially assesses the dominance of two parallel cultural forms. The first, which I define as ‘suburban disdain’ covers critical attitudes from

⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, *Beyond the City: the Idyll of a Suburb* (Fairfield, IA: 1st World Library, 2004), p. 10; E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 316.

⁷ See Part One of Todd Kuchta’s *Semi-detached Empire* for a detailed description of the suburbs and the representations of their encroachment into the countryside. Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire: Suburbia and the Colonization of Britain, 1880 to the present day* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

⁸ H. G. Wells, *War of the Worlds* (London: Pan Books, 1975), p. 165.

⁹ William Pett Ridge, *Outside the Radius: Stories of a London Suburb* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p. 20.

within popular culture and academic history, whilst the second reflects the varied feelings of the suburbanites themselves. For those within suburbia, the suburb has risen to fame as a comfortable and safe setting; notably in middlebrow novels, situational comedies, and, most evidently, in the proliferation of suburban living. This chapter will suggest that the popularity of suburbia does not, as we shall see, produce a monoculture, but offers a diverse environment that includes both political radicalism and literary productivity. The chapter also critiques traditional assumptions about material emulation;¹⁰ namely, by arguing that *cultural* aspiration is more characteristic of the suburban clerk than any *socio-economic* ‘keeping up with the Joneses’.

I. Suburban Disdain – Literary Attention

The most famous suburban nonentity was, and remains, Charles Pooter, archetypal clerk-protagonist of George and Weedon Grossmiths’ *Diary of a Nobody* (1892).¹¹ He was also critically received as one of the first lower-middle-class invaders of a predominantly middle-class environment. The pomposity of Pooter, continually mocked by his wife and their maid through many of his escapades – for example, his over-zealous application of red paint to their bathtub – immediately drew attention to all with which mass suburbia became identified. Indeed, Pooter’s outlandish choice of red paint, in particular, reflects a dominant expression of ridiculed suburban-ness. Todd Kuchta draws our attention to the use of the colour red to highlight the inherent danger of the suburban invasion:¹² from the ‘little red houses [...] in number defying imagination’ of C. F. G. Masterman’s *Condition of England* (1909),¹³ the ‘red rust’ of

¹⁰ See, for example, theories outlined in Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899).

¹¹ For a detailed description of Pooter and Pooterism see A. James Hammerton, ‘Pooterism or Partnership? Marriage and Masculine Identity in the Lower Middle Class, 1870-1920’, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (July, 1999), and ‘The Perils of Mrs Pooter: Satire, Modernity and Motherhood in the Lower Middle Class in England, 1870-1920’, *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1999), 261-276.

¹² Note, the interesting contrast between the initial representations of suburban ‘redness’ versus the political conservatism which has become a dominant assumption – more on which later in this chapter.

¹³ C. F. G. Masterman, *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 57.

Forster's *Howards End* (1910),¹⁴ and the 'little red roofs' of Orwell's *Coming up for Air* (1939).¹⁵ Likewise, Gail Cunningham reminds us of the 'red-and-white rough-cast villas' in Wells' *Ann Veronica* (1909).¹⁶ The culmination of this is the dominant marker of the Martians in *War of the Worlds* – the 'Red Weed' – that signals the destruction of London's suburbs.¹⁷

If we take *The War of the Worlds* as a pioneering expression of concern about the growth of suburbia, we see that not only is Wells' scientific romance a starting point for an author whose primary interest became writing about suburbans but that his novel set the agenda for literary discussions of the suburbs for the next fifty years. Thus we see the language of suburbanisation inextricably linked with several representations that remained in the collective consciousness.

The first is the theory of contamination – the 'Red Weed' is, we note, 'a cankering disease, due [...] to the action of certain bacteria', just as in *Ann Veronica* it is 'fungoid growth'.¹⁸ Similarities between Wells' red weed, and Roger Silverstone's comments in *Visions of Suburbia* (1997) are clear: 'The suburban is seen', he writes, 'if at all and at best, as a consequence, an excrescence, a cancerous fungus, leaching the energy of the city, dependent and inert and ultimately self-destructive'.¹⁹

Second, Wells' artilleryman's gives the reader a telling account of the suburbanites' responsibility in the success of the Martian invasion which he argues should dismiss them from salvation in the new underground world:

All these – the sort of people that lived in these houses, and all those damn little clerks that used to live down that way – they'd be no good. They haven't any spirit in them – *no proud dreams* and no proud lusts; and a man who hasn't one or the other – Lord! what is he but funk and precautions? They just used to skedaddle off to work – I've

¹⁴ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 316.

¹⁵ George Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 19.

¹⁶ Gail Cunningham, 'Houses in Between: Navigating Suburbia in Late Victorian Writing', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2004), p. 423.

¹⁷ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 155.

¹⁸ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, p. 155; Wells, *Ann Veronica* (New York: Peter Smith, 1932) p. 3.

¹⁹ Roger Silverstone, *Visions of Suburbia* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 4.

seen hundreds of 'em, bit of breakfast in hand, running wild and shining to catch their little season-ticket train, for fear they'd get dismissed if they didn't; working at businesses they were afraid to take the trouble to understand; skedaddling back for fear they wouldn't be in time for dinner.²⁰

The artilleryman's suggestion that this type will be captured by the Martians and caged like 'rabbit[s]' reflects the contentedness of the suburban 'animal'; who, as critics suggested, was drawn towards the monotonous working conditions which we have already seen, flattered by the seeming respectability of suburban housing, and hen-pecked by an odious wife. This 'rabbit' existence, which is opposed by the artilleryman, becomes fused with the language of degeneration; as Kuchta observes, 'suburbia became increasingly central to debates about national health following the Boer War', and was invariably accused of having a 'debilitating effect on an already sedentary middle class'.²¹ Note also that, for Wells, as for many later writers, the clerk was the epitome of this suburban degeneration. As Mark Clapson argues:

The suburbs were allegedly full of 'clerks', a pejorative catch-all term. This mockery stemmed from George and Weedon Grossmith's caricature Mr Pooter [...] and continued to George Orwell's Stanley [sic] Bowling in the 1930s novel *Coming Up for Air* [...] Clerks lived routine and uneventful lives dictated by the times of commuter trains and the monotony of office life. According to their literary critics, they were passive creatures, devoid of finer feelings and high culture. They tended their little gardens, were mesmerised by advertisements for material things, and obsessed by the petty symbols of respectability and status.²²

²⁰ Wells, *War of the Worlds*, pp. 165-166.

²¹ Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, pp. 115-116.

²² Mark Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Worlds: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in Post-war England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 6.

And yet, whilst many critics draw on *The War of the Worlds*, and the artilleryman's dystopian vision in particular, as evidence of Wells' antagonism towards the suburban clerk, it is, as Cunningham argues, 'Londoners, not suburbanites, who are portrayed as complacent and incurious'.²³ In contrast, it is the suburban narrator who risks all to understand the foe that he faces, whilst rejecting the artilleryman's manifesto and being content to return to his wife and his villa when the Martians are defeated.

This chapter thus offers a different reading of suburban fiction arguing that, instead of lambasting suburban culture and the clerks who produced and enjoyed it as 'routine and uneventful', such fiction celebrates the creativity of suburban culture. That there is a clear narrative trajectory from the Grossmiths' Pooter to Orwell's Bowling (identified across literary criticism and social history) stands as evidence, as I argue, of the significance of suburban existence in the twentieth century. These 'passive creatures' supposedly interested only in 'material things' and 'petty symbols', proved capable of producing a body of literature which was, at times, self-critical but which offered their lower-middle-class readership a vision of a suburban future. Time and again in clerical fiction, as Cunningham remarks, 'suburbia, culturally categorized as home to the commonplace and mundane, is conceptualized with great imaginative vigor'.²⁴ In sparking the imagination the suburbs thus act as 'cultural provocation' to a generation of explicitly clerk-writers for whom it was their home.

II. *Suburban Disdain – Academic 'Aloofness'*

Turning away, for a moment, from early-twentieth-century literary representations, we see that in academic historiography, interpretations of the suburban subject remained negative. H. J. Dyos's *Victorian Suburb* (1961) is a history of Camberwell – one of the suburbs frequently represented in fiction – that is also a rare, personal account of

²³ Cunningham, 'Houses in Between', p. 431.

²⁴ Cunningham, 'Houses in Between', pp. 422-423.

the rise of suburbia. In part he writes sentimentally, having lived in Camberwell for some time, but also critically, reflecting his later middle-class values. As Tom Jeffery succinctly suggests, people tend only to write about the suburbs when 'they have moved on to greater things'.²⁵ This approach towards lower-middle-class history is not uncommon, suggesting that the rise into the middle class, as both Jeffery and Rita Felski argue, immediately creates a disdain for those below. Felski goes so far as to call lower-middle-classdom a 'negative' identity, asking, 'is it any wonder that individuals of lower-middle-class origins remain silent about their background, preferring camouflage over confession?'²⁶

Many historians and sociologists, whilst not as openly antagonistic as Masterman (whose greatest criticism is that suburbans are 'limited [in] outlook beyond a personal ambition'),²⁷ have nonetheless had a tendency to keep their suburban lower-middle-class subjects safely at arm's length.²⁸ Indeed, if one excuse for intellectual disdain is social mobility, the other reason, as Webster suggests, for the strength of feeling towards the suburbs is rooted in its otherness: 'it occupies a space as much defined as what it is not as by what it is, constructed by difference and imitation rather than possessing innate and original features'.²⁹ Such disdain was only encouraged by F. M. L. Thompson's scathing study, *The Rise of Suburbia* (1982), in

²⁵ Tom Jeffery, 'Politics and Class in Lewisham', in David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (eds), *Metropolis London: Histories and Representations Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 193.

²⁶ Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class', *PMLA*, Vol. 115, No. 1, Special Topic: Rereading Class (January 2000), p. 41.

²⁷ Masterman, *Condition of England*, p. 65.

²⁸ See, for example, Alan Jackson's study of semi-detached London, which provides a detailed exploration of the architectural and economic development of suburbia but offers few personal observations on the character of the suburbanite, even within the section on 'the suburban man'. David Thorns sets out *Suburbia* (1973) as a study in which he aims to demonstrate that disdain for the 'middle-brow, conformist, respectable, uninspiring members of society who are quite content to potter around in their own rather limited world' was in fact a view that was 'divorced from the realities of suburban life'. However, by citing those who call the suburb a 'nightmare, humanly speaking' and a 'proliferating nonentity', and to the suburbanite as 'doomed to remain imprisoned in his box home', Thorns does rather perpetuate the stereotypes he claims to criticise. Alan Jackson, *Semi-detached London: Suburban development, life and transport, 1900-39* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973); David Thorns, *Suburbia* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1973), pp. 149, 16, 15.

²⁹ Webster, *Expanding Suburbia*, p. 2.

which suburbia is referred to as ‘an unlovely, sprawling artefact of which few are particularly fond’.³⁰ Thompson goes on to further criticise earlier suburbanites:

The suburbs appeared monotonous, featureless, without character, indistinguishable from one another, infinitely boring to behold, *wastelands* of housing as settings for dreary, petty, lives without social, cultural, or intellectual interests, settings which fostered a pretentious preoccupation with outward appearances, a fussy attention to the trifling details of genteel living, and absurd attempts to conjure rusticity out of miniature garden plots.³¹

My point, then, is that within early-twentieth-century literary circles, and even contemporary academic studies of suburbia, the prevalent attitude is derived from within the ‘highbrow’, or, at the least, from the comfortably wealthy, well-educated, middle-class arena; those who may have grown up in the suburbs (and may well have enjoyed it) but who renounce any attachment once they belong to the cultural elite.

III. *Changing Narratives, Critical Attention*

Exceptions to this begin to emerge toward the end of the twentieth century. John Carey’s book *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) was, as Zygmunt Bauman notes, treated with ‘a venom and malice rarely encountered even in a realm of academic criticism not particularly notorious for its civilised manners’.³² Bauman attributes this to Carey’s ‘bring[ing] into the open some of the most vehemently denied and concealed (because the most socially awkward) of the guilty feelings haunting the intellectual profession’.³³ Stefan Collini calls it an ‘exercise in

³⁰ F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), p. 2.

³¹ Thompson, *Rise of Suburbia*, p. 3 – my emphasis added.

³² Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (London: Blackwell, 1993), p. 233.

³³ Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 233. John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Amongst the Literary Intelligentsia* (London: Faber, 1992).

Plainmanspeak, a sweeping sub-Orwellian indictment of “literary intellectuals” which belies *le trahison de clercs*.³⁴ *The Intellectuals and the Masses* offers a reading of the cultural elite’s reactions to the works of ordinary, often suburban, writers. The central thesis is that ‘the intellectuals’ loathed ‘the suburbs, [...] such lowly figures as the office clerk, [...] the popular press and [...] the people as an inert, uncultured dead mass’ and thus deliberately wrote challenging works to exclude the semi-illiterate.³⁵ It is the modernists in Carey’s work who are cast as cultural dictators merging, ultimately, with Fascist avant-gardism until, as Jennings and Kemp-Welch suggest, ‘it is the intellectuals that are responsible for the Holocaust’.³⁶

‘Like [the word] “masses”’, Carey writes, ‘the word “suburban” is a sign for the unknowable. But “suburban”’, he continues, ‘is distinctively topographical with intellectual disdain’.³⁷ Intellectual disdain is also directed towards suburban studies. Peter Conrad’s review of Carey’s work in *The Observer*, calls it an ‘unwitting [...]

³⁴ Stefan Collini, *English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 290. Collini’s criticism stems from his approval of anti-intellectualism as a national characteristic, but his disapproval of deliberate attempts to create hostility for intellectuals within the only sphere which encourages it, or as he puts it ‘what I find particularly enraging and depressing is the anti-intellectualism of the intellectual’. Collini cites Julien Benda’s *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (*Trahison de clercs*) in order to draw comparison with Carey’s thesis, which is interesting within this study of the clerk. The original French has been translated as ‘intellectual’ rather than ‘clerk’ because the editors assumed the clerk would offer more confusion than clarity. Benda’s original definition of clerk is ‘all those who speak to the world in a transcendental manner’ but, as the translator, Richard Aldington, points out, ‘[he] does not know the English word for “all those who speak in a transcendental manner”’. He does, however, draw the reader’s attention to the etymology of the word clerk, and its Chaucerian sense, religious connotations, and contemporarily as a ‘person who performs sedentary labor in an office’. This line from ‘clerk’ to ‘intellectual’ is suggestive of the predisposition towards writing that is noted in Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell’s, *Literary Secretaries/Secretarial Cultures* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). Richard Aldington, ‘Translator’s Note’, *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press, 2007), p. xxix.

³⁵ Jeremy Jennings and A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to the Rushdie Affair* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 6.

³⁶ Jennings and Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p. 6. This is also an interesting contention of Carey’s given the body of work arguing that the *petite bourgeoisie* (established as the heroes in Carey’s work) in Europe were responsible ultimately for the rise of fascism. As Geoffrey Crossick suggests, ‘for many, at the time and since, fascism has been seen as an intrinsically petit-bourgeois order’. Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 224. See also Klaus Eder’s comment that ‘Nazism, then, can be explained as a historically unique attempt to put petit-bourgeois political culture in the place of political high culture and to consecrate it as the legitimate political culture’. Eder, ‘Politics and Culture: On the Sociocultural Analysis of Political Participation’, in Axel Honneth et al (ed), *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 95-121, 112.

³⁷ For an etymological description of the term ‘suburban’ see Richard Dennis, *Cities in Modernity: Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 179. Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 53.

apology for the vendetta conducted against our culture during the 1980s by the Baroness from Finchley'.³⁸ And so we see the topography of suburbia influence critical reactions, indicating that the suburbs continue to be thought of as best hidden in order to protect the more fruitful intellectual zones of pure metropolis or countryside. As Carey writes, 'if we ask what has happened to the antagonism between the intellectuals and the suburbs, the answer is, of course, that it still exists'.³⁹

Carey's work thus marked a new chapter in interest in the suburbs, for without doubt Carey's heroes – whom he identifies as opposing fascism – are the suburbans, notably epitomised by lower-middle-class writers like Arnold Bennett. This renewed interest is reflective of the increasing appreciation of the suburban as the key to modernity itself. As Felski puts it, 'the office worker trudging to the railway station to catch the 8.20 train comes to serve as a resonant symbol of the modern dehumanized self'.⁴⁰ The interest in the suburb is also charged with personal interest; consider, for example, Richard Dennis's comments in *Cities in Modernity* (2008): 'I am writing this chapter at home, a 1930s semi-detached house in North Harrow, in the suburbs of North-West London.' 'However much I aspire', he continues, 'to live somewhere more "stylish", more "cultured" or more "urban", the advantages of suburbia are indisputable'.⁴¹ Dennis goes on to compare himself and his situation to that of Charles Pooter; placing himself within that lower-middle-class lineage that enjoys suburban convenience, and is prepared to defend it – note that both additionally engage in the act of writing, albeit in very different genres. That Pooter – a very typical late-Victorian character – is not only remembered but popular in contemporary society (*The Diary of a Nobody* has never been out of print and is frequently dramatized)⁴² suggests that these powerful domestic images have persisted in the mind of the British

³⁸ Peter Conrad, 'No Intellectuals Please, We're British', *The Observer* (5 July 1992).

³⁹ Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 69.

⁴⁰ Felski, 'Nothing to Declare', p. 37.

⁴¹ Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 180. See also Felski's article which is offered as a very personal response to criticism levelled at those belonging to the lower middle classes.

⁴² There have been three televised versions, directed by Ken Russell (1964), Bill Hayes (1979), and Susanna White (2007), and two radio adaptations, one in 1977 (director unknown) and one directed by Andrew Lynch (2012).

public.⁴³ Now that suburban life has become the ultimate in ‘normality’ – the rows of villa-style houses, semi-detached and terraced, that initially were synonymous with lower-middle-class pretension, now represent the typical – and academics are, among others, determined that suburbia should suffer ridicule no longer.

On the heels of Carey’s work came Roger Silverstone’s seminal edited study, *Visions of Suburbia* (1997), which opens with a quotation from *Diary of a Nobody*. Silverstone was the first to make suburban culture a topic in its own right: ‘this book,’ he states at the outset, ‘is about suburbia’. He continues:

It places suburbia centre stage, unashamedly reifying it, unashamedly revealing the hidden underbelly of modernity in all its tortured, clichéd glory, but also rigorously enquiring what it is that has made suburbia so central to contemporary culture and what it is that we need to make sense not just of suburbia’s past and present but also of its future.⁴⁴

Silverstone draws on the centrality of the suburban space within modern culture and undermines any assumptions that the suburb is an intellectual void. Particularly illuminating, in terms of this thesis, are his comments on suburban fiction as a valid and expressive form:

[I]t is precisely in the ordinariness of suburban everyday life, in the rhythms and routines of day and week, commuting and housework, that the particular character and distinctiveness of suburban culture is to be found.⁴⁵

In identifying a specifically *suburban* culture, Silverstone thus opened the doors for a wider understanding of what has now become known as ‘suburban fiction’. As a

⁴³ See Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs*, pp. 1-13 for a general discussion of suburban culture from the 1890s to the present.

⁴⁴ Silverstone, *Visions of Suburbia*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Silverstone, *Visions of Suburbia*, p. 9.

result, several recent re-examinations of the suburb have offered more positive, and most importantly, culturally-focused readings. Studies such as Webster's collection *Reviewing Suburbia* (2000), Lynne Hapgood's *Margins of Desire* (2005), and Kuchta's *Semi-Detached Empire* (2010) follow in Silverstone's footsteps in presenting a more complex narrative.

Hapgood's study, for instance, ostensibly offers an examination of domestic fiction, which is intended to counter the dismissive approach to 'fictional suburbia' that has been brought about 'by a modern association with mediocrity'.⁴⁶ Occasionally, there are hints of the academic nervousness that still surfaces when discussing middlebrow fiction. Hapgood's interpretation of those she terms the 'clerk class' is, for example, conflated with the working class; she refers to literary figures as varied as Charles Dickens's Wemmick, Shan Bullock's civil servant Robert Thorne, W. Pett Ridge's 'City bank clerks', Edwin Pugh's Ferdinand and even Pooter himself as a 'strange mutation of the working class'.⁴⁷ Likewise, as Cunningham argues, in interpreting suburban fiction as 'repress[ing] a wider knowledge of economic and social realities in order to enclose the suburban world in safe moral values', Hapgood is undermining the 'otherness' of the suburbs.⁴⁸ Hapgood also tends to dismiss Pugh, Pett Ridge and Bullock as possessing a 'kind of artlessness' which she blames on the 'suggestion of a thinly veiled autobiography' that Cunningham argues is a natural response to the 'anxiety and disorientation' of a 'new spatial environment'.⁴⁹ Hapgood offers, then, a midway point in suburban criticism; whilst deeming suburban fiction worthy of study, she is not convinced by the literary worth of some of the novels

⁴⁶ Lynne Hapgood, *Margins of Desire: The Suburbs in Fiction and Culture 1880-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 5.

⁴⁷ Notably in a chapter entitled 'The Working-Class Suburb', pp. 170-193. References to wider studies of clerical work are generally absent in Hapgood's work, despite her 'argument [being] grounded in the history of the suburbs'. The term 'lower middle class' is used more readily when discussing female writers – see, for example the chapter on 'Women Readers and Romance Fiction' in which Hapgood mentions a 'growing population of clerks [which] seemed to constitute a new class'. In contrast, Kuchta's bibliography covers suburban and clerical works in much more detail and offers an extensive reading of the cultural connotations, literary representations, and critical attention of suburbia. Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 120.

⁴⁸ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 171; Cunningham, 'Houses in Between', p. 423.

⁴⁹ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 171; Cunningham, 'Houses in Between', p. 423.

within that study. She is also critical of the very autobiographical elements of suburban fiction that, as Bennett's Mr Aked suggests, makes it so special. In this sense, Hapgood recalls us to that 'mediocrity' which has limited the 'critical attention' that suburbia has received in the past.⁵⁰

Kuchta's work, on the other hand, blends postcolonial literary studies with suburban historiography in arguing that the encroachment of suburbia was reflective of, and driven by, the waning of Empire – the colonisers of nations turning inwards to colonise their own subjects as a preventative against urban degeneration. In this sense, Kuchta sees the suburbs as ostensibly English and thus 'bristling anxiously over its perceived inferiority' but also as an 'other', 'a threatening terra incognita'.⁵¹ In terms of this thesis, Kuchta's suggestions become most insightful when he turns his attention to the clerk. For example, when discussing Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* (1895) Kuchta focuses on the 'transformation [of] the comical suburban clerk [Almayer] into a subject of modernist contemplation' – something which I come back to in the conclusion of this thesis.⁵²

Seeing suburbia – and by extension, the suburban clerk – as worth studying is clearly representative of the trend for analysing the middlebrow more generally but placing the suburban himself at the centre of the narrative is often complicated by political and cultural tensions. Indeed, this fascination with middlebrow fiction has opened up an analysis of suburban space that responds to a century of stereotypes but, more often than not, complicates those stereotypes. Hapgood suggests that 'the demographic move from center to suburbs was matched by a corresponding shift in fictional setting from the city to suburbia', and, indeed, in the works of Wells and Bennett we see this shift even within each novel's narrative – a trend which has 'gone almost unnoticed'.⁵³ This chapter, then, addresses this 'distinct genre of suburban

⁵⁰ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 5.

⁵¹ Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 5.

⁵² Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 95.

⁵³ There has been some attention, however, been paid to women's literature of the suburbs – see, for example, Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), and Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity*

fiction’, unpicking what Webster identifies as the ‘superficial myth of homogeneity [that] can mask a range of tendencies from the discordant and bizarre to the comic and tragic’.⁵⁴

The Clerical Suburb

Our own street, for example, consisted mainly of the families of skilled artisans, minor Civil Servants, white-collar workers of the more servile kind, wage-slaves because of their low mental equipment and submissive temperaments: salt of the earth; and like grains of salt, not especially distinguishable from each other, except in the intimacy and temporary safety of their own homes.⁵⁵

The suburban experience for our clerical workers was a varied one, as is, of course, reflected in their fiction. Richard Church offers us a reading of a safe suburban existence, which is not remarkable from the outside but which allows the stereotyped inhabitants to display individualism – indeed the ‘submissive temperaments’ of the ‘wage-slaves’ remind us of the anonymous mechanisation in the office environment. Wells, on the other hand, had miserable childhood recollections of suburbia, and consequently in *The War of the Worlds*, the aliens’ attack on the built-up areas surrounding London acts as metaphorical revenge on a landscape which he never remembered fondly. Wells, however, also shows an awareness that, for most of the lower middle class, suburbia was preferable to the misery of housing in more central areas of London; a central theme to many of his novels. If we look, once again, more closely at *The War of the Worlds*, we see that the narrator survives only by hiding within the ruins of a suburban home in Sheen – in this case the house acts as a literal

and *Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), as well as Hapgood’s articles. Cunningham, ‘Houses in Between’, p. 423; Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 85; Webster, *Expanding Suburbia*, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Richard Church, *Over the Bridge* (London: William Heinemann, 1956), p. 14.

haven – whilst the emotional reunion with his wife takes place symbolically in the dining-room of their own suburban house in Woking. Orwell, too, offers us another narrative; one which is distinctly anti-suburban but designed to invoke sympathy for a class which he views as having potential, if they can only rid themselves of political apathy.⁵⁶ In *Coming Up for Air*, as Judy Giles suggests, George Bowling's 'prophetic vision in which he sees the streets riddled with bomb-craters and burnt out buildings' is a Wellsian destruction of the unquestioning suburban mentality rather than an obliteration of the suburban classes.⁵⁷ Central to all three writers is a sense that, regardless of suburbia's architectural flaws, the suburban is not to be diminished simply by his environment.

Here we come to the two opposing facets of suburbia in middlebrow clerical fiction which are defined, in part, by periodization. The first, and more optimistic construct is the product of a late-Victorian upbringing; note how writers such as Wells, Bullock, Bennett, and Church see suburbia as an alternative to inner-city boarding houses and rented lodgings under a watchful landlady. These authors, as we shall see within this chapter, were not uncritically enthusiastic about suburbia but they did believe that moving from the metropolis to the suburbs was a marker of socio-economic success that could pave the way for literary success. This critical step up the ladder into full-time authorship might not be achieved by their individual clerk-protagonists but it was thus within reach of future generations. Later in the twentieth century, as we see in Orwell's novels, the 'future' (now present) generation are less convinced by this move, and with suburbia replacing the inner-city boarding house as the place-to-escape, the clerk seeks to take the next step into rural living proper.

Thus a common feature across the clerical novel – similar, at least initially, to the Victorian *Bildungsroman* – is the sometimes perilous financial journey of the young office worker attempting to secure a respectable career, comfortable living, and happy family life, whilst also seeking an ideological standpoint that challenges the

⁵⁶ More on politics in a moment.

⁵⁷ Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 40.

stereotypical representations of the lower middle class. Many of the earlier characters live with landladies or in small and uncomfortable lodgings whilst dreaming of what they see as suburban luxury. Within all these novels we see the protagonists championing the individuality of suburban living, comparing it favourably to urban anonymity. In the later novels, we see the clerk-character once more on the move, attempting, like George Bowling – and our rambling clerks – to return to the ‘pre-twentieth century rural world’, and thus striving to escape the now anonymous suburban avenues.⁵⁸

One such clerk, whom we have already encountered, is Richard Larch, the main character in Bennett’s semi-autobiographical novel *A Man from the North*. Carey reads Larch as ‘Forster’s Leonard Bast seen with sympathy and insight’, and indeed Bennett is far more understanding of Larch as a ‘literary aspirant’ than Forster is tolerant of Bast’s aspirant cultural desires.⁵⁹ Initially, Larch lives right in the centre of London, in Raphael Street, Knightsbridge, but only as a lodger in a small dwelling. His room is described as:

a long, rather low room, its length cut by the two windows which were Mrs Rowbotham’s particular pride; between the windows a table with a faded green cloth, and a small bed opposite; behind the door an artfully concealed washstand; the mantelpiece, painted mustard yellow, bore divers squat earthenware figures, and was surmounted by an oblong mirror framed in rosewood; over the mirror an illuminated text, “Trust in Jesus”, and over the text an oleography, in collision with the ceiling, entitled “After the Battle of Culloden”.⁶⁰

Bennett makes clear that these are decorating touches added at minimal cost – as the mass-produced earthenware suggests – by an austere landlady who is hoping to attract

⁵⁸ This is the subject of the next chapter. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 41; Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 161.

⁶⁰ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, pp. 4-5. An oleography was a coloured lithograph popular at the end of the nineteenth century because it was cheaply and widely available.

the right sort of lower-middle-class bachelor; the religious text indicates, of course, a certain kind of morality, the oleography draws attention to patriotism, and the personal washstand encourages cleanliness. The furnishings are merely the basic necessities for an urban clerk living in the home of an impoverished spinster but Larch's main concern is his proximity to the city itself (having come from a small, northern village) and he is enthralled by the prospect of 'the high sombre trees, the vast, dazzling interiors of clubs, the sinuous, flickering lines of traffic, [and] the radiant faces of women framed in hansoms'.⁶¹ Like Wells, Bennett emphasises the acquaintance with London as a marker of entry into the adult world. As Asa Briggs puts it, 'the education of the main character starts not with books but with London' and Larch himself calls the capital 'the natural home of the author'; however, Larch soon finds his life socially constricting and creatively limited, and physically yearns for the comforts of suburban domesticity.⁶²

For the married clerk, as Shan Bullock's 1907 protagonist Robert Thorne discovers, suburbia is the epitome of comfortable living. Thorne, who has worked his way up from a dismal attic to a suite of rooms, pays seven shillings a week to live in a four-room upper flat in Dulwich, whilst he and his wife dream of further advancement into suburban life 'proper' – 'it was a goodly way, we knew, from an attic in Kensington to a villa in Surbiton'.⁶³ Thorne's senior colleague Mr Oliver lives in such a house, and from the moment that Thorne views Mr Oliver's domestic happiness he is cast as the perfect role-model, both professionally and privately. A similar projection of inner-city life can be found in another of Wells' novels, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900), in which the protagonist, a schoolmaster's assistant, exists in a dismal domestic situation whilst trying to support his young wife and begin his career. Marrying before he has finished his degree, Mr Lewisham places himself under dire financial strain while simultaneously trying to impress his new bride with an idyll of

⁶¹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 7.

⁶² Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 347; Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 33.

⁶³ Shan Bullock, *Robert Thorne: The Story of a London Clerk* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p. 36.

domesticity. Their home just south of Brompton Road is described as being simply ‘a minute bedroom and a small sitting-room, separated by folding-doors on the ground floor’.⁶⁴ Like Bullock, Wells suggests that suburbia is actually a desirable and enviable position if contrasted to the genuine hardship of city-life – and this is merely from a lower-middle-class perspective; neither author looks at the horror of working-class slums in this period. As Church says, ‘to a boy coming out of Battersea, [Dulwich] was half-way to paradise’.⁶⁵

Whilst the Grossmiths make Charles Pooter a suburban caricature, there is also a genuineness to Pooter that is focused explicitly on his fondness for his suburban home. As Dennis suggests, [“The Laurels”] neatly summarises London suburbia of the 1890s: the desire to be close to nature, to have a garden of one’s own’.⁶⁶ Pooter lives in a respectable area (although the house itself backs onto the railway lines) and indeed Holloway itself was highly thought of – George Gissing’s title character and his family, for example, in *Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (1899), are described as ‘nicely dressed, a pattern to Holloway households [...] Such families, linked together, make the back-bone of English civilisation’.⁶⁷ For all of Pooter’s misadventures, at the end of the diary his boss pays off the remainder of the mortgage on ‘The Laurels’ as tribute to his years of service at the firm; it is Pooter’s proudest moment, and one which suggests the Grossmiths’ fondness for their hero.

Another novel which attempts to address the criticisms of suburban living is Bullock’s second clerical work, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (1917). Bullock’s protagonist lives in Camberwell on, we read, a ‘pleasant enough, wide, straight, open, quiet, respectable road’.⁶⁸ While Ruby’s house could be seen as symbolic of what Crosland dismisses as the ‘miles and miles of villas with bay-windows and little-black yards’, Bullock focuses on the human element, arguing that ‘behind the long

⁶⁴ H. G. Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (London: Odhams Press, 1900), pp. 97-98.

⁶⁵ Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 181.

⁶⁶ Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 181.

⁶⁷ George Gissing, *A Freak of Nature, or Mr Brogden, City Clerk: An Uncollected Short Story*, edited by Pierre Coustillas (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1990), p. 21.

⁶⁸ Shan Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1917), p. 11.

dreariness of glass and brickwork were humans with aspirations as individual as their diverse selves'.⁶⁹ Like Bennett and Church, Bullock is concerned not with the aesthetics of suburbia, nor the repetition of architecture, but the suburban subjects themselves.

One visible suggestion of this diversity, which was picked up by critics and used to demonstrate a lack of imagination, is found in the naming of suburban villas. And many a middle-class spectator drew attention to what they saw as the audacity of villa-naming – for example, Pett Ridge remarks in *Outside the Radius* (1899) that, 'the early numbers went on conventional lines, and called themselves for no reason The Firs, The Oaks, The Elms, The Beeches'. He continues, 'these being exhausted, there came turmoil of the mind and the summoning up of daring conceit. Thus you have Plas-Newyddelln [...] La Maisonette [...] Beau Rivage; Ben Nevis, Beethoven Villa, St. Moritz'.⁷⁰ Agatha Christie similarly draws attention to this suburban habit in *The Big Four* (1927), as Captain Hastings comments:

A few moments more saw us ascending the steps of The Laurels, as Mr Ingles' residence was called. Personally, I did not notice a laurel bush of any kind, so deduced that it had been named according to the usual obscure nomenclature of the suburbs.⁷¹

Lower-middle-class authors like Bullock, however, are suggesting that the naming of suburban villas (Mr Ruby's house is called *Caseta* – 'a name in which the Rubys had pride') is actually in recognition of the 'diverse selves' that dwell within.⁷² The inhabitants are attempting to counter the anonymity of suburbia and create a distinct identity for their home. The Rubys' house also has a number but Bullock suggests it is a postal necessity only, as 'they seldom thought of home as number Twenty-three'.⁷³

⁶⁹ Crosland, *The Suburbans*, p. 19; Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces*, p. 11.

⁷⁰ Pett Ridge, *Outside the Radius*, p. 6.

⁷¹ Agatha Christie, *The Big Four* (London: Fontana, 1978), p. 19.

⁷² Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 12.

⁷³ Bullock, *Mr Ruby*, p. 12.

In contrast, J. M. Barrie, who gives very little personal detail about the home of the lower-middle-class clerk Mr Darling and his family, in *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911), does constantly refer to the house as ‘No. 14’.⁷⁴ In this way he emphasises the lack of romance and creativity associated with Mr Darling when compared with the adventures in Neverland. In London, the Darlings are, as Barrie implies, too unimaginative to think of a name that is even suitably suburban; Neverland is the place for wild and uninhibited naming. Only when we compare Mr Ruby with Mr Darling do we see why *Caseta* is a source of great pride; for Mr Ruby has not chosen a typical name but one which reflects his true desire to experience a wider world. In many ways, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* becomes an inversion of Barrie’s children’s story – a tale in which it is the clerk-parent who makes an irresponsible and spontaneous trip to a wonderful and rich imaginative world (Gibraltar, in Mr Ruby’s case), before returning to reevaluate the life which was left behind.

Clerk-authors’ impressions of suburbia vary enormously; from those who wistfully admire villas in Holloway and Surbiton but who are too poor to make it to those who see suburbia as a stepping-stone onto wider worlds. In between these two extremes we have the Smiths of Surbiton, who, in Keble Howard’s 1906 novel, represent the ultimate in contented suburbanites. Significantly, they are defined by where they live – the novel is even titled *The Smiths of Surbiton* – and their ‘cheery little villa’ named ‘The Pleasance’ sums up the tone of the entire novel. The origin of this particular novel is also interesting, for Mr Leicester Harmsworth asked Howard – later referred to as the “Laureate of Suburbia” – to write a series for his new magazine *The World and His Wife*, about a couple who had an income of six-hundred pounds a year, which was to be ‘absolutely realistic, entirely free from exaggeration and fictitious excitements’.⁷⁵ What ultimately shaped Howard’s novel is the income that his publisher assigned to his fictional characters – making them explicitly suburban. While Howard could have penned a piece about the difficulties of suburbia, he instead

⁷⁴ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 238.

⁷⁵ Keble Howard, *Smiths of Surbiton: a comedy without a plot* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1925), p. 8.

presents a glowing report of a family which he describes as ‘sufficiently humdrum, indeed, to take a cheerful view of life, to be fond of each other, to have children, read the books they like, visit the theatres they like, and whistle the music they like’.⁷⁶ Howard even offers a warning to ‘Superior Person[s]’ that they ‘will not like the story’.⁷⁷ In this sense, he is challenging the type of middle-class critic who assumes that a novel about contented suburban living will contain references to ‘low’ literature, middlebrow tastes and typically tedious anecdotes about a mundane existence. The popularity of this series meant that the novel had, by the time a new edition was published in 1925, already enjoyed, as Howard himself declares, ‘twenty years; many editions; many languages; [and] many friends’, as well as, inevitably, ‘a few sneers’. Moreover, it ‘sold with astonishing rapidity’, was published in many countries, did particularly well in America, and also led to two sequels – *The Smiths of Valley View* (1909) and *The Smiths in War Time* (1917) – and a play. Clearly, aspiring to successful suburban living was a popular topic for reading.

In contrast, Orwell’s account, which as I have suggested is less positive than those of Bullock and Howard, is nonetheless not a straight-forward attack on suburban living. Orwell is often cited for his critique of West Bletchley in *Coming Up for Air*:

You know how these streets fester all over the inner-outer suburbs. Always the same. Long, long rows of little semi-detached houses – the numbers in Ellesmere Road run to 212 and ours is 191 – as much alike as council houses and generally uglier. The stucco front, the creosoted gate, the privet hedge, the green front door. The Laurels, the Myrtles, the Hawthorns, Mon Abri, Mon Repos, Belle Vue [...] ⁷⁸

However, George Bowling’s experiences in the country town of Lower Binfield are a confrontation of his own unrealistic nostalgia, rather than a repudiation of his feelings towards suburbia, and there is no sense that his move to West Bletchley was an

⁷⁶ Keble Howard, *Smiths of Surbiton* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906), pp. vii-viii.

⁷⁷ Howard, *Smiths of Surbiton* (1906), p. vii.

⁷⁸ Orwell, *Coming up for Air*, p. 9.

unwise one. And yet, there is an element of generational tension within Orwell's novels on the lower middle classes, noticeable particularly within *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), which is suggestive of the cultural dominance of suburbia within the lower-middle-class family, and which is portrayed as supportive of the 'money-code'. Here we see the tension between the late-Victorian desire for a better life in the suburbs, and the later twentieth-century view that suburbia was not as intellectually or culturally stimulating as a life in the throbbing metropolis. Indeed, Comstock cannot, at the beginning of the novel, imagine anything worse than a life in suburbia:

That was what it meant to worship the money-god! To settle down, to Make Good, to sell your soul for a villa and an aspidistra! To turn into the typical little bowler-hatted sneak – Strube's 'little man' – the little docile cit who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage pie and stewed tinned pears, half an hour's listening-in to the BBC Symphony Concert, and then perhaps a spot of licit sexual intercourse if his wife 'feels in the mood'.⁷⁹

His antagonism towards the 'money-god', and thus suburbia's intrinsic relationship with self-worth and social aspirations makes 'aspidistra-living' entirely unsupportable. Not only that, but the suburbs are distinctly anti-masculine; the domestic femininity undermining independence, sexuality, and even taste. And yet, by the end of the novel, Comstock repeats the generational pattern, wanting to place his family within that same secure environment:

The lower-middle-class people in there, behind their lace curtains, with their children and their scraps of furniture and their aspidistras – they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. The money-code as they interpreted it was not merely cynical and hoggish. They had their standards, their

⁷⁹ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 51.

inviolable points of honour. They ‘kept themselves respectable’ – kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were *alive*.⁸⁰

Comstock thus arrives at the same conclusions that Larch, Thorne, Ruby and Lewisham do; that the suburbs are the only place for lower-middle-class culture to be defended, nurtured, and promoted, and that on an individual basis the retreat to suburbia is the preservation of a particular lower-middle-class identity. Like the earlier authors, Orwell was, as Bernard Crick points out, ‘not simply writing *about* the lower middle class, he was also writing *for* a readership of men like George Bowling in an attempt to challenge their political apathy’.⁸¹ And thus we can turn to the question that this suburban identity posed in political terms; namely, was the suburban clerk to become Orwell’s proletarian socialist hero or to be subsumed into Strube’s ‘little man’, the conservative nationalist?⁸²

Political Radicalism

Howard’s novel was written to challenge the stereotypical view of suburbanites as repressed and pathetic, and it succeeded to a degree, according to the reviews that accompany the 1925 edition but it did rather enhance the image of the politically contented, conservative villa-owner.⁸³ The Smiths are not in a position to confront the status quo; indeed they are doing well out of commerce and middle-managership. Socially, they are at the height of clerkly life and have more in common with their middle-class neighbours than with the Larches and Thornes battling in the inner-city

⁸⁰ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 268 – original emphasis.

⁸¹ Bernard Crick, as cited in Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb*, p. 40.

⁸² The ‘little man’ of Sidney Strube’s cartoons for the Daily Express was a ‘bespectacled and bowler-hatted man of modest means’, whom Alison Light sees as ‘emblematic of a redemptive, conservative nationalism between the wars’. Light, as cited in Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 173.

⁸³ ‘All his characters are human and alive’ – *Daily Mail*; ‘Unaffected and quite charming’ – *New Witness*. Hapgood calls The Smiths a ‘celebrat[ion] of what the new middle classes have won for themselves’. *Margins of Desire*, p. 51.

to become suburban. Politically, we would not expect radicalism from such comfortable characters. An assumption, however, that the majority of the lower middle class followed this conservative trajectory would be an oversimplification. ‘Villa Toryism’ is often used to describe the political cautiousness of the middle class; emulated by a set of people (mainly clerks) who were desperate to achieve a higher social status and thus moderate their own opinions and attitudes in order to align themselves with those above them. And yet, as Richard Price suggests, ‘it is perhaps significant that most of the early union activists were also socialist, and, indeed,’ he continues, ‘the contribution of the lower middle class to the early history of the socialist societies was in all probability greater than has yet been realised’.⁸⁴ Socialism’s specificities aside, it is also worth thinking about suburbia more generally, not in terms of, as Webster puts it, ‘stability and conformity’, but as a force for ‘contradiction and flux’.⁸⁵

The lower middle classes (or *petite bourgeoisie*) in Europe more widely, and Germany in particular, have been frequently analysed in terms of political affiliations.⁸⁶ In British studies, on the other hand, ‘Villa Toryism’ appears to have eclipsed the need for further study. Even contemporaneous critics, convinced of suburban apathy, were quick to dismiss the political potential of the British lower middle classes, as Clapson suggests:

⁸⁴ Richard Price, ‘Society, Status and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower-middle-class Patriotism, 1870-1900’, in Crossick (ed) *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p. 107. As the clerical characters are not demonstrably unionised within the novels under consideration, I shall not be looking at unionisation as a variant of political radicalism. For more detail on the topic, however, see Gregory Anderson’s chapter on Trade Unionism in *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), David Lockwood’s chapter in *The Blackcoated Worker: a Study in Class Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) and R. M. Blackburn’s *Union Character and Social Class: A Study of White-collar Unionism* (London: Batsford, 1967).

⁸⁵ Webster, *Expanding Suburbia*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Crossick and Heinz Gerhard-Haupt, *The Petite-Bourgeoisie in Europe 1780-1914: Enterprise, Family and Independence* (London: Routledge, 1995).

The attack on the suburbs was undertaken by writers on both the Left and the Right of the political spectrum as uniform and ungainly sprawls of streets and streets of silly little houses with silly little gardens.⁸⁷

Crossick is likewise critical of the ‘caricatured treatment’ the *petite bourgeoisie* endured – particularly aiming his criticisms at writers like Wells who ‘were themselves from that background’ – and yet he suggests that ‘the caricature relates to the reality, for it seems that from the middle of the nineteenth century there was little distinctive or coherent about the voice of the *petite bourgeoisie* in British political life’.⁸⁸ Crossick goes on to say that,

The characteristic rejection of both state and élites that had shaped the ideology that grew with dissenting religion survived wherever petit-bourgeois politics found expression, but it became subsumed with a blander liberalism that allowed many to move further towards social conservatism when faced with an increasingly organised working class.⁸⁹

Where there is tension between the accounts of historians and literary representation is in the number of politically ‘un-bland’ characters to be found in suburban fiction. Or, put simply, why did writers like Wells want their fictional clerks to be failed socialists rather than being straightforward suburban conservatives? While the suggestion that suburban voters were frequently, as, Frans Coetzee argues, ‘a reactionary vanguard’ is thus a valid one, the assumption of a homogenised political force emanating from suburban culture is an over-simplification that is not reproduced across middlebrow fiction.⁹⁰ Equally divergent are representations of liberalism in the novels, and

⁸⁷ Clapson, *Invincible Green Suburbs*, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Geoffrey Crossick, ‘The Petite Bourgeoisie in nineteenth-century Britain: the Urban and Liberal Case’, in *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans in Nineteenth-century Europe* ed. by Crossick and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 62-94 (p. 71).

⁸⁹ Crossick, *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans*, pp. 71-72.

⁹⁰ In German politics, for example, the *petite bourgeoisie* are described by David Blackbourn as ‘convulsive’, ‘unstable’, ‘prickly’ and ‘unpredictable’. Frans Coetzee, ‘Villa Toryism Reconsidered:

associations of jingoism and fascism within clerical histories.⁹¹ In short, we see a lower middle class that could be a force for diverse and opposing strands of radicalism.⁹² Whilst I shall mention the wider discussions of jingoistic conservatism within this section, my focus shall remain with the novels, and thus the more dominant representation of left-wing politics. Hapgood sees this radicalism in terms of emulation – as she puts it, ‘the possibility of social and political equality frames the significance of suburban literary themes’⁹³; but, in many ways, I argue that the suburban socialist seeks more than just equality with middle-class neighbours. Indeed, in bestowing left-wing political thought upon their clerical protagonists our authors – Wells, Bennett, and Orwell – are offering the reader the opposite of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ in drawing parallels between the working-class radical and the lower-middle-class clerk. Indeed, as Briggs comments in 1963, it is within the ‘political imagination in [Wells’s] novels’ that the reader sees his vision for a more optimistic future.⁹⁴ The subtlety of associations with socialist doctrine thus becomes fundamental to the over-arching sense of hope that emanates from within the suburbs, and not merely as a manifestation of the proletarianisation of the lower middle classes.

The complexity of lower-middle-class identity itself contributes to the wide-range of political allegiances displayed by those living in the suburbs. While Villa Toryism is usually held as a marker of typical middle-class tendencies, the basis for supposing that suburbs in their entirety should also be right wing ignores the growing

Conservatism and Suburban Sensibilities in Late-Victorian Croydon’, *Parliamentary History*, 16, 1 (1997), p. 32; Blackburn, ‘Between Resignation and Volatility: the German Petit Bourgeoisie in the Nineteenth Century’ in Crossick (ed), *Shopkeepers and Master Artisans*, p. 55.

⁹¹ Crossick, for example, argues that the relationship between the *petite bourgeoisie* and inter-war fascism has remained unduly prominent for too long. His own collection aims to ‘undermine the inevitability of that link, by stressing not only the real national variations in the character of the petit-bourgeois political engagement, but also the ideological ambiguities of that move to the right’. John Tosh’s chapter on ‘The New Imperialism’ in *Manliness and Masculinities* likewise places the clerk at the centre, calling the ‘key constituency [of new imperialism] lower-middle-class men, with clerks to the fore, particularly during the Mafeking celebrations’. Crossick and Haupt, *The Petite Bourgeoisie in Europe*, p. 224; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2005), p. 204.

⁹² Another interesting depiction of this radicalism is the presence of spiritualism within the novels. Whilst clearly not a political ideology, this religious unorthodoxy is representative of a similar type of suburban radicalism and shall be touched upon in this chapter.

⁹³ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 9.

⁹⁴ Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 344.

population of lower-middle and working-class residents. As Coetzee suggests, in the Tory stronghold of Croydon, by 1903 sixty-one per cent of the population was working class. He does argue, however, that 'Villa Toryism is as evocative of place as of class', calling the idea of a 'homogenous middle-class suburban presence [...] dubious enough in the 1880s and even more fanciful thereafter'.⁹⁵ In Coetzee's analysis, Villa Toryism is predicated as much on the environment as the social hierarchy – if not more so. This argument, then, assumes that the suburbs are necessarily reactionary because they are visually perceived to be so. This seems to be based, once more, on the stereotype that has pervaded all other representations of the suburban resident – Coetzee cites Masterman's claim that 'in feverish hordes the suburbs swarm to the polling booth to vote against a truculent proletariat'.⁹⁶ Again, we see the suburbanites thwarting the efforts of a lower class in an attempt to preserve their socially precarious position, and, worse than even this, in being categorised as part of this class, they appear to encourage mutiny.⁹⁷

Tom Jeffery argues that any claim concerning middle-class conservatism should be challenged: 'I shall have in mind the well-worn image of the suburban middle class as isolated and reactionary and shall propose an approach which, while acknowledging such truth as lies within the image, seeks to go beyond its potentially damaging limitations'. He adds that in order to do this, he will examine the 'often unrecognised but undoubtedly important migration of the working class to the suburbs'.⁹⁸ Whilst the first part of Jeffery's statement suggests that there is more to suburbanites than mere reaction, his dismissal of the lower middle class, and their impact on voting habits in Lewisham, means that clerks (who made up a large section of any London suburb in the early twentieth century) are thus side-lined in the debate about middle-class conservatism and potential working-class radicalism. And yet, the

⁹⁵ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism', p. 46.

⁹⁶ Coetzee, 'Villa Toryism', p. 32.

⁹⁷ Which is of note as part of the 'proletarianisation thesis' if, as Hapgood suggests, Bullock et al are working class themselves; which in itself would pose interesting questions about their political behaviour.

⁹⁸ Jeffery, 'Politics and Class in Lewisham', p. 191.

first case-study to which Jeffery refers (taken from Mass Observation) is written by a clerk and is apparently typical of the 'contemptuous image of the suburban middle class, eking out a dreary existence conscious of the proximity of death and the working classes'.⁹⁹ Jeffery further perpetrates the stereotype by suggesting that 'the natural political corollary of a beleaguered, aspirant and anxious middle-class culture has been a reactionary politics [and] would naturally support a Conservatism which was the institutionalized expression of the cult of gentility'.¹⁰⁰ These statements sound more like a typical description of the Pooter-esque 'clerkly' classes than the middle-class proper, but it not until his conclusion that Jeffery comments that 'in looking at the politics of the suburban middle classes there is a need to make distinctions between, for example, professional and clerical workers', something which he does not attempt within the chapter.¹⁰¹ In political histories, then, just as in cultural studies, we see that the suburbs bear the marks of the proletarianisation debate; suburbia is co-opted to demonstrate either middle- or working-class cultural significance, once more refusing the lower middle classes their own distinct identity.¹⁰²

There is also little room in Jeffery's 'cult of gentility' for the visible displays of clerical jingoism to which Price draws our attention. As Price's chapter suggests, in examining jingoism we return to the antagonism between Carey's 'masses' and the intellectual elite. Jingoism is thus represented by John Hobson and J. M. Robertson, Price argues, as the result of 'open[ing] the floodgates of "the abyss" and allow[ing] the uncivilised, uninformed masses to influence rational discussion and policy making'.¹⁰³ Price suggests that instead of placing lower-middle-class jingoism within Liberalism's concern to control the masses, as Hobson and Robertson understand it,

⁹⁹ Jeffery, 'Politics and Class', p. 192.

¹⁰⁰ Jeffery, 'Politics and Class', pp. 192-3.

¹⁰¹ Or, perhaps Jeffery sees the lower-middle-class suburban as Orwell does in *Coming up for Air*, when his protagonist remarks: 'I could keep my end up in the rather mixed society of a place like Ealing, where the office-employee class overlaps with the middling-professional class'. Jeffery, 'Politics and Class', p. 207; Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 137.

¹⁰² Note, Flint refers to several of the clerical protagonists studied in this chapter as 'middle-class [and] dependent for their incomes on the man's employment in some type of administrative or clerical office'. Flint, 'Fictional Suburbia', p. 115.

¹⁰³ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', p. 90.

the political reaction can be taken as a gauge of 'social pressures and changes that marked the 1890s'.¹⁰⁴ This, as Price demonstrates, is a markedly 'clerkly' reaction – in, for example, the 'spontaneous patriotic demonstrations in the Stock Exchange', or the 'disproportionate number of clerks in the volunteer regiments for the Boer War'.¹⁰⁵

It is also a trend that follows the clerks home to the suburbs, notably in the 'patriotic processions complete with bunting, floats, bright lights and flags in celebration of the victories in spring 1900'.¹⁰⁶ The *Daily Mail* – aimed at a lower-middle-class readership and 'reek[ing] of the concerns of villadom' – drew parallels between European imperialism and the increasing number of German clerks moving to London. Price suggests, then, that it is instead the *decline* of the cult of gentility, combined with the socio-economic pressures felt by the lower middle classes at the turn of the century, which leads to the insecurity of the clerk and the projection of those fears onto external enemies.¹⁰⁷ In the Wellsian imagination, we return, then, to the Martian. Indeed, the 'primitive and primeval' behaviour of the suburban citizens in *The War of the Worlds* is echoic of the displays of jingoism around London.¹⁰⁸

An alternate position, and one which is arguably seen more frequently in the clerical novels, is, as David Smith asserts, that socialism is anti-radical, offering instead an opportunity to eliminate the 'social friction' that was so evocative of (particularly the clerks') suburban experience.¹⁰⁹ Jeffery's account certainly makes clear the difficulties in classifying clerical workers: he refers to several clerks as 'middle class' whilst he also discusses the 'skilled and black-coated workers' who are tenanted in another area of Lewisham, suggesting that black-coated workers are a subsection of the *working* class.¹¹⁰ If we take the established view of the clerk as

¹⁰⁴ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', pp. 90-91.

¹⁰⁵ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', p. 91.

¹⁰⁶ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', p. 91.

¹⁰⁷ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', p. 92.

¹⁰⁸ Price, 'Society, Status and Jingoism', p. 90.

¹⁰⁹ David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the 20th Century British Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Jeffery, 'Politics and Class', p. 194.

desirous of becoming a well-established member of the middle class, socialism provides an opportunity to see beyond the daily tedium of 'keeping up with the Joneses' to an utopian vision of a society that allowed the clerk to be free of such classification, without fear of losing materially as much as, say, the middle or upper classes.

Socialism was not, however, an easy creed to follow for a class that, as Jeffery asserts, was so 'desperate for social validation'.¹¹¹ Whilst socialism is discussed by many suburban clerks in fiction it is presented as a difficult ideology to fully support. The most obvious examples of this conflict can be found in the works of Wells who blends varying political sentiments in his lower-middle-class novels.¹¹² As Smith states:

Even in this, [Wells'] most avowedly Socialist period, his fiction is characterised by an expressed disapproval of the official Socialist sects, of their narrowness and their impracticality. It is characterised, too, not only by a rejection of the class-struggle concept of Socialism but also by a virtual rejection of the working class itself.¹¹³

Wells' preference for lower-middle-class characters, and his explorations of their hardship rather than those of the working class, is suggestive of, as Smith, argues, a reluctance to engage with the class below his own. For Wells, then, it is the lower-middle-class socialist who holds more promise than his factory-working comrade, and yet, as we see in the narratives, the clerk-socialist fails to make a political impression.

On the other hand, Orwell, as Kuchta suggests, supports the vision of socialism that is dependent on the lower middle class, not because of clerical radicalism but because 'they *are* the proletariat'.¹¹⁴ And thus we return to the

¹¹¹ Jeffery, 'Politics and Class', p. 193.

¹¹² This is perhaps reflective of his own political experiences – in 1903 he was part of the Fabian Society, which he unsuccessfully tried to influence, then he joined the Labour Party in 1922 before becoming disillusioned by the first Labour Government. Smith, *Socialist Propaganda*, p. 21.

¹¹³ Smith, *Socialist Propaganda*, p. 21.

¹¹⁴ Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 180.

centrality of clerical (self) consciousness. If Orwell believed that the clerkly class could unite the proletariat proper and the bourgeoisie in achieving socialism – a union that, as we know, did not occur – then he sees the failure to do so as a product of the clerk’s misunderstanding of self; or, rather the lack of identification with a coherent social stratum clearly defined both internally and externally (a uniting feature both of suburban novels and historical analyses).¹¹⁵ Orwell’s assertions that the suburban would ‘die on the field of battle to save his country from Bolshevism’ undermines the ‘politic cautiousness’¹¹⁶ of the stereotypical clerk. And yet, when faced with the ardent enthusiasm of the three young Communists and the ‘two old blokes’ from the Labour Party, at a Left Book Club meeting, George Bowling is most unimpressed by the latent jingoism easily whipped up by the ‘anti-Fascist’ speaker.¹¹⁷ His ironic observation that he is part of the ‘West Bletchley revolutionaries’, such as they are, is less a straightforward dismissal of suburban apathy than it is a criticism of contemporary politics. In the meeting, Bowling is facing a crisis of misplaced political enthusiasm – wrongly, as he sees it, directed towards imperialist dominance and patriotic fervour – rather than a reluctant suburban electorate; the ‘middling chaps’, as he says, ‘carrying on just as usual’.¹¹⁸

The vision of socialism is not, therefore, a straightforward one for the literary clerk; indeed, Wells’ clerks are often depicted as struggling with a definition of their ideological views. In *Christina Alberta’s Father* (1925) this is played out as a battle with both society and sanity as Mr Preemby, a quiet and inoffensive ex-laundryman, sits through a séance at his suburban boarding-house and consequently believes he is a reincarnation of the lost Sumerian King, Sargon, Lord of the World. Much of Mr Preemby’s readiness to believe that he is Sargon is based on the desire to ease the

¹¹⁵ As so many of the earlier studies of *petit-bourgeois* behaviour demonstrate, the precarious socio-economic position of the clerk underlies political decisions; or, as Mr Ruby puts it, there are two rules governing the lower-middle-class clerk, ‘one to live up to his Position, the other to maintain Respectability’. Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces*, p. 31.

¹¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 14, line 116.

¹¹⁷ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 151.

¹¹⁸ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 158.

despair and suffering that he sees around him and add meaning and direction to the seeming futility of his existence. He meets a young writer, Bobby, whom he views as one of his disciples and they spend much time in discussing the implications of Sargon's return – whilst Bobby attempts to work out if poor Preemby is truly mad or just eccentric. Most of Preemby's visions of a utopian future are noticeably socialist in tone and reminiscent of Wells' own views of a world-wide "Constructive Socialism":¹¹⁹

"Aren't we all agreed about those things – in theory?"

"In theory, yes," said Bobby. "But not in reality. If everyone really wanted to abolish the difference of rich and poor it would be as easy as pie to find a way. There's always a way to everything if you want to do it enough. But nobody really wants to do these things. Not as we want meals. All sorts of other things people want, but wanting to have no rich and poor any more isn't real wanting; it is just a matter of pious sentiment".¹²⁰

The irony is, of course, that aside from the statements of ancestral origin, everything that Preemby believes in is entirely sane; yet he is locked up in a mental asylum indefinitely, until Bobby rescues him.

In another of his novels, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900), Wells' lower-middle-class hero faces a similarly complex inner conflict of political allegiance. The titular character is a dedicated socialist, proudly sporting a 'blood colour' tie during his years at university; where he also is a prominent speaker for his cause. Wells' narrator is cynical throughout Lewisham's most devout years: 'it was only too easy to accept the theory of cunning, plotting capitalists and landowners, and faultless, righteous, martyr workers'.¹²¹ Lewisham's close friend, Miss Heydinger, is drawn towards spiritualism, and, once again, Wells draws parallels between her faddish infatuation with mediums

¹¹⁹ Smith, *Socialist Propaganda*, p. 21.

¹²⁰ H. G. Wells, *Christina Alberta's Father* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1925), p. 204.

¹²¹ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 47.

and séances and Lewisham's penchant for radical political ideas.¹²² While Wells' disapproval of formal political allegiances is apparent there is a hope expressed for the broader social awareness of his lower-middle-class characters. Indeed, Lewisham's more honourable impulses are based on the 'strong persuasion [...] that human beings should not be happy while others near them were wretched'.¹²³ This much vaguer sense of social harmony is part of Mr Preemby's conscience and much in evidence across the period. For Vera, the wife of a clerk in Victor Canning's *The Wooden Angel* (1938), suburban life represents just this glimmer of equality:

The class she was born in was in a state of flux, which had been induced by many years of newspaper-fed doctrines of free-thought and a growing heritage of religious doubt¹²⁴ and spurious political freedom, and although there was still a considerable block of honest, unimaginative folk who had the good sense to recognise themselves and their limitations, there was as many who were ready to echo any protest that seemed an easy solution of difficulties they had never really given much thought to. One of these cries – and the one which Vera cherished above others – was that one person was as good as another.¹²⁵

¹²² Which ties in with Crossick's comments on the relationship between dissenting religions and the trend towards ill-defined lower-middle-class liberalism. Crossick, *Shopkeepers*, p. 72.

¹²³ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 47.

¹²⁴ Outside the remit of this chapter, but often visible in the background of these novels are the dalliances made with spiritualism. In *Love and Mr Lewisham*, the title figure rescues his future wife from her uncle, who makes use of her in his séances. In Norman Collins's *London Belongs to Me*, confidence-trickster Mr Squales is a dubious spiritualist, conducting séances as Enrico Qualito in the hopes of meeting wealthy widows. In *Christina Alberta's Father*, Mr Preemby's conviction that he is Sargon comes after attending his first séance, whilst staying in a suburban boarding house. Jason Marc Harris discusses the high cultural and literary associations with spiritualism, which suggests that suburban forays into 'other worlds' were intended to draw parallels with middle-class doubters, and mark the distance between the lower middle classes and 'rural working class [folklore]' and superstition. Indeed, Harris's description of the professional, intellectual spiritualists ('sensitive, artistic people') makes clear that, for clerk-authors particularly, rejecting orthodox values and instead placing faith in "salon lore" helps further the interpretation of them as artistic types. Jenny Hazelgrove suggests that, by the interwar period, spiritualism held a 'preponderance towards what one prominent medium described as the "superior working class"'. She also states that by 1932 there were '500 societies affiliated to the [Spiritualists' National Union]' alone. This particular avenue of mystical expression grows once the clerk begins to ramble in the rural landscape, when "salon lore" meets an enchanting pre-industrial idyll (see chapter three). Jason Marc Harris, *Folklore and the Fantastic in 19th Century British Fiction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 10; Jenny Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and British Society between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 14.

¹²⁵ Victor Canning (Julian Forest, pseud.), *The Wooden Angel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), p. 265.

Vera sees life in Mountrose, the new suburb built overlooking her home town of Wearemouth, as a way of forgetting the less desirable aspects of her upbringing, ‘consol[ing] herself with the doctrine that she was as good as the Mayor’s wife’.¹²⁶ At its broadest, then, suburban socialism preached equal opportunity – Vera and Francis, her clerk-husband, can buy into the suburban dream for a deposit of just fifty pounds – that rises above ‘spurious political freedom’. This freedom of equal opportunity, however, ignores faddish ideologies and locates itself firmly within a self-awareness of position.

In many respects, the Edwardian clerkly novel is rife with a new political anxiety. Just as Dickens and his middle-class Victorian contemporaries explored their unease about the working classes and urban poverty, these middlebrow authors were contemplating the plight of the lower-middle-class nobody. In Frank Swinnerton’s *The Young Idea*, the majority of the ‘young ideas’ expressed are based on the principle that, for the lower middle class, contentedness should be achievable. Young ‘radical’ clerk Galbraith declares: ‘I want novelists to grapple with great social problems, the poor, and the way real people live’.¹²⁷ And yet in referring to the ‘poor’ he, like Wells, means those who are trapped in a ‘poky suburban flat [...] a hopeless, objectless wrestling with a small salary and mean doings, and the snobbery of the poor’.¹²⁸ Galbraith has a ‘scheme for regenerating the lower-middle class’ which ‘makes poverty more tolerable [through] a natural, simple life’.¹²⁹ This sounds more like the type of solution offered by radical thinkers such as William Morris in his work *News from Nowhere* (1890). His socialist utopia, as Cunningham suggests, is based more on ‘an idealized suburbia’ than what is frequently assumed to be ‘an aesthetic of faux-medievalism’.¹³⁰ His vision of neat, coherent rows of houses – neither too ostentatious

¹²⁶ Forest (Canning), *The Wooden Angel*, p. 265.

¹²⁷ Frank Swinnerton, *The Young Idea: A Comedy of Environment* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1910), p. 154.

¹²⁸ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 171.

¹²⁹ Swinnerton, *The Young Idea*, p. 86.

¹³⁰ Cunningham, ‘Houses in Between’, p. 425.

nor overtly shabby – identical, equal and equipped with sufficient green areas has been understood as a call for suburban living.

In this sense, Morris's socialist (suburban) utopia has much in common with Wells' own suggestion that the 'suburbs should be the best of all worlds, morally enhancing, and offering in microcosm an Englishman's model of his ideal nation'.¹³¹ In both, however, the 'ideal nation' is not exactly suburban. As Kuchta suggests, and as the final chapter in this thesis shall explore, Morris's vision falls between medievalism and suburbia – the very inter-space in which the clerk sought to reconnect with his yeoman forefathers. Where suburban idealism and *petit-bourgeois* political thought come together are in the more general principles that Crossick identifies:

In addition to the judgements of political and economic life that link to the concept of the 'moral economy', one finds also those passionate defences: of the small against the large, the concrete against the abstract, the local against the national and international, the personal against the anonymous, and the individual against the structure. These ideas recur unceasingly in the discourses of *petit-bourgeois* politics.¹³²

Crossick suggests that these concerns are expressed more visibly in the late nineteenth century, but we can see these sentiments lingering in Edwardian fiction. Indeed, Aked's defence of suburbia is carried out along these lines by drawing Larch's attention to the individualism of the suburban villa versus the anonymity of the overcrowded street.

Beyond the Suburbs

¹³¹ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 31.

¹³² Crossick, *The Petite Bourgeois in Europe*, p. 224.

The connections between the literary establishment and this crisis of politics made radicalism appear integral to the role of the clerical author. While many of them thus battle with their socialist sympathies they are also contributing to the long tradition of left-wing cultural capital. This relates to another facet of the clerical novels and one that is both implicitly suggested and overtly discussed – namely, the formation of the Authorial figure. Several novelists, in works that boast autobiographical traits, imbue their protagonists with the complexity of an artistic mind that struggles to express itself politically, imaginatively, or even, at times, rationally within a suburban framework. These characters are suggestive of what Cunningham argues was critical to the suburban consciousness at the time:

The clear boundaries between town and country, and between classes and cultures, were being effaced by the rapidity and magnitude of suburban growth – catastrophic, perhaps, but also in its very ‘multitudinousness’ imaginatively stimulating.¹³³

Whilst most scholarly critics and contemporary commentators focus on the ‘catastrophic’ elements of mass suburbanisation,¹³⁴ Cunningham recognises that the literature of the suburbs can be a positive response to the environment. Likewise, Malcolm Bradbury says of Wells’ Edwardian novels:

[*Love and Mr Lewisham*] was the first of a row of novels Wells produced rapidly over the Edwardian period, all with somewhat similar themes, all about the excitement of life in a time of change and promise. Wells was above all readable; he was the novelist of ordinariness and familiarity, which he made excitingly unordinary and unfamiliar. His stories were mostly based on autobiographical materials, born out of lower-middle-class London suburban world from which he came, tales of aspiring,

¹³³ Cunningham, ‘Houses in Between’, p. 422.

¹³⁴ Cunningham is quoting Wells’ *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) in which he talks of the ‘catastrophic multitudinousness of suburban development’. Cunningham, ‘Houses in Between’, p. 422.

opportunity-seeking young men and women who were taking on the adventure of social, educational, commercial and sexual self-transformation.¹³⁵

I further Bradbury's suggestion of a soul-searching, but nonetheless optimistic, Edwardian literary culture by discussing the implications for many clerkly authors who felt inspired by their location and who successfully represented their experience in a vast output of fiction between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. In doing so, however, this section also continues to explore the tension between authors and their protagonists that emerged in the previous chapter – namely, the clerk-author's refusal to permit their clerk-characters the literary success that they themselves had achieved. As Kuchta argues, 'suburban texts often depict clerks as aspiring litterateurs, perhaps because their jobs involved transcribing documents without leaving any personal imprimatur'.¹³⁶ Kuchta's analysis of clerkly authorial failure breaks down creative aspirations into class consciousness, but there is, I believe, more than just socio-economics to the clerk-character's failure to emulate the literary success of his clerical creator.

The pathway to literary success was not an easy one. Aked, in *A Man from the North*, attempts to instruct Richard in the complex art of writing:

'Note the varying indications supplied by bad furniture like ours' (he grinned, opened his eyes, and sat up); 'listen to the melodies issuing lamely from ill-tuned pianos; examine the enervated figures of women reclining amidst flower-pots on narrow balconies. Even in the thin smoke ascending unwillingly from invisible chimney pots, the flutter of a blind, the bang of a door, the winking of a fox terrier perched on a window-sill, the colour of paint, the lettering of a name, – in all these things there is character and matter of interest, – truth waiting to be expounded'.

¹³⁵ Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Opening World, 1900-1915', in Harold Bloom (ed), *Edwardian and Georgian Fiction* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishing, 2005), p. 296.

¹³⁶ Kuchta, *Semi-detached Empire*, p. 107.

Most important, instructs Aked, is practice: ‘sit down every night and write five hundred words descriptive of some scene which has occurred during the day’.¹³⁷ Richard complies, as do many of our fictional clerks, desperate to become writers. When Richard finds an article in a half-crown review titled ‘To Literary Aspirants’, Bennett also makes reference to just one of the many instructional advertisements that were popular at the end of the nineteenth century.¹³⁸ The key to success as an author, as the article sets out, is in drill and practice, and ‘a regular course of technical exercises’.¹³⁹ The copier-clerk is the perfect audience for such advice; his professional capabilities lying in the ability to constantly rewrite information with methodical precision. In Pugh’s *The Broken Honeymoon* (1908), Ferdinand is another aspirant writer, similarly tied to a ‘Schema’ of practice:

‘I don’t propose to be a solicitor’s clerk all my life, you know.’

‘What then?’ asked Rosetta.

‘I-I’m going to be an author,’ I said. ‘Didn’t you know?’

She was silent for a space. “Is that why you get up so early every morning for – to write?”¹⁴⁰

Like Richard, Ferdinand believes it is ‘only a question of practice’ (and early rising – Richard gets up at six to write) that separates him from becoming an author. Wells’ Lewisham has his own ‘Schema’ designed to propel him towards success as a scientist and man of letters: “‘French until eight,” said the timetable curtly. Breakfast was to be eaten in twenty minutes; then twenty-five minutes of “literature””.¹⁴¹ As John Batchelor argues, Wells’ ‘objectives [are] to make a good plan, get a good education, and *live* [and these objectives] all underpin his “prig” novels’.¹⁴² Wells’

¹³⁷ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 78.

¹³⁸ Bennett himself wrote several works advising would-be-authors (including the obviously titled *How to Become an Author* (1903)).

¹³⁹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁰ Edwin Pugh, *The Broken Honeymoon* (London: John Milne, 1908), p. 56.

¹⁴¹ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 12.

¹⁴² John Batchelor, *H. G. Wells* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 101.

communications with Bennett on the subject of *A Man from the North* and *Love and Mr Lewisham* make their fictional similarities all the more prominent, particularly in light of their shared socio-economic upbringings:

My wife and I have read *A Man from the North* with the very keenest interest and we are both struck by the curious parallelism (in spite of their entire independence and authenticity) of the two books. Your approach and line of thought are clearly rather more towards Gissing than are mine, and I am reminded by that, that Gissing some years ago when I was telling him the idea of *Lewi-sham* told me that he had also contemplated the same story.¹⁴³

For both authors, culture provides what Felski calls ‘an empty but potent signifier, a talisman that offers the promise, however opaque, of entry into a higher world’, making it the most promising method of escaping dreary lives.¹⁴⁴

Where the clerical novels present their most positive representation of suburban culture, however, is in overriding the traditional portrayal of soulless suburbanites desperate for material status symbols. Instead we see a class that places education and cultural aspiration at the fore. As both Jeffery and Felski suggest, ‘if there was aspiration, it was aspiration to learn, to take their limited education further’.¹⁴⁵ Several of the clerical novels, then, become representative of what David Lodge describes as ‘the autobiographical-novel-about-a-boy-who-will-grow-up-to-be-a-writer tradition’ – usually associated with modernist works such as Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917) and Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers* (1913) but a feature of works by Wells, Bennett, and conceived of by writers as early as Gissing.¹⁴⁶ However, the type becomes a complex one in suburban fiction as in office fiction. Whilst in many cases these are autobiographical novels, written, clearly, by

¹⁴³ *Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells: a Record of a Personal and a Literary Friendship*, ed. by Harris Wilson (Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1960), p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ Felski, ‘Nothing to Declare’, p. 36.

¹⁴⁵ Jeffery, ‘Politics and Class’, p. 201; Felski, ‘Nothing to Declare’, p. 40.

¹⁴⁶ David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (London: Vintage, 2011), p. 208.

boys who *do* grow up to be writers, their fictional protagonists often fail to achieve this; or, as Lucas writes, they endure the ‘downward curve from would-be-writer to ex-non-writer’.¹⁴⁷ If this seems to suggest that the suburbs are a wilderness of thwarted dreams it does not prevent the authors from saturating their narratives with quiet optimism. In this sense, it appears that the creative *aspirations* themselves are more important than authorial success.

Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is one such example. Gordon Comstock is outwardly dedicated to his writing (as well as, at an early age, to his socialist principles) and hates the cheap novels in the bookshop he works in just as he despises the advertising image of ‘spectacled rat-faced clerk’ Roland Butta with his mug of Bovex.¹⁴⁸ Both mock Gordon’s deep desire to make something of himself through his authorial pursuits: ‘here was he, supposedly a “writer”, and he couldn’t even “write”!’¹⁴⁹ The novel is a retelling of Orwell’s time as a part-time assistant in a second-hand bookshop, and, more specifically, of how he almost gave up on his literary ambitions because of the dismal nature of ‘living in bed-sits, making a pint in a pub last a whole evening, fearing rent day, and knowing that the post brought only rejection slips’.¹⁵⁰ Because, or despite all this, Comstock knows only failure as a would-be author:

You don’t know what it means to have to crawl along on two quid a week. It isn’t a question of hardship – it’s nothing so decent as hardship. It’s the bloody, sneaking, squalid meanness of it. Living alone for weeks on end because when you’ve not money you’ve got no friends. Calling yourself a writer and never even producing anything because you’re always too washed out to write. It’s a sort of sub-world one lives in. It’s a sort of spiritual sewer.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Lucas is referring to Richard Larch, from Bennett’s *A Man from the North*. Lucas, Arnold Bennett, p. 22.

¹⁴⁸ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Bernard Crick, ‘Blair, Eric Arthur (pseud. George Orwell)’, *DNB*.

¹⁵¹ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 100.

Here we see political ambivalence, spiritual degeneration, and unsuccessful authorship as the underlying themes of the clerical novel.

In Bennett's *A Man from the North*, Richard Larch decides that his literary ambitions are unrealistic when he fails to write his epic novel whilst maintaining a career as a clerk. He is surprised to find that his dandyish fellow clerk and office mate, Jenkins, has aspirations of his own – 'to learn French and [...] to join a Polytechnic Institute' – yet the confession makes him even more despairing: 'on returning to his lodging, [Larch] thought for the hundredth time how futile was his present mode of existence'.¹⁵² Despite originally seeing London as the ultimately creative space on his arrival years before ('he laughed the laugh of luxurious contemplation, acutely happy. London accepted him [...] Filled with great purposes, he straightened his back'), Larch soon becomes disillusioned with the fast-pace of urban life, which dashes his dreams of becoming a 'great reader' and an author.¹⁵³ With London as his muse – in the metropolis itself, and not trapped in a suburban villa, as critics would suggest – Larch, like Comstock, should be in the perfect setting to satisfy his literary desires. However, economic hardship damages his ability to be creative, just as Comstock's tirades against pennilessness are given as the reason for his failure to finish *London Pleasures*.

This failure-to-become-an-author is attributed to a host of factors: Comstock is too poor to write; Mr Aked has an 'impaired digestive apparatus'; and Larch 'complacently attribute[s] his ill-success as a writer to the lack of harmonious surroundings'.¹⁵⁴ Like Lewisham, Larch occupies a 'set of rooms' rather than his own house and, despite managing to acquire a second room as his study, blames these conditions for his failure. When faced with his manuscript, Larch declares: 'The lack of homogeneity, of sequence, or dramatic quality, of human interest; the loose syntax;

¹⁵² Bennett, *A Man from the North*, pp. 253-4.

¹⁵³ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, pp. 7, 18 – original emphasis.

¹⁵⁴ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 238.

and the unrelieved mediocrity of it all, horrified him'.¹⁵⁵ Lewisham has merely a 'little toilet table at which he was to "write"' in his small Clapham house that he shares with his wife, mother-in-law and lodgers, and his environment is constantly referred to as preventing his would-be brilliance in the political and literary worlds.

If Larch finds his rooms in London equally uninspiring, he indeed believes that his creativity will be stifled forever once he marries:

He knew that he would make no further attempt to write. Laura was not even aware that he had had ambitions in that direction. He had never told her, because she would not have understood. She worshipped him, he felt sure, and at times he had a great tenderness for her; but it would be impossible to write in the suburban doll's-house which was to be theirs. No! In future he would be simply the suburban husband – dutiful towards his employers, upon whose grace he would be doubly dependent; keeping his house in repair; pottering in the garden [...].¹⁵⁶

Despite his earlier belief in the 'Psychology of the Suburbs' as the Zola-esque masterpiece that could be teased out of the 'latent poetry of the suburbs', Larch's vision of a life in the suburbs is clearly the opposite of the dream that so many of the clerks cherished.¹⁵⁷ He is committed to the propriety of taking his wife into the suburbs, seeing that as her correct place – 'in a year or two she would be the typical matron of the lower middle-class' – and yet for him to settle into that life is, as for Gordon Comstock, to relinquish his creative ambitions.¹⁵⁸ And yet, just as in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, the choice must be made between solitary authorship and companionate domesticity. Larch is mentally 'asphyxiated' early in the novel by the sight of a peasant woman glimpsed from a train. The implication of a 'hypothetical husband and children', despite their 'narrow' and 'dormant' intellectual capacities,

¹⁵⁵ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 246.

¹⁵⁶ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 263.

¹⁵⁷ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 106.

¹⁵⁸ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 262.

provokes a surge of companionate desire.¹⁵⁹ Larch even has his own Prufrockian moment, in which he worries that his solitary lifestyle and cultural aspirations will place him for ever out of the reach of women: 'he dreamt that he was in a drawing-room full of young men and women, and that all were chattering vivaciously and cleverly'.¹⁶⁰ His pursuit of Laura stems from an unarticulated episode with a prostitute that sparks a need for the type of physical intimacy which his writing cannot fulfil. After his tortured courtship with Adeline, whose middle-class status attracted him more than her personality, Richard is seemingly indifferent in his choice of wife:

At the moment she belonged to no class; had no virtues, no faults. All the inessentials of her being were stripped away, and she was merely a woman, divine, desired, necessary, waiting to be captured. She sat passive, expectant, the incarnation of the Feminine.¹⁶¹

We see then, the perfect summation of doll-like complacency; Laura offers the antithesis to Richard's intellectual turmoil.

The references to the 'suburban doll's-house' clearly echo Ibsen's commentary on nineteenth-century marriage roles. Ibsen's *Doll's House* (1879) is, of course, an exploration of the repressive patriarchy of suburban life; however, it is a prison that can be finally escaped.¹⁶² For Norman Collins, the metaphor of the doll's house betrays something of the artificiality of suburban life:

Dolls' houses appear to be the right dwelling places for these thousands, these tens of thousands, these hundreds of thousands, these half-urban hoards. Stand on the bridge at Liverpool Street Station at a quarter-to-nine in the morning and you see the model trains drawing in beneath you one after another, and swarms of toy-passengers

¹⁵⁹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁰ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 228.

¹⁶¹ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 258.

¹⁶² Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (London: R. Hart-Davis, 1965).

emptying themselves on to the platform to go stumping up to the barrier – toy-directors, toy-clerks, toy-typists, all jerking along to spend the day in toy-town, earning paper-money to keep their dolls’-houses going.¹⁶³

In *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell echoes this sense of artifice or delusion when critiquing the suburban obsession with house-ownership:

We’re all bought, and what’s more we’re bought with our own money. Every one of those poor down-trodden bastards, sweating his guts out to pay twice the proper price for a brick dolls’ house that’s called Belle Vue because there’s no view and the bell doesn’t ring.¹⁶⁴

For all the despair within these fictional accounts of toy suburban life there is a glimmer of hope which lies with the potential of the next generation. For example, Larch believes that ‘a child of his might give sign of literary ability. If so – and surely these instincts descended, were not lost – how he would foster and encourage it!’¹⁶⁵ Implied here is also the suggestion that one benefit of the slow pace of suburban life is having the time to ‘foster’ and ‘encourage’ the talents of his children. The ‘toy-life’ of the doll’s house will provide the safe haven that will inspire literary confidence, nurtured in an idyllic setting by attentive parents – an advantage not enjoyed by the orphaned Larch. Ultimately that dolls’ house world would become the next generation’s *real* existence; and could thus be written about just as London was – ironically, in this case, by Bennett himself.

In Wells’ *Love and Mr Lewisham*, the failed political and literary dreams of Mr Lewisham are likewise countered by his unswerving belief in the literary talents of his future offspring: “‘We must perish in the wilderness – Someday. Somewhen. But

¹⁶³ Norman Collins, *London Belongs to Me* (London: Collins, 1945), p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Orwell, *Coming up for Air*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁵ Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 264.

not for us... Come to think, it is all the child. The future is the Child. The Future”¹⁶⁶ The ‘Child’ is placed within a patriarchal context as Lewisham cries “‘Career! In itself it is a Career. Father! Why should I want more”¹⁶⁷ Wells is suggesting that Lewisham is undergoing an almost spiritual metamorphosis – this is his moment in the wilderness. A lifetime of political and literary philosophies has led to this moment of self-awareness – the narrative of Lewisham’s struggles as a socialist, as a would-be-author, and in his attempts to raise his social position, have not been for naught. His life story climaxes only once he has endured these hardships and recognised that whilst his carefully designed ‘Schema’ for his beautifully ‘arranged Career’ must be destroyed they have led to this moment of epiphany in which he accepts his role within both the social and natural order.¹⁶⁸ In a strikingly similar scene, Gordon Comstock disposes of his great and unfinished work, *London Pleasures*, in an act of great selflessness for his unborn child: ‘the sluttish poet of today,’ he says, ‘would hardly be recognisable in the natty young business man of tomorrow’.¹⁶⁹ Gordon makes the ultimate sacrifice for the future of the Comstock family; he gives over his soul to the ‘money-code’, to ‘get married, settle down, prosper moderately, push a pram, have a villa and a radio and an aspidistra’. And yet within that selling of self, there is romantic hope: the novel ends with his kneeling against the ‘softness of [his new wife’s] belly’ listening to the stirrings of new life.¹⁷⁰

Church’s autobiographical *Over the Bridge* offers the fulfilment of these suburban dreams. Nurtured by what Church refers to variously as the ‘pocket of civilisation utterly quiet and self-sufficient’, the ‘jungle of aspidistras’, and the ‘close intimacy of a lower-middle-class home’, he develops from avid reader to published poet (in the *Clarion*, no less).¹⁷¹ Church was the son of a Post-Office worker, whose passion for the Civil Service led to his insistence on Church’s own entrance into the

¹⁶⁶ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁷ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁸ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁹ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, p. 266.

¹⁷⁰ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, pp. 266, 277.

¹⁷¹ Church, *Over the Bridge*, pp. 18, 60, 118.

clerical world. By 1933 Church gave up life as a clerk to turn to writing as a full-time occupation. The suburban literary dream personified, Church offers what Lewisham, Comstock, and Larch seek for their own offspring – although, notably, it was not the future that Church’s own father envisioned, being, as he reminisces, as loyal to the Civil Service as ‘a soldier to the regiment’.¹⁷²

If we turn, finally, to Julian Barnes’s *Metroland* (1980), we see a remarkably similar narrative continuing long into the twentieth century. Barnes’s *Metroland* itself is rooted in the late nineteenth-century suburban development following the Metropolitan line out of London. Protagonist Chris’s attitude to suburbia reflects the conflict between his own sense of security and the desire to appear cynical in front of his childhood confidante Toni:

Everyone in this suburb of a couple of thousand people seemed to have come in from elsewhere. They would have been attracted by the solidly built houses, the reliable railway service, and the good gardening soil. I found the cosy, controlled rootlessness of the place reassuring; though I did tend to complain to Toni that I’d prefer something “...more elemental”.¹⁷³

Metroland is contrasted to the ‘limitless sexual, social, and political freedom’ of Chris’s liberating experiences in central Paris; for a time the contented suburban becomes the effortless *flâneur*.¹⁷⁴ And yet, it is to suburbia that Chris returns because ‘it’s an efficient place to live’. Not only is Chris now a bone-fide suburban, he is, like Gordon Comstock, a copywriter – a self-conscious culmination of the clerkly would-be-author type: ‘It was ridiculous, but pleasant [...] There were poets and novelists in advertising, they said; though I could never quite remember their names when asked. I did know that Eliot had worked in a bank’.¹⁷⁵ Barnes’s ‘coming of age book’ sees the

¹⁷² Church, *Over the Bridge*, p. 135.

¹⁷³ Julian Barnes, *Metroland* (London: Pan Books, 1990), p. 33.

¹⁷⁴ Sebastian Groes and Peter Childs, ‘Julian Barnes and the Wisdom of Uncertainty’, in *Julian Barnes: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Groes and Childs (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ Barnes, *Metroland*, p. 139.

two childhood friends standing in a suburban garden discussing the realities of adulthood – Toni as a failed poet, Chris defending charges of being a ‘budding fat cat’. And yet, like for so many of our clerks, Chris’ contentment lies ‘in having a child’.¹⁷⁶ ‘So this is it?’ asks Chris, as his daughter wakes him with her ‘grizzl[ing]’.¹⁷⁷ The glow of the suburban street light, which doubles as a night-light for baby Amy, gives a final lingering impression of the protagonist’s happiness.

Barnes’s novel is a modern retelling of that semi-autobiographical narrative – written, indeed, like so many of the early twentieth-century clerical novels, while the author was a journalist. As in those earlier novels, here we see the first pretensions of early maturity, virginal forays into the romantic, the grey reality of office work and, in the end, youthful ambitions replaced with the suburban dream. The universalization of the clerical novel rests, then, not only in the clerkly protagonist, but in the manner of telling the universal (suburban) narrative. *Metroland* reads like a rewriting of the clerkly story, and Chris is a culmination of the clerkly type; his early (misplaced) intellectualism and political radicalism reminds us of Lewisham, his intense relationships in Paris echo, once more, Lewisham’s conflicting desires for Ethel and Miss Heydinger, his journey back to suburbia follows that of Gordon Comstock, Rosemary and their child. Even the terse, ironic writing of that journey from anti-bourgeois adolescent to suburban father covers details echoic of the pathos and intimacy of Wells’ narratives of lower-middle-class life.

There is, it seems, a belief that the suburbs, while represented as a constricting space, and one in which some fear the mind will be subdued, somehow has the power to nurture and prepare a new generation to fulfil the dreams of their fathers.¹⁷⁸ This seeming contradiction suggests that the suburbs present a different experience for those who are life-weary and used to the chaotic, sometimes depressing city than for the children of the lower middle class. There is hope that the suburb will become a

¹⁷⁶ Barnes, *Metroland*, p. 147.

¹⁷⁷ Barnes, *Metroland*, pp. 174-5

¹⁷⁸ Having children is, as Carey comments regarding Bennett’s novels, ‘mysteriously elevating’. Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 171.

place of cultural inspiration and, indeed, the success of suburban authors appears testament to this optimism. And if the example of early-twentieth century middlebrow authors does not convince the intellectuals of suburban literary validity, then, as we have seen, we can turn to one of their own – Julian Barnes – to reinforce the centrality of the clerical novel within the canon. Both Wells and Bennett suggest that the hardship in the city and monotony in the suburb can create a certain kind of artistic energy, without which there would be no inspiration for a literary career. As Nick Rennison says of *Metroland*, ‘this could have been a conventional first novel about clever adolescents making their first onslaughts on the adult world... but it is something more’.¹⁷⁹ This comment on a contemporary re-writing of the suburban novel can be applied to so many of the earlier clerkly novels. For most – Bullock, Bennett, Swinnerton – these are autobiographical first or second novels, and those which were penned by more established writers remain, nonetheless, recognisably reminiscent of the author’s experiences. They do not read as mere autobiography, nor as realist *bildungsroman*. There is a distinct style to these suburban novels that is partly, as we saw in the previous chapter, connected to the internalisation of the ‘non-event’, and partly reflected in the seeming innocuousness of their endings. As Simon James says of Wells’ works, ‘Wells inverts the [*bildungsroman*] genre’s emphasis. Instead of the hero’s wayward desires being corrected by a more morally clear-sighted world, the insufficient world is instead blamed for not fulfilling the more laudable of those desires’.¹⁸⁰ Or, as Merritt Moseley puts it, ‘that this maturing process involves a shrinking of horizons and an acceptance of the ordinary is part of the realism’.¹⁸¹ Moseley is commenting on *Metroland* but this summation fits the conclusions of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, and *A Man from the North* perfectly. It also counters Flint’s suggestions in ‘Fictional Suburbia’ that

¹⁷⁹ Nick Rennison, *Contemporary British Novelists* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 24.

¹⁸⁰ Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity and the End of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 78.

¹⁸¹ Merritt Moseley, *Understanding Julian Barnes* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), p. 18.

While Gissing, Henry James and others were experimenting with inconclusive endings, with themes of unfulfilment, of wrong choices made, of the sadness of middle-aged protagonists forcing a future of nothing certain but its tedium [suburban fiction] maintained the convention of events leading to a happy ending.¹⁸²

Nor are these endings as straightforward as Hapgood's suggestion of a 'closing down of possibility'; they are ultimately about the clerk-author's self-sacrifice – a sacrifice that will result in middle-aged sadness and clerical tedium but which offers their children the cultural and aspirational opportunity to avoid that same clerkly future.¹⁸³ The escape to the suburbs is made for the sake of future generations not the clerk himself. If we saw in the office the need for a mitigation of the internalisation of mechanisation, the suburb offers an answer of sorts. The clerk becomes, once more, a human entity (never more intensely so than in the moment that each becomes a father) in the suburb but he also faces a selfless impulse to turn his back on the fight to leave clerk-hood. The stability and security of the suburban life – earned through the financial safety of a career – meant that the clerk had, once more, to meekly accept the 'money code' and return to the dismal office future. Though this moment marks a noticeable downturn in the clerk's fortune, he could, at least, feel comfortable in the prospect of his annual two-week holiday – the focus of the next chapter. This two-week holiday would allow the clerk to find a space in opposition to his usual existence; that could challenge the usual narrative of urbanity, work, and familial responsibility and which, when translated into literature, demonstrated how far the clerical protagonist could challenge those stereotypes that had formerly held him captive.

¹⁸² Flint, 'Fictional Suburbia', p. 119.

¹⁸³ Hapgood, *Margins of Desire*, p. 72.

Chapter Three: The Ramble

Fly from all the gritty, dirty highways of the City
to forget in pleasant rambles dreary duties of the desk.

‘A Warble for Walberswick’, *Punch* (19 Nov. 1881)

In this final chapter I explore the ramble, the moment at which the clerk sets out from his suburban villa to seek, as Victor Canning’s Mr Finchley expresses it, adventure in the ‘long roads, brown beer and rich hours’.¹ The clerk turns to a rural landscape to satisfy his wanderlust, and so he escapes into the rolling hills and picturesque scenery of England. The rambling clerk has the time and freedom to explore his interest in a broader and even ‘classical’ self-education, replacing his lost ‘schema’, and seeking out a meaningful historical and national identity. This rambling clerk can be found in the novels of Victor Canning, Thomas Hughes, George Gissing, Shan Bullock, H. G. Wells, Francis Brett Young, Jeffery Farnol, and George Orwell. He is also to be found in many non-fictional accounts of rambling written by clerks themselves. Both fiction and non-fiction aim, above all, to convince the reader that the ramble is a life-altering journey which offers freedom from social constraints, personal relationships and an oppressive environment, forging instead, a lasting relationship with a ‘homeland’.

First, though, there must be some clarification of terminology; rambler, in this context, is not the hobby walker, who is generally member of a club and who hikes along trails and footpaths in national parks. The clerk-rambler predates the formalisation of the leisure industry – the late nineteenth-century campaign to get ‘back to the land’ was still in its infancy – and he travelled *alone*.² It should be added

¹ Victor Canning, *Mr Finchley Discovers His England* (London: Pan Books, 1972), p. 213.

² For a detailed history of formal rambling groups and institutions see David Hollett’s *The Pioneer Ramblers, 1850-1940* (North Wales: Ramblers Association, 2002). See also studies by Michael Rosenthal and Wendy Joy Darby for a discussion of working-class pioneers within movements such as the YHA and various ramblers’ associations. Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (London: Collins, 1986), and Darby, *Landscape and Identity: Geographies of Nation and Class in England* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).

that the clerk-rambler was a specifically London-centric phenomenon, and it was the countryside of the South of England to which he escaped, notably during the two-week holiday given to nearly all clerks by the beginning of the twentieth century. Having done this, the clerk was content to ramble freely; as H. V. Morton puts it in 1928, 'I will, in fact, do anything that comes into my head as suddenly and light-heartedly as I will accept anything, and everything, that comes my way in rain or sun along the road'.³ Perhaps, though, it is in a tour through Germany that we find the clearest definition of the English rambler – witness former-clerk Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men on the Bummel* (1900):

'A "Bummel",' I explained, 'I should describe as a journey, long or short, without an end; the only thing regulating it being the necessity of getting back within a given time to the point from which one started. Sometimes it is through busy streets, and sometimes through the fields and lanes; sometimes we can be spared for a few hours, and sometimes for a few days... We nod and smile to many as we pass; with some we stop and talk awhile; and with a few we walk a little way. We have been much interested, and often a little tired. But on the whole we have had a pleasant time, and are sorry when 'tis over'.⁴

This chapter examines, then, representations of the clerk on his *bummel* or ramble in middlebrow novels and anecdotal writings (what Paul Fussell would call 'travel books')⁵ between 1859 and 1940,⁶ a period in which depictions of the countryside of the south of England coincided neatly with a fashionable construction of Englishness. This chapter is both the broadest in terms of chronology and source base, drawing

³ H. V. Morton, *In Search of England* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1933), p. 22.

⁴ Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), p. 207.

⁵ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Travelling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 203.

⁶ While I would like to present the statistical data for the number of guide books written in this period, it is, due to the mass, popular format of these books, difficult to calculate. Personally, the method by which I have come to understand the sheer volume of these guides is in visiting second-hand bookshops across England, and even as far as the northern states of America.

upon rambling narratives/guide-books written by and for the lower-middle-class clerk in addition to many of the novels discussed across the thesis.⁷ Some of the pieces mentioned in this chapter fall simply into the category of factual guide-books but most include such a personal perspective as to blur the lines of distinction between fiction and non-fiction. What is also worthy of note is that in this chapter we temporarily part ways with the modernist clerk. While I suggested, when talking about the office and the suburb, that the middlebrows and the modernists had some shared views on the clerk's experience, the ramble stands alone as a grass-roots (no pun intended) development that was pioneered by ordinary clerks. This is not to say, of course, that there were no expressions of interest in the concepts of ruralism or national identity by the modernists, but rather, that the ramble was, by nature, a movement of specifically the urban lower-middle-classes.⁸ The modernist clerk, it would seem, stayed in the metropolis and perfected the parallel art of *flânerie*. Instead, this chapter charts the spread of rambling (and ramble writing) from clerks to the broader (middle-class) cultural psyche.

In analysing these rambles, it is striking that there are three distinct waves of enthusiasm, and that each represents a stage in the move towards what I see as the idealisation of the Rambler. One year stands out before we recognise these stages of gradual interest – namely, 1859, the year in which the 'Manchester Clerk' published his account of a ramble taken during a fortnight's holiday and Thomas Hughes published his literary memorial to the White Horse monument.⁹ One was anecdotal, the other fictional, but both are illustrative of the vibrant historical appetite for rural

⁷ For clarity, the authors studied shall be divided into three groups: clerks, lower-middle-class authors, and 'outsider' authors. Canning, Farnol, and Jerome were clerks – as were W. Loftie, Cabot (pseud), and the self-titled 'Manchester Clerk'. Orwell, Gissing and Wells enter my discussion not as clerks but as observers of, more widely, lower-middle-class life; this is also true of H. V. Morton and Edward Thomas whose non-fictional accounts will be cited. In the final category stand E. M. Forster, Hughes, Brett Young, and W. H. Hudson, all of whom are middle-class observers that (with the chronological exception of Hughes) follow the trends set by the clerical writers.

⁸ See Alexandra Harris's *Rural Modernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010).

⁹ Manchester Clerk, *A Fortnight's Ramble through some of the more beautiful and interesting counties of Old England* (Manchester: Dunnill, Palmer & Co., 1859) and Thomas Hughes, *The Scouring of the White Horse: or, the long vacation of a London clerk* (London: Macmillan, 1859). These texts will hereafter be referred to as *A Fortnight's Ramble* and *The White Horse*.

England, and both are centred on a clerk – Hughes’s protagonist is Richard Easy, a young clerk. As the nineteenth century came to a close, the clerk-rambler was at the heart of novels by Wells, Gissing, and Jerome, as well as a considerable number of non-fictional travelogues.¹⁰ The second notable peak occurred around 1910, when Farnol, Forster, and Wells (once again) all explored the rambling lower-middle-classes.¹¹ Finally, the fictional rambling clerk re-emerges in 1934 (the same year as J. B. Priestley’s *English Journey*), on the back of a decade of so-called ‘nature writing’ by authors such as Morton, Hudson, Stephen Graham, and Adrian Bell.¹² In the first period, the lower middle classes dominated impressions about the rambler; after Hughes’s account, representations by middle-class authors are not particularly abundant. The second phase – on or around 1910 – is marked by an outpouring of material about the clerkly rambler, and so we see him feature right across middlebrow fiction, in clerkly travelogue,¹³ and in middle-class culture. Finally, in the 1930s, it is a clerk-author who leads the way: Canning’s *Mr Finchley*, a tale by a clerk about a clerk, is published in 1934, quickly followed by Orwell’s *Coming up for Air* (1938) in which Bowling, an insurance salesman, takes off on his own ramble to Lower Binfield. In 1940, Brett Young publishes *Mr Lucton’s Freedom*, which reads as a near

¹⁰ See, for example, Robert Weir Brown, *Kenna’s Kingdom, a Ramble Through Kingly Kensington* (London: David Bogue, 1881); Harry Brittain, *Rambles in East Anglia: or, Holiday Excursions among rivers and Broads* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1890); Mark Knights, *Peeps at the Past: or, Rambles Among Norfolk Antiquities* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1892); John Kirby Hedges, *A Short History of Wallingford: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, to which is added rambles in the neighbourhood* (Wallingford: John Bradford, 1893).

¹¹ As did George Edward Tasker in *Country Rambles...Romford, Hornchurch and Upminster* (Ilford: South Essex Recorders, 1911), Anthony Collett in *Country Rambles round London* (London: Grant Richards, 1912), and J. Charles Cox in *Rambles in Kent* (London: Methuen, 1913).

¹² It could be said that a fourth wave of interest is apparent in contemporary writing; these clerkly authors are, in many ways, the literary forerunners to modern writers such as Roger Deakin, Robert MacFarlane, Kathleen Jamie, Chris Yates, and Jean Sprackland.

¹³ See, for example, Walter Gawthorp, *By London’s City Walls* (London: Homeland Association, 1925) and S. P. B. Mais, *Southern Rambles for Londoners* (London: publisher unknown, 1936). Most of these authors did not produce more than a couple of rambling narratives, and even those who wrote more prolifically tended to focus on a specific locality; for example, Mark Knights wrote at least six guides to Norwich and the surrounding area. The only author who became well-known for his writing was Stuart Petre Mais, a literary critic, educationalist, radio broadcaster, novelist, and travel writer, who latterly earned a living creating commissioned travel pieces. He was a proponent, in many of his works (especially in *See England First* (1927), *This Unknown Island* (1932) and *England’s Pleasance* (1935)), of encouraging city-dwellers to both appreciate and protect the rural environment. Despite an output of more than 200 books, many sold little more than 3,000 copies and none are in print now. Bernard Smith, ‘Mais, Stuart Petre Brodie’, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/46344> [accessed 24.02.2011].

re-writing of Canning's novel, and a work that demonstrates the diffusion of the ramble genre across a broader social spectrum.¹⁴

These three waves will not be treated systematically throughout this chapter; rather I have drawn attention to them now so as to explain that whilst the chronological base of this chapter is, indeed, wide-ranging, the material itself is nonetheless comparable. From this point onwards, however, I will discuss the texts thematically rather than by their position in these three peaks of interest. In doing so, I am compressing history in order to draw attention to the similarities in narrative traits and subject matter. Most important, is, as I suggest, the idea that across this long century, and whenever developments are made, it is the clerk who stands – walking stick in hand – at the gateway to the heart of England and as an iconic figure in the association between the southern rural idyll and the dominant idea of 'Englishness'.

The Rural Tradition

The clerk-rambler was not, of course, the first figure in English literary tradition to idealise rural England. Seeing England as an idyll can be traced as far back as Spenser's 'The Shepheardes Calendar' (1579), Milton's 'Comus' (1634) and, later, Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1849), in all of which Virgilian pastoral and Edenic visions play a major part. In her pioneering study *Wanderlust* (2001), Rebecca Solnit traces the roots of a distinctly English pastoral to the domestic landscape design of the eighteenth century – a landscape that the clerk was naturally socially exempt from. Once the gardens of landowners progressed from formal ordering to rolling, naturalised landscapes, the idea of using this landscape as a space for walking

¹⁴ It is interesting to chart the social progression of these protagonists as middle-class authors appropriated the form – and so, Finchley is a clerk, Bowling is a travelling salesman and Mr Lucton, Brett Young's rambler, is a manager. Regardless of these incremental promotions they all conform to the same character traits.

developed quickly and was adopted as a central motif of the Romantic movement.¹⁵ William Wordsworth, for example, famously employed, ‘his legs as an instrument of philosophy’ and in doing so he witnessed the democratic nature of walking.¹⁶ Across private spaces and open terrain, the appreciation of both landscape and walking became central to English literary culture.¹⁷

For many, of course, the countryside was far from the cities in which they lived and worked, hence the enjoyment of literary accounts of the rural. As Mr Dalglish, Dent’s general editor, commented in 1932,

when lack of leisure and short days, or inclement weather, or illness confine to the arm-chair and the fireside, with the Open-air Library the exhilaration of the wide spaces may still be experienced, and the mind, less trammelled than the body, may wander happily in company with the companion most suited to his mood.¹⁸

By the 1930s, eighty per cent of the English population lived in an urban environment¹⁹ and ‘arm-chair tourism’, as John Taylor calls it, had never been so popular.²⁰ The growth in rural writing at this time was supported, as Malcolm Chase argues, by an ever-growing publishing industry; in fact, as he observes, ‘the opening-up of the publishing market mirrored the opening-up of the countryside itself’.²¹

¹⁵ See Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2001), especially Chapter Six: ‘The Path Out of the Garden’.

¹⁶ This connection between walking and philosophy has always been maintained. See, for example, the works of Rousseau, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 82.

¹⁷ See also the earliest canonical tours of Daniel Defoe and William Cobbett, as well as those of lesser known writers such as William Howitt, all of whom take trips to find the ‘heart’ of England.

¹⁸ *The House of Dent 1888-1938* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938), p. 292.

¹⁹ Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”’: English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 7 (1997), p. 160.

²⁰ Root also talks about an audience of ‘armchair travellers’ for contemporary ‘nonfiction of place’. He suggests that this type of writing is successful if it manages to ‘trigger in the reader who is unfamiliar with the setting a similar sense of having been there, of being able to dwell within that textual place’. John Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist’s Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 4; Robert Root, *Landscapes with Figures: the Nonfiction of Place* (Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska, 2007), p. 1.

²¹ Malcolm Chase, ‘This is no claptrap: this is our heritage’, in Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (eds), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 129.

Because of this, the stories of the clerk-rambler were instrumental in creating a market for rural writing, which was enthusiastically sold to this static, urban readership.

If we briefly summarise developments prior to 1932 and Dalglish's comments we see the expansion of this market. Dent themselves had launched their Open-Air Library featuring popular nature authors such as Hudson, Thomas, Lucas and Jefferies by 1908, their Wayfarer's Library in 1913, and their detailed Everyman's guides to the British counties in 1915.²² By 1926, other publishers had followed suit. G. Bell & Sons created a 'Pocket Guide' series, while Methuen & Co. had a 'Little Guides' range of sixty volumes ('Pocketable Guides to the Counties of England and Wales and to Well-known Districts at Home and Abroad') available at 4s.²³ Longman's 'English Heritage' series began in 1929, and in 1930 Batsford developed an 'English Life' series which included volumes on 'the countryside, Old English household life, inns, villages, and cottages'.²⁴ The pricing of these collections created a readership largely made up of the suburban lower middle classes – the clerical class, if you will.

Coinciding with these publishing developments, the Edwardian period saw the cultivation of a particularly nostalgic construct of rurality defined, as G. E. Mingay suggests, by the term 'countryside' – a term which, as Mingay points out, John Betjeman dubbed "a delightful suburbanism".²⁵ Betjeman suggests, as Dent's editor did, that the English countryside was most appreciated by those who were not immersed in it but who instead could enjoy its beauty and its tranquillity temporarily without facing the hardships of a demanding rural life. During the First World War it was an idealised version of this life which was presented as the 'home' to defend,

²² J. M. Dent produced the Everyman series of guides to England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, which gave detailed descriptions of each county within. By 1929 each book in the Wayfarer's series was priced at 1s. 6d – 'The Wayfarer's Library' in W. H. Hudson, *Afoot in England* (London: J. M. Dent, 1929).

²³ 'A Selection of Messrs. Methuen's Publications', in H. V. Morton, *The Heart of London* (London: Methuen & Co, 1926). In addition, Taylor mentions the Homeland Association publications that began in the 1890s and flourished particularly between 1918-1939 – guides to towns, villages, and seaside resorts that included pictures of local sites ('abbeys, castles, churches, village greens and war memorials'). Taylor, *A Dream of England*, p. 128.

²⁴ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit: 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 73.

²⁵ G. E. Mingay, *The Rural Idyll* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 117.

regardless of the actual environment from which most ordinary soldiers had been enlisted. Everyman's Library even released an anthology of rural writing entitled *The Old Country: a Book of Love and Praise of England* (1917) which was distributed by the YMCA amongst those serving. As Martin Wiener observes, 'the urban and industrial England that was providing the men and materials for the conflict was scarcely noticed; in its place was evoked the England of Alfred Austin and Rupert Brooke'.²⁶ One example Wiener cites is E. V. Lucas's poem 'O England', which sentimentalises "country of my heart's desire, land of the hedgerow and the village spire".²⁷ Morton likewise comments on a 'little London factory hand' who, during the war, 'visualized the England he was fighting for [...] as not London, not his own street, but as Epping Forest, the green place where he had spent Bank Holidays'.²⁸

The nostalgia of Lucas's 'O England' remained an appealing one beyond war-time propaganda, as nature writing encouraged the association of the rural landscape with the concept of the 'English home' throughout the first few decades of the twentieth century. We also see in this period the symbolic merging of the idea of the national 'home' and sentimentally-infused memories of the rural 'holiday'. Witness, for example, Alfred Austin's *Haunts of Ancient Peace* in 1902 which is actually based on a *tour* he had taken through England, in which the heroine seeks 'washing-days, home-made jams, lavender bags, recitation of Gray's *Elegy*, and morning and evening prayers'.²⁹ The 'folk myth of the rural home', which Mandler argues was created in juxtaposition to early-twentieth century urban-ness is underwritten, I would argue, by the clerical ramble. The clerk's two-week holiday was the perfect opportunity to reach out into the English countryside and create memories not only of a bucolic retreat from the hum of the city and the restrictions of the suburb but to engage in the constructions of Englishness.³⁰ Consider, for example, Hudson,

²⁶ Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 63.

²⁷ Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 63.

²⁸ Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 20.

²⁹ Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', p. 167.

³⁰ Again, Edward Thomas, who in his youth felt passionately about his Welsh heritage, 'switched his allegiance to Wiltshire' after reading the works of Richard Jefferies; luckily, 'several of the Thomas

whose sense of England as his 'spiritual country' was based largely on holiday excursions to Somerset, East Anglia and Berkshire.³¹

While the clerk's decision to use his holiday time for rambling appears, at first glance, to be inconsequential, what actually occurred was a period of clerkly reclassification. Upon returning home from a two-week ramble enthused by nature's muse, many clerks attempted to capture the essence of that journey in written form as both a celebration of the experience and a guide for others to follow. The clerk thus became a pioneer in the development of a new genre of literary non-fiction – a form of place writing that fused fiction and non-fiction. By this, I mean that the clerk-rambler-writers took the real rural landscape – identified distinctly by factual references to specific locations – and used it as the inspiration for part-non fictional/ part-autobiographical novels. Many of these works are representative of what Robert Root calls the 'nonfiction of place' – defined as writing in which the 'landscape of the work, [or] the backdrop against which events take place [,] is often foregrounded to such an extent that it is the primary focus for the work'.³² In this way, as Root argues, the boundary between fiction and non-fiction is permeable because whilst the setting drives the story and the character depictions the landscape can ostensibly become the 'fact' of the novel. In both forms of place writing, the onus is on the transmission of a vivid depiction of location that is recognisable both to those familiar with the place and those who have never been or will never see it. The descriptions given of the landscape offer, then, something like the lyrical evocation of place that is associated with the Romantic poets, or, more recently, with the emerging genre of nature writing favoured by contemporary writers such as Roger Deakin, whilst also following certain fictional traits. As one reviewer suggests in *The Montreal Gazette* (1935):

family had [also] moved to work in the Swindon railway yards'. Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: the Pastoral Impulse in England, 1880-1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), p. 31.

³¹ Hudson had been brought up in Argentina by American parents but this did not stop him 'finding a sense of home-coming [...] on the green levels of Somerset and East Anglia, in Berkshire forests, and in small villages as far apart as Gloucestershire and Norfolk'. Hudson, *Afoot in England*, p. 271; Ruth Tomalin, *W. H. Hudson: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 165.

³² Root, *Landscapes with Figures*, p. 1.

All the while Mr Finchley is absorbing all the splendor of the English countryside, is developing a new outlook on life, a broader, kinder and more understanding outlook... It is not the writer's sole aim to picture Mr Finchley as a vagrant wanderer, a sometime smuggler, or the consumer of beer in wayside inns, although of course Mr Finchley is present in the picture: but the picture itself is the English West Country, its busy high roads and its quiet lanes, its running waters and its woods.³³

In 1859, one of the earliest clerical rambles – the Manchester Clerk – writes in a similar style about the rural landscape in his account: ‘descending, in sweet intoxication of delight, we walked on to Chepstow, underneath a long and stately avenue of elms, glorified in the golden sunset; - and in the soft evening light, subdued and reposeful, filled with love of happy England’.³⁴ The Manchester Clerk's piece embodies both poetic and patriotic fashions in rambling-writing as well as directing the reader towards a particular route.

Perhaps the best known of these poetic clerk-ramblers is Forster's Leonard Bast. It is due to this relative fame that it is perhaps wise to deal with Bast first before discussing more unfamiliar (and consequently less well-known) characters. This is also pertinent because Bast plays his part in the genealogy of the clerk-ramble, both as a creation of the 1910 ‘peak’ and as a device for Forster to comment on the genre. Most critics have seen Bast's ramble as further evidence of the limited intellectual capacity of the clerk and the dangers that (sub)urban living had for the deterioration of the national stock. In doing so, they have taken Forster's commentary on Bast's midnight ramble at face value. According to such commentators, the Basterian suburban clerk felt little for the rural (although, it is worth noting that the Manchester clerk lived in the ‘straggling suburbs’) whilst Forster's idealisation of rural labourers

³³ *The Montreal Gazette*, May 4 1935, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1946&dat=19350504&id=iJMuAAAIAIAJ&sjid=FpkFAAAIAIAJ&pg=6818,528357> [accessed on 24.11.11].

³⁴ Manchester Clerk, *Fortnight's Ramble*, p. 32.

is usually read as an unflattering projection of contemporary – and oftentimes modernist – eugenicist thought:

Here men had been up since dawn. Their hours were ruled, not by a London office, but by the movements of the crops and the sun [...] that they were men of the finest type only the sentimentalist can declare. But they kept to the life of daylight. They are England's hope. Half-clodhopper, half board-school prig, they can still throw back to a nobler stock, and breed yeomen.³⁵

Talk of 'nobler stock' engages with contemporaneous eugenics which preached the value of rural life as opposed to a life in the city or suburbs. Charles Masterman, for instance, was particularly critical of the suburban experience, but he was also an advocate of the 'restoration not of a peasantry but of peasant values in the city'.³⁶ Rider Haggard was similarly convinced by the regenerative power of agricultural labour. In his opinion, it was the 'man in the office... who neither toiled nor spun, [who] was the real danger' – as evidenced by the puny clerk who steals Gladys's heart in *The Lost World* (1912).³⁷ His solution was, once more, in the 'recreation of a yeoman class, rooted in the soil and supported by the soil'.³⁸ As Forster likewise suggests in his novel, it is the 'yeoman' class and rural values that offer the best hope of social rejuvenation, and so the novel ends with Bast's illegitimate baby playing in the newly-cropped hay – saved from shame and degeneration by a return to the rural.³⁹

³⁵ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 301.

³⁶ Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', p. 162.

³⁷ Alun Howkins, 'Rider Haggard and rural England: an essay in literature and history', in Chase and Shaw (eds), *The Imagined Past*, p. 84.

³⁸ Howkins, 'Rider Haggard and Rural England', p. 90. Many of Rider Haggard's friends agreed; in 1899 Lord Walsingham, a Norfolk landowner, wrote to him, expressing his views on the matter: 'Look at the pure bred cockney – I mean the little fellow whom you see running in and out of offices in the city, and whose forefathers have for the last two generations dwelt within a two-mile radius of Charing Cross. And look at the average young labourer coming home from his days [sic] field work, and I think you will admit the city breeds one stamp of human beings and the country breeds another... Take the people away from their natural breeding grounds, thereby sapping their health and strength in cities such as nature never intended to be the permanent home of men, and the decay of this country becomes only a matter of time.' Alun Howkins, 'The discovery of rural England', in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 66.

³⁹ A similar fate to that of the motherless clerk's son in George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893).

While this reading of Forster seems straight-forward enough, I would argue that Forster has his clearest moment of empathy for Bast in the latter's desire to be immersed in a natural environment, and not merely for the sake of the race. Consider Bast's description of his ramble:

"Have you ever read *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*?"

Margaret nodded.

"It's a beautiful book. I wanted to get back to the Earth, don't you see, like Richard does in the end. Or have you ever read Stevenson's *Prince Otto*?"

Helen and Tibby moaned gently.

"That's another beautiful book. You get back to the Earth in that. I wanted – " He mouthed affectedly. Then through the mists of culture came a hard fact, hard as a pebble.

"I walked all the Saturday night," said Leonard. "I walked".⁴⁰

Bast's desire to 'get back to the Earth' propels him into a world of twilight rambling across the North Downs in search of something of the beauty that he finds when he reads nature writers such as Jefferies, Henry Thoreau and Robert Louis Stevenson – all heroes of Dent's series. However, most interestingly, and unlike the other clerk-ramblers in this chapter, Bast is not fulfilled by his ramble ('it wasn't what you may call enjoyment').⁴¹

There are, it seems, a number of reason *why* Bast does not enjoy his ramble. In particular, Forster implies Bast is overwhelmed by a literary tradition that suppresses any heartfelt connection with nature. As Jonathan Wild puts it, Bast is 'dazzled by the very beacons that he feels are illuminating his way'.⁴² Thus when Bast cites Lucas's *The Open Road: A Book for Wayfarers* as his inspiration (the 1899 collection of

⁴⁰ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 111.

⁴¹ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 113.

⁴² Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture, 1880-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 113.

poems and other short pieces which offers a romantic and sentimental version of pastoral travel), Forster is dismayed by reliance on a book that has been described by Darby as ‘part of an efflorescence of nostalgia-laden “country” literature’.⁴³ Significant here, though, is Forster’s comment that ‘within [Bast’s] cramped little mind dwelt something that was *greater* than Jefferies’ books – the spirit that led Jefferies to write them’.⁴⁴

Our clerk moves away from the language of degeneration and ‘the abyss’,⁴⁵ to talk instead of the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual revelations that could re-energise and revitalise the suburban commuter, renewing his spirit and helping him face the everyday realities of a clerkly life.⁴⁶ Bast does not achieve the depth of self-reflection that he desires, but many clerks, as this chapter explores, did – these clerks found tranquillity in the act of rambling. It is, perhaps, in Margaret Schlegel’s defence of Bast that we see the ‘spirit’ that Forster alludes to: ‘Let me explain exactly why we like this man [...] Firstly, because he cares for physical adventure [...] Secondly, he cares for something special in adventure. It is quickest to call that special something poetry –’.⁴⁷

The Self-Reflective Clerk

As Marsh suggests, immersion in a natural, rural environment was particularly attractive to those ‘for whom the elaborate social system of conventions and proprieties seemed suffocatingly restrictive, preventing the expression of natural

⁴³ *The Open Road* (1899) featured poems such as Yeats’s ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’, R. L. Stevenson’s ‘The Vagabond’, Walt Whitman’s ‘Song of the Open Road’, Shelley’s ‘Hymn to Pan’, and Tennyson’s ‘A Small Sweet Idyll’. It was still part of Methuen’s series of popular publications in 1926 and sold for 6s. Darby, *Landscape and Identity*, p. 173.

⁴⁴ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 114 – my emphasis added.

⁴⁵ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Marsh talks about the spiritualist overtones to the ‘back-to-the-land’ movement; with the rural landscape acting as a ‘pantheistic substitute for religion’ in a time of declining Christianity and Darwinist science. Marsh, *Back to the Land*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 137 – original emphasis.

feelings and simple pleasures'.⁴⁸ For the clerk, the ramble could become a noticeably poignant expression of the pent-up frustrations of a life of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. Carey argues that many lower-middle-class authors encouraged the exploration of the 'cult of the open road' because it enabled them to be freed from their 'clerkly cares'.⁴⁹ Richard Jefferies's *Open Air* (1908) struck a chord with many of London's workers, as one post-office clerk states; 'We shake the dust of the city from our feet, and turn southward to walk miles of turf and track, to laze in a hay-meadow, to eat sandwiches sitting on the low, rounded wall of an old churchyard'.⁵⁰ The creation of a literary genre that explored the 'open road' and that was based on the work of writers who were of the same class encouraged the idea that an escape could be made, not only from the drudgery of urban life but also from the constraints of social position.

The other, more widely available, opportunity for suburban escape was, of course, the seaside holiday. The clerk and his family were included in the mass-migration to the seaside by the early-twentieth century, and indeed, most clerical novels include a chapter or two spent in a suitably lower-middle-class resort. But, as John Walton, Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard all assert, the seaside reinforced social divisions and accompanied acceptable behaviours, rather than providing an escape from suburban tensions.⁵¹ Mr Finchley, for example, is desperate to visit

⁴⁸ Marsh, *Back to the Land*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ This cult of the open road included not only ramble journals and narratives from this country, but also the wider genre of adventure and empire literature that was prominent in middlebrow literature in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in works by Rider Haggard, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and R. L. Stevenson. For more research on this area see John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), C. E. Gittings (ed), *Imperialism and Gender: Constructions of Masculinity* (New Lambton, N. S. W.: Dangaroo Press, 1996), Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville, VA: Virginia University Press, 2000), Martin Burgess Green, *The English Novel in the Twentieth Century: the Doom of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1984), and Gail S. Clark, 'Imperial Stereotypes: G. A. Henty and the Boys' Own Empire', *Journal of Popular Culture* (1985), 43-51. Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 146.

⁵⁰ Carey, *Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 146.

⁵¹ Arnold Bennett, for example, talks about the 'infestive lower-middle-class folk' that spill out onto the promenade, who offend Larch despite his being one of them: 'Richard forgot that he himself was a clerk, looking not out of place in that scene'. Nigel Morgan and Annette Pritchard, *Power and Politics at the Seaside: The Development of Devon's Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), p. 29; Bennett, *A Man from the North*, p. 165.

Margate for his first holiday before he gets drawn into rambling. The reality of the sea-side holiday – experienced when he lingers for two days in St Ives – does not fulfil Finchley because he feels pressured by social convention. As G. K. Chesterton glibly puts it in *Heretics*, ‘if, as he expresses it, he goes to Ramsgate “for a change”, then he would have a much more romantic and even melodramatic change if he jumped over the wall into his neighbour’s garden.’⁵²

When Aldous Huxley likewise comments on the insipid nature of lower-middle-class tourism in *Along the Road* (1925), he is analysing the typically emulative and inauthentic behaviour of a class he believes gain very little from travel: ‘they travel, not for travelling’s sake, but for convention’s’, he writes, ‘they set out, nourished on fables and fantastical hopes, to return, whether they avow it or not, disappointed’.⁵³ Huxley falls into making the same mistake as Forster; he assumes that a class who are neither cognizant with the rural landscape nor educated enough to read it ‘properly’ cannot have a meaningful connection with it. There is, of course, a hint of Wordsworthian exclusivity here; as neither the tithed labourer, nor the middle-class poet, the clerk has no place but as a tourist trespasser. The clerical *rambler*, however, offers a very different narrative. Whilst at the beginning of his tale he is haunted by the dissatisfaction that comes from a strict social code, by the end the clerk has achieved a depth of connection with the pastoral South that makes him much more than a mere observer. He returns, not disappointed, but having experienced a ‘romantic’ change in perspective that shapes his future in the suburban environment.

This transformation is most noticeable in the later fictional works as the post-war nostalgia for the southern landscape comes to its peak. If we consider, for instance, Canning’s *Mr Finchley Discovers His England* (1934) and Francis Brett Young’s *Mr Lucton’s Freedom* (1940), we see that the clerk has to un-learn a whole set of clerkly habits before he can become a rambler. When we first meet Mr Finchley he is sunning himself on a bench; as the owner of a new Bentley drives up, Finchley is

⁵² G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: John Lane Co., 1919) [electronic version], p. 61.

⁵³ Aldous Huxley, *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), p. 9.

very much a clerk – he is the ‘neatly clad, harmless-looking little man’ whom the driver decides to entrust with keeping an eye on his precious car. When said car is stolen – with poor Finchley dozing on the backseat – the reality that he has become caught up with a member of the criminal classes offends his clerical sensibilities. Significantly, this is the point at which he becomes a rambler, as he first steals another car and then abandons it:

He could, of course, drive the car into the country and leave it, or even manoeuvre it into the river. He could give it away or abandon it in the car park. But all these solutions appeared to lack stability and neatness. He was a tidy man and to leave a car lying about a main road or cul-de-sac or blocking up a river... well, it was not done and *all the clerk in him* was opposed to the idea.⁵⁴

The fact, then, that he *does* abandon the car (in the middle of the country) is a measure of just how *un-clerkly* Finchley the ‘rambler’ is.

Following Canning’s lead, when Francis Brett Young wrote *Mr Lucton’s Freedom* in the late 1930s, his titular businessman-turned-rambler is taken, at first, for a bank robber because he is spotted in a country pub with a hundred pound note. Lucton, who left his impressive suburban home in North Bromwich for an evening drive in his brand new Pearce-Tregaron motor-car, carries with him an envelope containing ‘two thousand four hundred and twenty-six pounds’ exactly – the proceeds of selling the small home that he has lived in for twenty years. Lucton has risen to the position of manager for a company that he started out in as junior clerk and thus the emotional turmoil he experiences on the sale of his former house symbolises his unwanted rise into the middle-classes proper. Driving through a small ford in a thunderstorm and consequently crashing, Lucton realises that he is lost some miles from home. At that point, having been ‘dislodged from the safe rut in which he was running’, Lucton decides to fake amnesia and not return to North Bromwich. He plans

⁵⁴ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 49 – my emphasis added.

to survive on the money in his pocket but when he produces the envelope stuffed with hundred pound bills in order to settle for a pub supper, the barman suspects criminal activity and threatens to call the police. Not wanting to explain himself and risk having to cut his impromptu ramble short, Lucton charges out of the pub before he can be arrested:

[...] now that he came to look back upon the escapade, he knew he had enjoyed himself. It was a primitive, physical triumph: for the first time since the war he had proved the superiority of his wits and his limbs. After twenty years of smug respectability, he, Owen Lucton – whom the policemen on duty in Sackville Row saluted [...] – had run from the powers of the Law like a pickpocket and thereby satisfied some suppressed, mysterious craving for adventurous action.⁵⁵

Like Finchley, Lucton is inspired by his brush with the law, which seems to offer the hope of a freer existence; unbound by the constraints of respectability, they can both engage as never before with the countryside. That night Lucton sleeps, for the first time, in a barn where, upon waking, he becomes aware of a deep change: ‘though his limbs were slightly stiff from unwonted strains and exertions, there was even in them a feeling of ease and lightness, as though the very blood that ran through them had been cleansed’.⁵⁶

Finchley also experiences rapid physical change once exposed to the countryside, ‘a country that was unknown to him as Tibet’:

He cherished the unnatural contention of civilization that it was wrong to bathe without a costume. But the water called to him potently, and his collar gripped him like a warm pad about the neck. Why shouldn’t he bathe? And having asked himself the question he could find no adequate objection save in his own cowardice. Was he

⁵⁵ Francis Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom* (London: The Book Club, 1941), p. 86.

⁵⁶ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 88.

afraid? The debate within himself lasted five minutes. He looked about for a spot to undress and, a few minutes later, stepped from the rear of a blackthorn as naked as the day of his birth. To any observer the pallid white of his flesh might have proved a discordant element in the harmonies of blue and gold and brown. Mr Finchley was not worrying about observers.⁵⁷

Here Finchley is at one both with nature, and with himself, in a way which the reader assumes can never have happened in the past ten years spent working in a solicitor's office. Part way through his adventures, and after he has been rambling for a few days, Finchley is asked to fill in for a missing side-show worker. His response betrays his clerkly habit of mind: 'Mr Finchley gasped. Become a guy in a third-rate side-show! He, Edgar Finchley, solicitor's clerk! He looked down at his clothes. Did he look so disreputable? Did he look so very much like a tramp?'⁵⁸

This first mention of tramp-Finchley, as opposed to clerk-Finchley, is a significant moment. At the outset of the ramble, Finchley wants to enjoy himself, connect with nature, and experience a form of physical freedom, but he wants to do so whilst retaining an aura of respectability. This 'respectable' or partial engagement with rural life is challenged but not overridden (a peasant baker contradicts Finchley's statement that 'it must be great to lead an open-air life' with a curt 'you city folk who only see the country in the summer wouldn't like it in the winter')⁵⁹ until Finchley meets a roaming parson. This parson listens to Finchley's tales of rambling but criticises the so-called adventure on the grounds that Finchley has always hidden behind the safety of his wallet. He suggests that, for Finchley to really forge a lasting connection with the landscape, he 'must be penniless and ready to work for [his] food

⁵⁷ Note, that Lucton also has a moment of bathing in the early stages of his ramble: 'The still water looked so cool and inviting that, but for its shallowness, he would have been tempted to undress and lie down in it; but, in addition to being bulky, Mr Lucton was modest; and the voice he had heard in the next field, if only a carter's, warned him that haymakers were near. So he contented himself with stripping to the waist, scrubbing his hands with wet sand, and sousing his head in the pool'. Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 53; Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 90.

⁵⁸ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 60.

before [he can] understand the spirit which keeps these people wandering and living'.⁶⁰ The parson adds that 'to appreciate their love of the countryside, of this England, you have to see it as they do, as the country which gives them food, shelter and friendship'. This overtly idealised vision of the life of the rural poor nonetheless acts as a spur not only to Finchley but to a wider array of clerical figures, fictional and otherwise. One of the first scenes that Lucton admires after his car crash in *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, for example, is that of 'slow rustic human shapes' amid the 'cottages of Cotswold stone and luminous half-timber', 'an old man, hobbling home on a stick [and] a woman, wearing a sun-bonnet, carrying buckets of milk or water attached to a yoke'. These figures simply add to the 'village's mysterious enchantment' as well as to the obviously Romantic influences on the clerk's imagination.⁶¹

These idealised rural characters form as much a part of the scene as the landscape does. The country tramp or vagrant, in particular, is a reoccurring character frequently encountered by the clerk-rambler. This tramp-figure, to whom the roaming parson alludes, becomes the unequivocal figure-head of this image of rural Englishness. The hardships of a life exposed to the elements and dependent on the generosity of strangers is carefully avoided; instead, the reader is presented with a vibrant and bountiful culture of living off the land. Even Hudson, ardent nature-lover and prolific travel writer, describes a 'genial ruffian' in this way:

On a hot June morning near Lewes he met a 'genial ruffian' just out of gaol, swinging along with a bunch of yellow flag irises in his coat: he must indeed have been happy and seen all familiar things with a strange magical beauty in them.⁶²

As Marsh argues, the figure of the tramp is often evocative of the ideology that 'the savage may no longer be noble, but he has a mythical contentment not known to the

⁶⁰ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 113.

⁶¹ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 75.

⁶² Tomalin, *W. H. Hudson*, p. 173.

rest of us'.⁶³ In many ways the tramp is portrayed as nature's aristocrat – living off the abundant produce of the earth, connecting with the seasonal variations, and free from responsibilities. Indeed, clerk-characters like Finchley, as well as writers such as Hudson, imbue the tramps that they meet with a higher, almost spiritual connection with nature.

As Solnit comments, the terms 'tramp', 'vagabond' and 'gypsy' were 'popular among the walking writers' and, indeed, very often the clerical walker-writer desires, it seems, to emulate the tramp, if only for the duration of the ramble. *Mr Finchley* itself begins with a quotation from the Youth Hostel Association Handbook, which states: '[clerks] will make wonderful discoveries in their own country and, once they have tasted the pleasures of this vagabondage, they will return to it again and again'.⁶⁴ These words, as well as the characters he meets, encourage Finchley to 'have a go' at tramping – he sends his possessions and money ahead of him and samples a life of odd-jobs and occasional pay, albeit knowing that he only has to make it thirty miles to Exeter to be assured of his belongings and a hot meal. Again, Peter Vibart, protagonist of Farnol's Regency-set ramble, *The Broad Highway* (1910), sets out on his walking tour, determined to 'turn [his] hand to some useful employment', such as digging, once his money runs out.⁶⁵ He has, however, the comfort of knowing that his wealthy friend Sir Richard will assist should the need ever arise, just as Mr Lucton, the company partner, knows he has only to contact his family or associates in order to receive financial aid.

Solnit argues that 'to play at tramp or gypsy is one way of demonstrating that you are not really one'.⁶⁶ This is indisputable, of course; however, in becoming a Rambler, the clerk was attempting to achieve some kind of classlessness that would free him, for the duration at least, from his carefully restricted place in society. And so, Finchley even begins to look like a tramp during his ramble:

⁶³ Marsh, *Back to the Land*, p. 246.

⁶⁴ <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/wordscape/canning/finch1.html> [accessed on 28/08/2011].

⁶⁵ Jeffery Farnol, *The Broad Highway* (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1910), p. 16.

⁶⁶ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 124.

At that time he was in need of a wash; there was a two days' growth of beard on his chin, a rent in the seat of his grey trousers caused by a projecting nail in the [boat's] boards, bacon fat and cocoa stains down his jacket front, and the upper of his right shoe was working away from its sole.⁶⁷

He reverts, at the end of the novel, to a neatly dressed clerk, in order to survive the realities of the office and the strict dress-code demanded by his housekeeper. The clerk was not, however, simply playing at middle-class tramp-fancier; he is organically forging a connection with working-class ruralism that lasts longer than his holiday – harking without cynicism, if you will, back to his 'yeoman roots'.

The appeal of the tramp, it should be noted, is in his splendid isolation.⁶⁸ Indeed, the tramps whom Finchley meets when he spends a night on a poor ward are celebrated for their refusal to become a collective. They are, he remarks, 'very sullen and morose men, moving with a quiet sullenness and making no gesture of friendship'.⁶⁹ Likewise, the clerks rarely join with others in rambling; though they may meet companions on the road (and not just tramps), they enjoy their company only briefly and then part. See, for example, Finchley's short-lived friendships with a colourful bunch of characters also seeking the 'open road' – including show-man Shorty, philosophiser Ignatius, gypsy Ernst, aristocrat Mr Woodall, John the Artist, Scout-master-clerk Michael Grady (who is an emblem of the orchestrated 'back to the land' movement, giving up his two-week holiday to take scouts into the countryside), and smuggler Captain Pitt.

Walking is, by its very nature, I suggest, an act of classlessness; 'even now', as American scholar Solnit writes, 'English people tell me that walking plays so profound a role in English culture in part because it is one of the rare classless arenas

⁶⁷ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 250.

⁶⁸ Melanie Tebbutt argues that the trend towards individualism (and away from urban capitalism) saw the Northern clerk-ramblers as 'fugitive[s] from materialism'. Tebbutt, 'Rambling and Manly Identity in Derbyshire's Dark Peak, 1880s-1920s', *The Historical Journal*, 49, 4 (2006), p. 1149.

⁶⁹ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 152.

in which everyone is roughly equal and welcome'.⁷⁰ It is easy to draw parallels, as many have done, between the nature of walking and the ideology of socialism, and the history of rural walking does indeed boast many connections with Socialist philosophy: from Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England* (1894), Ruskin and Morris's enthusiasm for open-air life and the Sheffield Clarion Ramblers (1900-present) to land-rights activist Terry Howard's itinerary of trespass walks.⁷¹ *The Clarion*, indeed, becomes, as Howkins suggests, 'less socialist and more ruralist during the second decade of the twentieth century'.⁷² This is reflected in the clerk's ramble if only because, as Lowenthal suggests, the English enjoyment of walking has always been an activity that, unusually for a nation so obsessed with class, 'transcends class boundaries'.⁷³ And once the clerk discovers, as Finchley does, 'his' England, his consciousness of class recedes. Note, for example, how Finchley goes from being a 'taxpayer [and] a ratepayer' to spending a Bank Holiday on a casual ward because he is genuinely mistaken for a tramp:

[T]o spend a night in a casual ward was hardly a nice act. What would Mrs Patten and Sprake and... He stopped himself in time... damn them! Fate, luck, something had led him to the place, he told himself, just to see whether he would be afraid. To the porter's amazement, he chuckled suddenly and stepped forward.⁷⁴

The 'Manly' Clerk

I have to-date studied the clerk in the office and in the suburban home – two sites in which the masculinity of the clerk was put under pressure – now, as I study him on the

⁷⁰ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 112.

⁷¹ Terry Howard is a campaigner and chair of the Sheffield Ramblers Association. Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 164.

⁷² Howkins, in Colls and Dodd (eds), *Englishness*, p. 78.

⁷³ David Lowenthal and Hugh Price, 'The English Landscape', *Geographical Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (July 1964), p. 343.

⁷⁴ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, pp. 148-149.

ramble, I am conscious of how very masculine the clerk appears to be. This is, in many ways, because the ramble enabled the clerk to prove he was not a ‘flabby bodie[d] sedentary city dweller’.⁷⁵ Tebbutt’s recent article on rambling and masculine identity argues that for the *northern* clerk – described as ‘priggish, [with an] “effeminate” emphasis on duty, self-improvement, moral propriety and “puritan self-denial”’ – rambling clubs in the Dark Peaks were crucial as a physically challenging, ‘re-masculating’ environment.⁷⁶ For the *southern* clerk, however, the ramble is more complex in terms of gendering. As Tebbutt asserts, the ‘softer, domesticated southern landscapes’ were not the most obvious scene for robust acts of explicitly male physicality.⁷⁷ These were, of course, landscapes which had been shaped and contoured by centuries of agriculture; fertile, welcoming and, in the summer time, when most rambles were taken, places of abundance. Consider, for example, the scenery in Hughes’s very early ramble, *The White Horse* (1859):

By the time we got past Wormwood Scrubbs (which looked so fresh and breezy with the gossamer lying all over it), I could think of nothing else but the country and my holiday [...] How I did enjoy the pretty hill with the church at top and the stream at the bottom by Hanwell, and the great old trees about half a mile off on the right before you get to Slough, and the view of Windsor Castle, and crossing the Thames at Maidenhead, with its splendid weeping willows [...] And then all the corn-fields, though by this time most of them were only stubble, and Reading town, and the great lasher at Pangbourn, where the water was rushing and dancing through the sunlight to welcome me into Berkshire.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ This does not mean that female clerks did not ramble at all – after the development of the YHA, as well as later rambling and hiking clubs, memberships were increasingly made up of lower-middle-class young women as well as men. Huxley, *Along the Road*, p. 242.

⁷⁶ This is Tebbutt’s summation of popular satire. Tebbutt, ‘Rambling and Manly Identity’, pp. 1137–1138.

⁷⁷ Tebbutt, ‘Rambling and Manly Identity’, p. 1134.

⁷⁸ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 22.

There is evidence here of a landscape that not only has been recently harvested but has had visible inhabitation for many centuries; the contrast between the ecological ('the great old trees'), the historical (Windsor Castle) and the developed (in the towns of Slough and Reading), draws the reader's attention to the layering of the scene which has drawn clerk Richard Easy towards Berkshire for his holiday. It is a far cry from the craggy outlooks and mountainous wilderness of the rural north:

First I went into the flower-garden, and watched and listened to the bees working away so busy in the mignonette, and the swallows darting up into their nests under the eaves, and then diving out again, and skimming away over the great pasture; and then round the kitchen-garden, and into the orchard where the trees were all loaded with apples and pears, and so out into a stubble-field at the back, where there were a lot of young pigs feeding and playing queer tricks, and back through the farm-yard into the great pasture, where I lay down on the grass, under one of the elms, and lighted my pipe; and thought of our hot clerks' room, and how Jem Fisher and little Neddy were working away there.⁷⁹

A more idyllic farm-house scene can hardly be imagined, and yet, Richard does not partake in the agricultural reality – an easily identifiable site of masculine energy – but lazes in the sun, later indulging his thirst for knowledge about the White Horse by striking up conversations with elderly labourers and locals.⁸⁰

Mr Lucton also finds his spontaneous ramble soothing when viewed in contrast to the strains of office life ('In all his life he had seen no surroundings that seemed better suited for the soothing of jangled nerves, the calming of turbulent

⁷⁹ Hughes, *The White Horse*, pp. 20-21.

⁸⁰ Indeed, bad weather rarely occurs in the rambles – they are instead romantic accounts of beautiful weather. This is not the case in the city, where mysterious fog, rain, and greyness pervade. Even the summer storm that causes Lucton to crash his car at the beginning of the story is representative of his own business tensions rather than the fault of his surroundings.

emotions, the solving of vexatious problems in an atmosphere of true tranquillity') but, unlike Richard, he does engage in farm work:⁸¹

Mr Lucton found this novel exercise superbly exhilarating. It involved every muscle in his arms and loins and torso. He had discarded his coat and his collar and turned up his shirt-sleeves; his body rejoiced in an unaccustomed freedom from the restrictions of civilized clothing, almost as if it had suddenly been freed and come to life. The men worked in silence, but his ears were full of pleasant sound: the soft swish of the hay through the air, Ted Tibberton's muffled stamping, the jingle of harness of the patient horses.⁸²

There is, I suggest, a certain maleness foregrounded in this hay-making scene, with the clerk-rambler thus having his own masculinity underlined. This happens again in Canning's *Mr Finchley*, largely as an effect of the feminisation of the landscape:

The light of morning came sprouting over the *bare shoulders* of the downs, tipping the long ridge with golden lines and throwing great pools of black and grey shadows across the plain. Slowly the broad scarp-faces quickened into a green life that caught at the wavering light and held it fast to the *breast* of the earth. The sun tipped the edge of the hills in a blazing *tiara* and every copse and thicket, each barn and cottage, sprang into a bold relief.⁸³

Finchley here becomes the male voyeur, surveying a sexualised landscape. It should be noted that Finchley has just rescued Jane, a young damsel in distress – she is sleeping in the car while he appreciates this scene, and when he returns to her, he

⁸¹ Interestingly, Lucton describes the work as 'the sense of unburdened ease that accompanies a mechanical task in which no effort of thought is involved [which] spread over his mind a soft glow of contentment'. This suggests that the mechanisation which we saw in the office chapter is a comparatively unnatural and restrictive act, rather than the easy rhythms of manual labour. Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 95.

⁸² Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, pp. 94-5.

⁸³ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 43.

carries honeysuckle for her lapel. The height of Finchley's clerkly and cautious approval of Jane is when he refers to her as a 'nice girl [...] who would make some lucky man a good wife one day'.⁸⁴ Given all this, it is no surprise that Finchley's masculinity is well to the fore by the end of the novel: 'Beneath his dirty, scrubby face, however, there was a healthy tan, and the long lines under his eyes were from dirt alone, he was leaner, though still stout, and the tonsure round his brown head was turning golden with the bleaching action of the sun'.⁸⁵

In *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, the rambler is again positioned as masculine by a feminised landscape: the 'face of the earth', we read, was 'more lovely, more friendly and more familiar' than the 'town-bred women [who] were apt to be anxious and peevish'.⁸⁶ For Lucton, this gentle and welcoming femininity of the landscape offers comfort that his seemingly uncaring wife will not.⁸⁷ Thus the scene which Brett Young makes most overtly sensual, is one in which Lucton feels most accepted:

To Lucton's eyes the scene of that tired returning appeared strangely beautiful: the big meadow cleared of its haycocks now, lay naked and luminous in a mild light that seemed nearer the moon's light than the sun's...⁸⁸

The feminisation of the landscape acts as a reminder of the deliberate exclusion of women from these clerkly-rambles. In most accounts of the ramble, the clerk is portrayed as having gleefully left his wife behind – the ramble being as much about an escape from marriage as it is from society more widely. For example, at the beginning of Jerome's fictionalised bicycle tour, *Three Men on the Bummel*, his characters deliberate on the best approach to subtly leaving their womenfolk behind so that they can have a proper holiday (on the grounds that 'unbroken domesticity cloy[s]

⁸⁴ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 46.

⁸⁵ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 250.

⁸⁶ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, pp. 54, 89.

⁸⁷ It is suggested that while Lucton was a prisoner of war, his wife nursed, and consequently fell in love with, a soldier who later died.

⁸⁸ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 97.

the brain’).⁸⁹ Again, Mr Brogden, George Gissing’s city clerk in *A Freak of Nature, or, Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (1899), though drained by his work, is finally prompted to set off on his ramble, not because of the office, but by his wife:

One Saturday evening, when Mrs Brogden was discussing a grocer’s bill, he suddenly experienced the strangest sensation. His brain seemed to rotate, and he clutched the table to prevent his body from likewise going round. Then a quivering fell upon his limbs, and his teeth chattered.

‘Stop! Please stop!’ he exclaimed, staring half wrathfully, half fearfully, at his wife.⁹⁰

Yet again in George Orwell’s *Coming up for Air* (1938), when George Bowling takes his ill-gotten gambling gains and slips away to his childhood home, Lower Binfield, he is deliberately abandoning his wife:

I get a fortnight’s holiday a year, generally in August or September. But if I made up some suitable story – relative dying of incurable disease, or something – I could probably get the firm to give me my holiday in two separate halves. Then I could have a week to myself before Hilda knew what was happening. In May, for instance, when the hawthorn was in bloom.⁹¹

Part of Bowling’s justification for this abandonment is the belief that wedded bliss is, in fact, long lost. This is repeated in *Mr Lucton’s Freedom* when Lucton toys with the idea of not returning home after his evening drive and reasons that it will not make much difference either way: “‘On a long summer evening like this it doesn’t matter a

⁸⁹ Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel*, p. 7.

⁹⁰ Mrs Brogden is also somewhat unsympathetic when her husband sneaks out of the house one evening to go for a walk. Her response is to ‘remonstrat[e] with him for a full hour [because] to her the unusual was presumably the improper’. George Gissing, *A Freak of Nature, or, Mr Brogden, City Clerk* (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1990), pp. 24, 26.

⁹¹ George Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 175-6.

damn how late I come home – not that it'd [sic] matter all that much," he smiled rather grimly, - "if I never came home at all."⁹² His speculation, it seems, is correct; while Lucton is away his son simply fills his place by running the office, and his wife and daughter leave for a sunbathing holiday on the Riviera. The reader never hears of their response to either his disappearance, or return.

For Finchley, Canning's unmarried clerk, two further female figures enter the narrative. The first is an officious landlady, Mrs Pattern, who takes the place of the wife in presenting the spectre of feminine control. In the early stages of his ramble, and before he fully relaxes, Finchley continues to measure his behaviour and appearance by the standards of Mrs Pattern: '[his clothes were] not dry as Mrs Pattern understood that word'.⁹³ However, once he returns home, he is empowered by the knowledge that he has lived rough, and in a manner that would have shocked and appalled Mrs Pattern. The second, fleeting glimpse of potential matrimonial bliss takes the form of former-client Mrs Crantell, whom Finchley, by chance, encounters at St Ives. Despite being attracted to the widow, he leaves St Ives and Mrs Crantell behind because the seaside holiday (and competition for Mrs Crantell's attention from Mr Henry Fadewaite) bores and frustrates Finchley. He feels more comfortable on the road. For Finchley, the ramble involves an element of freedom from the strict confines of domesticity, and the same may be said of Lucton, who calls himself 'a *fugitive* from the ties of family life'.⁹⁴ The rambler-clerk seems, indeed, to be taught to escape family life even before marriage – by the early twentieth century, increasing numbers of young, single clerks are being encouraged to ramble. In the preface to his ramble, for example, the 'Manchester Clerk' suggests that, 'young men in our large towns' would cease to go on 'ten or fourteen days in "Trips" to over-crowded sea-side towns' if they knew how 'readily a more enlarged and healthy enjoyment may be experienced [...] in cleanly, inviting, quiet, village Inns'.⁹⁵ Despite his suggestion, few young

⁹² Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 52.

⁹³ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 102.

⁹⁴ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 102 – my emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Manchester Clerk, *A Fortnight's Ramble*, p. 1.

bachelors took the Manchester Clerk's advice immediately, with rambling only really becoming a popular leisure pastime in the Edwardian period. By this time encouraging young office workers to ramble was demonstrative, as we have seen, of post-Boer War fears about the physical health of the urban mass, but it also represented a change in the perception of the ramble itself. Here, we return again to our three peaks of rambling interest; for if late-Victorian middle-aged clerks were escaping from cloying suburbia, and Edwardian youngsters were countering popular representations of clerks as feminised, the inter-war clerks saw rambling, once more, as a welcome departure from the re-domestication of society. It is no accident that many clerks were involved in shaping the YHA movement.

Having said all this, it should be acknowledged that female enchantresses are occasionally encountered on the ramble. Finchley, as we have seen, meets young Jane, and not-very-young Mrs Crantell during the course of his ramble, though neither have a clear or lasting impact. Richard Easy falls in love with his friend's sister, Lucy, in *The White Horse*, but he returns to London alone and doubtful as to whether or not he will see her again; like *Mr Finchley*, the novel ends on a note of suspense.⁹⁶ As another instance, Mr Lucton, who is married, falls for a young female hiker with a dazzling smile. Whilst they merely pass each other on a path in the early stages of the novel, they shelter together on a foggy hilltop towards the end of Lucton's ramble. The girl, Diana Powys, is in a state of distress because she has fallen out with her hiker-poet-boyfriend, and Lucton both comforts and advises her, rekindling, in the process, *not* a romantic interest but the paternal bond which he feels has been lost with his own daughters. Diana disappears from the mountain before Lucton wakes, and in the end he dismisses her as a youthful menace: 'girls like her are a public danger'.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Despite Richard's lengthy conversation with his friend Joseph on the practicalities of marriage between himself and Lucy, to which her brother consents, we never hear Lucy's opinion of the union, and Richard gets the train home. Mrs Crantell is not mentioned once Finchley leaves St Ives, until the final page of the novel when we read that cryptically 'Mrs Crantell's spectacle case which he had kept since their parting at Land's End was no longer in his rucksack when Mrs Pattern discovered it on top of the wardrobe that same Saturday morning'. Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 252.

⁹⁷ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 227.

Likewise, Finchley chastises runaway Jane as a ‘saucy minx’.⁹⁸ These women are, then, important figures with the ramble but, in the end, they do not jeopardise the homosociality of the ramble.

In Wells’ *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900), there is a chapter titled ‘The scandalous ramble’, in which Lewisham meets Ethel on a lonely lane and takes her across Immering Common; indeed, by the end of their ramble – which flaunts the curfews given to both – they are ‘full of their discovery of love’.⁹⁹ The relationship goes beyond an encounter to become an ill-fated marriage, in which the rural landscape plays a major part, as does Greek mythology:

They struck boldly across the meadows, which were gay with lady’s-smock, and he walked, by special request, between her and three matronly cows – feeling as Perseus might have done when he fended off the sea-monster.¹⁰⁰

Lewisham is overwhelmed by the idyllic setting (‘that spring was wonderful, young leaves beautiful, bud scales astonishing things, and clouds dazzling and stately!’), projecting his amorous euphoria onto the landscape. The ramble, then, here makes a ‘man’ of Lewisham – and it has much the same effect on Finchley who develops a ‘healthy tan’, grows ‘leaner’, and develops a ‘golden’ tonsure.¹⁰¹ Mr Lucton undergoes a similar experience; indeed, after only one night of rambling he feels a changed man: ‘No sooner had he opened his eyes than he was wide awake, and not merely awake but as thrillingly alert and alive as though, during that dreamless sleep, he had actually grown younger’.¹⁰² In this instance rambling has provided a physical impossibility – a rejuvenating sense of youthfulness – that Mr Lucton attributes largely to the removal of middle-class, suburban comforts such as rich food, expensive wine, and the post-dinner cigar and port. By the end of the novel, and as he returns to

⁹⁸ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 48.

⁹⁹ H. G. Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (London: Odhams Press, 1900), p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Wells, *Love and Mr Lewisham*, p. 35.

¹⁰¹ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 250.

¹⁰² Brett Young, *Mr Lucton’s Freedom*, p. 88.

North Bromwich, Lucton is a ‘much better-looking man than when he had last worn [his suits]’.¹⁰³

Insofar as the clerk was stereotypically aligned with particularly feminine traits (working indoors, overly domestic, characteristically plagued by ill-health), the ramble creates a clerk who is healthier, more vigorous and enthused by an open-air existence. In short, the clerk-rambler is very much a *masculine* figure. As Finchley muses after a few adventures, ‘he was Edgar Finchley; he was a man.’¹⁰⁴ Finchley continues: ‘He was no timid clerk. He had mixed with crooks and bested them. He had lazed in the sun and loved its heat on his skin. He had fought with his fists, fought like a wild-cat, and won...’¹⁰⁵

An English Heritage

Outwardly, as we have seen, the ramble was a period of reinvigoration, but this was not the only way in which the clerk progressed. The ramble was also an intellectual pursuit; note how we read of the ‘expansion [...] taking place in [Finchley’s] mind’.¹⁰⁶ There was, in fact, a widespread sense that the ramble provided the clerk with not only a chance to become a ‘man’ but also an opportunity to engage with history and culture. This is very obvious when, in *The History of Mr Polly* (1910), Wells’ ‘three P’s’ – the trainee drapers Polly, Platt, and Parsons – take long Bank Holiday walks in the countryside:

There is no countryside like the English countryside for those who have learned to love it; its firm yet gentle lines of hill and dale, its ordered confusion of features, its deer parks and downland, its *castles* and *stately homes*, its farms and ricks and great

¹⁰³ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton’s Freedom*, p. 341.

¹⁰⁴ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 58

¹⁰⁵ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁶ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 159.

barns and *ancient* trees, its pools and ponds and shining threads of rivers, its flower-starred hedgerows, its orchards and woodland patches, its village greens and kindly inns.¹⁰⁷

As is clear here, the countryside is, for the clerkly Rambler, entangled with history – castles, stately homes, and ancient trees. Morton makes this even more explicit in his non-fictional piece *In Search of England* (1928) where he declares:

I will shake up the dust of kings and abbots; I will bring the knights and the cavaliers back to the roads, and, once in a while, I will hear the thunder of old quarrels at earthwork and church door.¹⁰⁸

As John Rutherford notes, the ramble can be seen within the context of a more general Edwardian interest in the ‘rediscover[y]’ of rural England that could recreate the ‘old country’ and thus re-establish ‘political shape and meaning to Englishness’.¹⁰⁹ And, as George Bourne comments in *Lucy Bettesworth* (1913), it was, in particular, the *south* of the country which was ‘suggestive of the sturdy rural life [and] inseparable from England’s romantic history’.¹¹⁰ There are three crucial points which I shall make, then, in this section: first, that the clerk-Rambler wanted to engage with landscape history; second, that his concept of this ‘history’ was inextricably linked to national identity; and third, that this identity was geographically very specific.

That the clerk wanted to learn from his ramble and discover something of the local and national heritage is mirrored by the books he tended to read – Richard Church, for example, is encouraged by his brother to read John Addington Symonds’s

¹⁰⁷ Wells, *The History of Mr Polly* (London: Collins, 1969), p. 22 – my emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ John Rutherford, *Forever England: Reflections on Masculinity and Empire* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), p. 51.

¹¹⁰ George Bourne, ‘Extract from *Lucy Bettesworth*’, in *The Open Air*, ed. by Adrian Bell (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 243.

History of the Renaissance.¹¹¹ Bast, as we have already seen, not only reads Ruskin but also studies other contemporary celebrations of rural life by such as Jefferies, Stevenson, and Thoreau. Again, Lucton frequently cites both Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1485) and A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). As Wiener suggests, placing the rural subject in a 'long historical frame' reinforced the rural memory of a nation that was becoming predominantly city-based.¹¹² The ramble offered, therefore, an encounter with the past that could, in many ways, *counter* the uncertainty of the present. Witness, for instance, the reassuring classical and medieval information detailed in *A Fortnight's Ramble*, Hughes's *The White Horse*, and Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* (1889), each of which betrays an appetite for not only formal history but folklore and tradition.¹¹³ The great churches, castles, and ruins passed along the rambler's way together create a connection with the past as well as thereby reinforcing a very particular sense of Englishness.

Note, for example how Hughes writes of Wiltshire:

Installed as chronicler to the White Horse, I entered with no ill will on my office, having been all my life possessed, as is the case with so many Englishmen, by intense local attachment [and] love for every stone and turf of the country where I was born and bred.¹¹⁴

The novel itself is a compilation of fiction, myth, historical knowledge, and folklore – a veritable “stir-about”, as Hughes puts it – and significantly Hughes, who presents the novel as a memorial to the White Horse Hill festival of 1857, chooses a clerical

¹¹¹ W. H. Crosland has an entire chapter dedicated to the mocking of the lower-middle-class obsession with second-hand classics, and the practice of displaying them prominently in their suburban villas. Crosland, *The Suburbans* (London: John Long, 1905).

¹¹² Wiener, *English Culture*, p. 44.

¹¹³ At a similar time (1899), the Victoria County History series began, suggesting a widespread interest in local history. The County History series is a survey of each county and its peoples, dedicated to the Queen and described as ‘the greatest publishing project in British local history’: http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/NationalSite/AboutVCH?Session/@id=D_IKEBhuQddCGb8NlAH0bA [accessed on 01.08.10].

¹¹⁴ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. vi.

protagonist (Richard Easy), through whom to communicate his research into ‘the scattered legends and traditions of the country side’ as well as ‘any authentic historical notices relating to the old monument’.¹¹⁵ The same year that Hughes’s memorial was published, the ‘Manchester Clerk’ gave us his *Fortnight’s Ramble* – and again there is very considerable historical and antiquarian detail.

It is no accident that one antiquarian detail that fascinates Richard Easy is the legend of St George and the dragon; patriotism is again central when Finchley comes across the Wellington Monument in Somerset and stands in awe of the ‘tall monument thrusting up from the bare top of the hill’ whilst reflecting on the ‘memory of the brave duke’.¹¹⁶ We should note that Canning here refers to a real monument within his work of fiction; even the rambling *novels* often feature a basic level of factual history. Since many of our clerical authors had their thirst for history only whetted during their formal schooling, the growing opportunities to attend lectures in local history (at the Worker’s Educational Association, the YMCA and the various Technical Institutions) would have been very enticing.¹¹⁷ Such lectures, whilst not being equal to the many years spent studying in a more traditional academic setting, still provided a sound knowledge of historical matters. Indeed, as Edmund Yates comments in *All the Year Round*, as early as 1864, ‘clerks getting away for a week’s holiday, roughing it with a knapsack, and getting over an immense number of miles before they return [...] are by no means the worst informed, and are generally the most interested about the places they visit’.¹¹⁸ While it could appear that the clerk was once again falling into the emulative trap, mimicking a middle-class education, what is crucial here is that he is taking steps to educate *himself*. Indeed, by actively engaging with the landscape

¹¹⁵ Hughes talks of the practical application of Richard’s clerkly skills in recording this history – his ‘very good memory’ and ‘short-hand’. Hughes, *The White Horse*, pp. 18-19 and v-vi.

¹¹⁶ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 145. Note also the reassertion of Finchley’s own masculinity in the mirroring of the phallic monument.

¹¹⁷ In 1900 history was made compulsory in secondary schools. Philip Dodd, ‘Englishness and the national culture’, in Colls and Dodd (eds), *Englishness*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Edmund Yates, *All the Year Round* (1864), as cited in J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman’s Holiday: a Social History* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1976), p. 169.

around him, the rambler-clerk possessed an understanding of history that was more organically forged than that which was taught to middle-class boys in the classroom.

For all this, the clerk-authors are generally open in acknowledging that they are not experts in the field of history. For example, the ‘Manchester Clerk’ prefaces his rambling narrative with: ‘This is not a “literary effort” [...] the following pages are simply personal notes and recollections.’¹¹⁹ While he sets the piece up in this way, his language (‘hope, like the rising sun, irradiated the horizon of our immediate future with her transfiguring light’) and his constant references to Spenser, Shakespeare and Wordsworth, suggests considerable care has gone into the writing.¹²⁰ One gets the sense then, that, as with Jane Austen’s Mr Collins (a cleric, of course), the ‘personal notes’ which are given as ‘unstudied an air as possible’ are actually the ‘result of previous study’.¹²¹ And of course, it was monks and other religious clerks who first established the local history tradition in the sixteenth century. A line can, then, be traced from these earliest travel journals to works by gentleman scholars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries before the middle-class ‘tour-ist’ of the early nineteenth century gave way to the clerical ‘rambler’.¹²² Witness, for example, how Jerome declares: ‘You pass Oatlands Park on the right bank here. It is a famous old place. Henry VIII stole it from someone or the other, I forget whom now.’¹²³ For all his unstudied air, the rambler clearly is very much an historian.

It should be noted that the clerk’s focus on a strictly *English* heritage – or, rather a view of England that ignored its Roman past and focused on a medieval one – is one thing that places him apart from his upper-class equivalent, the ‘Grand Tour-ist’.¹²⁴ One reason for this, I suggest, is that medieval England’s history was

¹¹⁹ Manchester Clerk, *A Fortnight’s Ramble*, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Manchester Clerk, *A Fortnight’s Ramble*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1907), p. 59.

¹²² John Beckett, *Writing Local History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹²³ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 67.

¹²⁴ The Grand Tour presented the first itinerary: generally beginning in Dover, tourers crossed the Channel to Paris, then travelled to Geneva, heading across the Alps to explore most of the Italian cities, before heading back through many German-speaking cities, such as Berlin and Munich, and Flanders. Each city contributed something by way of great collections of art, architecture, or fine products, which helped to complete the cultural maturity of the upper-class youth.

physically within reach – that is to say, visible in the architecture and landscape that surrounded the rambler-clerk; whereas Roman England was an age which could, in fact, better be studied in Europe. This meant that the clerk did not feel that he was missing anything in not visiting the continent. And in turning foreign travel down on heritage grounds, rather than financial, the clerk could save face. Indeed, the opinion of Cabot, in *Musings of a City Clerk* (1913),¹²⁵ is that clerks will revel far more in their homeland than they could in Venice, Naples, or Paris – for there would always be disappointment in finding that the continental reality cannot match up to the myth:

The Days of Splendour, of Romance, of Nobility are as far from us and our pinckbeck ‘fashion’ and ‘form’ as the days of dead Caesar are. No, you will not find me going over there. It would not satisfy my wants. When my annual fortnight comes round I shall go off as usual [...] Do a little swimming or beach combing with my old friend [...] or, again, perhaps I may decide to give my old friend Farmer Drysdale a look up, and have a little old homely talk with him about his pedigree Tamworths [...] Just one simple old English farm house, or just a sweep of light green English sea, with just one stretch of English sky above us.¹²⁶

This talk of the *English* sea and *English* sky alerts us to the intensity with which the clerk identifies England with nature. Lowenthal argues that this identification with nature arose out of the lack of a dominant national costume, or national holiday.¹²⁷ He further suggests that ‘nowhere else is landscape so feted as legacy, nowhere else does the very term suggest not simply scenery and *genres de vie*, but quintessential national values’. ‘Rural England’, he finishes, ‘is endlessly lauded as a wonder of the

¹²⁵ This is a piece that follows the style of writers like Jerome; it is, as the Preface lays out, a ‘compilation of [...] somewhat varied sketches’ that are designed to entertain fellow city workers. It is not, therefore, a ramble narrative on the same terms as other discussed in this chapter, but Cabot does explore his short time as a commercial clerk, and therefore experiences the open road. The following quote is taken from section titled ‘On Continental Tours’, in which Cabot faces a painting of the Venetian Bridge of Sighs, and finds that his dreams of continental travel will be dashed by the reality.

¹²⁶ Cabot (pseudo), *The Musings of a City Clerk* (London: Heath Cranton & Ouseley, 1913), pp. 238-9.

¹²⁷ Lowenthal, as cited in John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 150.

world'.¹²⁸ Not only did this quasi-Edenic vision dominate the cultural construction of Englishness but the idealisation of the Home Counties, which were so close to the capital, created a sense that the pastoral idyll was within reach of the average Londoner. Most of our rambler-clerk narratives begin in London, and describe in detail the journey from city to countryside. For example, as Finchley passes through Kings Langley (and despite being held captive in the back of a stolen Bentley) we read of his pleasure at leaving London: 'they flashed by dark copses and over little white bridge where streams broke into cool lashers, by the side of a long park rich with huge oaks and browsing deer'.¹²⁹ Again, in 1918, Henry Adams writes of, 'the violent contrast between [London's] dense, smoky, impenetrable darkness, and the soft, green charm' of the rural landscape.¹³⁰

One of the authors that popularised Dent's Open-Air Library was Hudson, a well-known writer of English nature books, who very rarely travelled outside of the southern counties – in fact, in his biography there is no mention of a single northern location.¹³¹ For Hudson, as well as many others, London becomes symbolic of commercialism and industrialisation, while the southern counties are imagined as quintessentially meadows, vales, idyllic churches, and quaint hamlets. This is fundamental to the contrasts inherent between not only the urban and the rural, or work and holiday, but also between south and north. As Orwell argues in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), the north of England has become intrinsically linked to industrialisation but without the connotations of prosperity that London embodies.¹³² The proximity to London allows the rambler-clerk to experience the countryside within a single day-trip. As W. J. Loftie writes in *In and Out of London: or, the Half-Holidays of a Town Clerk* (1875):

¹²⁸ Lowenthal, as cited in Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, p. 150.

¹²⁹ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 16. Kings Langley is in Hertfordshire, only twenty one miles outside of London.

¹³⁰ Henry Adams, as cited in Lowenthal, 'The English Landscape', p. 323.

¹³¹ Tomalin, *W. H. Hudson*.

¹³² George Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 104-5.

London is full of interest; and the country within half a day's journey of London is the most interesting part of England. The man who knows something of the history of Kent, Surrey, and Hertfordshire, knows something tangible of the history of his country. He can connect events with places: and the places are often beautiful, while the events are often the greatest in our history. And the working men of London – be they clerks priestly or lay, be they merchants or mechanics – can find, within the limits of a Saturday afternoon's excursion, scenes and places which a tour on the Continent will not exceed, for the Englishman, either in interest or beauty.¹³³

Here we can see two striking representations of England. The first is Loftie's suggestion that Kent, Surrey and Hertfordshire hold unparalleled significance in terms of England. And, indeed, if we look at the number of sites of historical importance currently owned by English Heritage in the Home Counties, Loftie's argument remains persuasive – there are forty-one sites of interest (castles, houses, palaces, monuments and ruins) in the Home Counties alone; while there are only sixty-eight in the entire area to the north of the Humber.¹³⁴ The second striking aspect of Loftie's commentary is that this rural vision of England becomes intricately connected with the south, partly because of cultural and nostalgic influences, but also, and from a more practical point of view, because the London-based, clerk-rambler could only afford, and only had time, to travel in the South. Mr Brogden, who is preoccupied with the cost of surviving on a clerk's salary, can justify a short trip to Wiltshire because the train fare is reasonable. Likewise, Hughes's clerk Richard, despite having been recently given a bonus, decides to stay – against the advice of his friends – in England because it will save him the cost of the steam packet; he, then, chooses Berkshire

¹³³ W. J. Loftie, *In and Out of London: or, the Half-Holidays of a Town Clerk* (New York: Pott, Young & Co., 1875), p. 17.

¹³⁴ The fascination with a certain locality was reflective of the broader development of English regional history. Beckett argues that the nature of local history at the end of the nineteenth century was 'schizophrenic', because it 'flourished, but at the same time it was frowned upon'. One reason for this, I suggest, is that what had once been the leisure-time hobby of the upper and middle classes, was now seen as the two-week fad of the urban, part-time 'antiquarian'. <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/> [accessed 01.10.2011]; Beckett, *Writing Local History*, p. 88.

because it allows him to put ‘three pounds into [his] pocket, and please an old friend’.¹³⁵

In short, the London-based Rambler-clerk with his concern with heritage plays a major part in the development of what Mandler calls the ‘new “Englishness”’ which identified the ‘squire-archival village of Southern or “Deep” England as the template on which the national character had been formed and thus the ideal towards which it must inevitably return’.¹³⁶ This idyllic vision of Englishness that had its roots in the nineteenth century ignored the importance of northern industrialisation in favour of an anachronistic, rural vision of England. As DeGroot explains, ‘the mighty British Empire was built on Sheffield steel, Newcastle coal and Clydeside engineering, yet the prevalent images of Britain remain those of stately homes, cottage gardens, Henley regattas and strawberries at Wimbledon.’¹³⁷ As Robert Colls argues, the domination of this particular version of ‘England’ (‘England real or England fake, England now or England then’, as he calls it) was interwoven across varied cultural forms to create a powerful myth which connoted belonging.¹³⁸

Most of the many rambles during this period are set within a hundred-mile radius of London – mainly in Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Hampshire, and Essex¹³⁹ – with some clerks venturing to the ‘north’ (Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Oxfordshire), and a few reaching as far as East Anglia and the West Country. Peter Vibart, in *The Broad Highway*, follows a typical pattern when he declares, ‘I shall go, sir, on a walking tour through Kent and Surrey into Devonshire and then probably to Cornwall’.¹⁴⁰ Finchley begins his ramble by passing through Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire before venturing westward to Somerset,

¹³⁵ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 12.

¹³⁶ Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”’, p. 155.

¹³⁷ What is interesting is that the depiction DeGroot outlines has remained a popular one, and one that culturally has been characterised as the ‘true’ England, even to this day. Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighly: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 290.

¹³⁸ Robert Colls, ‘The People’s Orwell’, in Clare V. J. Griffiths et al (eds.), *Classes, Cultures, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 168.

¹³⁹ These counties are all included in Edward Thomas’s definition of the ‘South country’. Thomas, as cited in Colls and Dodd, *Englishness*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁰ Farnol, *The Broad Highway*, p. 16.

Devon and Cornwall. Mr Lucton is something of an exception because his ramble takes place in the West Midlands and on the Welsh borderlands; he passes through Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, and ends in Shropshire – the rural areas of which nonetheless have much in common with the cultural idyll of the south.

It is a southern, agricultural landscape, then, which characterises the majority of the clerk-rambler narratives and which informs the more general idea of Englishness. In *The Broad Highway*, Vibart, for example, strolls through the ‘beautiful land of Kent, past tree and hedge and smiling meadow’¹⁴¹; again, in *Mr Lucton’s Freedom*, Lucton muses on ‘the orchard-lands of the Severn Plain, with the slow Avon meandering about its feet, and larks overhead’.¹⁴² In extreme cases, the connotations of the rural idyll are so inextricably connected to the southern landscape that the ‘rural’ ramble begins with the rambler travelling – usually by train – from more northern areas to the iconic Home Counties. Thus the ‘Manchester Clerk’ states that he has ‘the purpose of seeing whatever [is] notable and lovely, both of town and country – in a *given* direction’.¹⁴³ This ‘given direction’ is, of course, southwards and the majority of his ramble takes place around the Home Counties because there the author feels he will find the ‘heart’ of England. The *Heart of England* is the title Edward Thomas gave to a collection of short pieces about walking through the country in 1906. While he carefully avoids mentioning localities, the rolling hills and meadows of the south are easily recognisable:

Out of the midst of pale wheat lands and tussocky meadow, intersected by streams which butter-bur and marigold announce, and soared over by pewit and lark and the first swallows with their delicate laughter¹⁴⁴.

¹⁴¹ Farnol, *The Broad Highway*, p. 23.

¹⁴² Brett Young, *Mr Lucton’s Freedom*, p. 52.

¹⁴³ Manchester Clerk, *A Fortnight’s Ramble*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁴ Edward Thomas, *The Heart of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 43.

It should be noted that Thomas is very mindful of his predominantly London readership. It is, he writes, ‘for the villa residents and the numerous others living “in London or on London” [... that] all our country literature is written’.¹⁴⁵ Thomas was from Wimbledon, and there is the sense that he presumes that the reader will himself be a Rambler. This sentiment is echoed in Canning’s *England for Everyman* (1936), which ends its account of the clerk’s journey with a plea to the reader to make their own pilgrimage.¹⁴⁶

That the average clerical worker longed to leave the grime of the city is not surprising, nor that the clerk-Ramblers all comment on their heightened awareness of city conditions whilst on the ramble. Mr Brogden calls London a ‘burden which had all but crushed him’ at the ‘first sight of open country’, whilst Richard Easy’s fortnight on a Berkshire farm heightens the contrast with clerkly life: ‘Elm Close [...] will be like a little bright window with the sun shining through into our musty clerks’ room’.¹⁴⁷ Again, Finchley talks about the ‘wearisome greyness in which he had moved dream-fashion’ in London before coming ‘alive’ in his rural idyll, whilst Jerome also believes that to be lost in the countryside is beneficial:

[I] suggested that we should seek out some retired and old-world spot, far from the madding crowd, and dream away a sunny week among its drowsy lanes – some half-forgotten nook, hidden away by the fairies, out of reach of the noisy world – some quaint-perched eyrie on the cliffs of Time, from whence the surging waves of the nineteenth century would sound far-off and faint.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Edward Thomas, as quoted in W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 194.

¹⁴⁶ Canning writes, ‘I have written this book of the impressions that I have gathered by visiting, and living in, various parts of England, in the hope that on reading these pages you may find old memories awakening in you, or feel the desire to make the same discoveries yourself’. Canning, *England for Everyman* (Chichester: Summersdale Publishers, 2011), p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ Gissing, *Mr Brogden*, p. 27; Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 186.

¹⁴⁸ The reference to Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) is clearly intentional, and ironic, given the complications and melodramas of life in Hardy’s rural England. Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 13; Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, pp. 11-12.

There is a hint here of the esotericism that became entwined with certain kinds of rural Englishness towards the end of the Victorian period. Frequently, this rural England took the form of a vision of a pre-industrial fairyland that epitomised the medieval values of knightly courage and chivalry. See, for example, *Mr Polly*:

He had dreamt of casual encounters with delightfully interesting people by the wayside – even romantic encounters. Such things happened in Chaucer and ‘Bocashiew’ [and] they happened with extreme facility in Mr Richard le Gallienne’s very detrimental book, *The Quest of the Golden Girl*, which he had read at Canterbury.¹⁴⁹

Canterbury is, in itself, evocative of a distinctly southern and overtly medieval version of Englishness, similar in tone perhaps to Jerome’s use of the phrase ‘far from the madding crowd’ – reminiscent, of course, of Hardy’s Wessex. For the clerk, who is, after all, attempting to redefine himself through the ramble, the cult of chivalry provided the perfect template for a courageous yet courteous vision of masculinity. Consider, for example, Mr Polly, whose imagined ‘encounters’ enable him to invent a newly ennobled self. Mr Hoopdriver in Wells’ *Wheels of Chance* (1896) also sees himself as a typically chivalric figure whilst bicycle touring: he is, he imagines, on a ‘knightly quest in honour of [a] Fair Lady’.¹⁵⁰ Again, the wandering parson who challenges Finchley to ramble without his money is described as ‘a man who loved his fellows enough to spur them to tests of Arthurian chivalry and Rabelaisian adventures so they might discover the good in themselves for themselves’.¹⁵¹ Morton even describes lending a young lady some petrol in such terms: ‘I was as relieved as most knight-errants were, I am sure, in days of the older romance when, on examining the

¹⁴⁹ Wells, *History of Mr Polly*, p. 67.

¹⁵⁰ Wells, *Wheels of Chance*, pp. 7, 10.

¹⁵¹ Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 113.

maiden in distress, they saw no trace behind her of a large and unpleasant dragon, but were requested merely to free a skirt from a bramble or to chase away a toad'.¹⁵²

As Mark Girouard has argued, there was a gradual revival in 'the code of medieval chivalry' through the nineteenth century and up until the outbreak of the First World War, and in many ways this particular expression of late-Victorian masculinity was more suited to the clerk-rambler than the other variant that was popular at the end of the century – namely, muscular Christianity.¹⁵³ The attractiveness of the chivalric code or trope was that it did not violate the increasing secularism of the age and yet still provided a kind of transcendentalism. Note how Richard Easy, for example, becomes mesmerised by the world of King Alfred, transported through the landscape and folk legend into antiquity, carrying forever with him the 'fair rich Vale, and the glorious old Hill [...] and all the memories of the slaying of dragons, and of great battles with the Pagan'.¹⁵⁴

Many of the authors mentioned in this chapter had a particular fascination with Arthurian legends or the medieval: Canning wrote a trilogy of novels depicting King Arthur, Hughes wrote a history of Alfred the Great, and ramble-publisher Dent resurrected his Camelot series in 1904.¹⁵⁵ Again, one of Mr Lucton's first acts as a *bona-fide* rambler is the purchase of a classical reprint – the two volumes of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* – from which moment he sees himself as a modern Sir Uwaine (Lucton's first name is Owen) travelling through deep valleys to rescue a fair maiden. We might also here note Wells' reference to Boccaccio, or 'Bocashiew' as Polly calls him, if only because Boccaccio himself was apprenticed in a bank for a while.

¹⁵² Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 44.

¹⁵³ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), see preface.

¹⁵⁴ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 199.

¹⁵⁵ Dent, *The House of Dent*, p. 147.

Consulting the Baedeker

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, middle-class tourism was marked, of course, by the famous Baedeker guide-books – so much so that many speak of the ‘age of the Baedeker’. T. S. Eliot satirises this age in ‘Murder in the Cathedral’ (1935) when he discusses the place of Thomas Becket’s assassination: ‘There is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it/ Though armies trample over it,/ Though sightseers come with guide-books looking over it’.¹⁵⁶ Later, in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969), John Fowles’ postmodern rewriting of the Victorian novel, we read, ‘nothing is more incomprehensible to us than the methodicality of the Victorians; one sees it best (at its most ludicrous) in the advice so liberally handed out to travellers in the early editions of Baedeker’.¹⁵⁷ Huxley was also critical of the Baedeker: ‘For every traveller’, he writes, ‘who has any taste of his own, the only useful guide-book will be the one which he himself has written’.¹⁵⁸ Huxley goes on to criticise the guides for ‘sending [him] through the dust to see some nauseating Sodoma or drearily respectable Andrea del Sarto!’¹⁵⁹ The Baedeker guides were, of course, designed for those who could afford to travel abroad; this, though, does not mean that the rambler-clerk was left without a guide-book; for him there was Bradshaw’s famous railway guide to England – as we can see in *The White Horse*:

“I’ll tell you what,” said Neddy, jumping up, “I’ll just run round to the Working Men’s College, and borrow a Bradshaw from the secretary. We shall find all the cheap excursions there”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ T. S. Eliot, ‘Murder in the Cathedral’, *T. S. Eliot: The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 241.

¹⁵⁷ John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (London: Vintage, 1969), p. 51.

¹⁵⁸ Huxley, *Along the Road*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁹ Huxley, *Along the Road*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁰ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 7.

The name of Bradshaw is everywhere in clerical rambling narratives: ‘Queen Elizabeth, she was there’, writes Jerome, ‘[and] Cromwell and Bradshaw (not the guide man, but the King Charles’s head man) likewise sojourned here’.¹⁶¹ What is ironic here is that, while not referring to the actual “guide-man” Bradshaw, Jerome is self-consciously drawing attention to his guide-book style. Jerome the clerk thus becomes a kind of English Baedeker. While England’s clerkly travellers could *not*, of course, turn to Baedeker, many did turn to Jerome and other clerkly ramblers in order to help them visualise a route. Others, though, were more independently-minded. Hudson, for example, challenges the tyranny of guide books in *Afoot in England* (1927), writing that, ‘[they] are so many that it seems probable we have more than any other country – possibly more than all the rest of the universe together... [Booksellers]’, he continues, ‘will tell you that there is always a sale for guide-books – that the supply does not keep pace with the demand’.¹⁶² Hudson’s attitude towards the guide-book remains very much that of the genuine Rambler:

My own plan [...] is not to look at a guide-book until the place it treats of has been explored and left behind. The practical person, to whom this may come as a new idea and who wishes not to waste any time in experiments, would doubtless like to hear how the plan works. He will say that he certainly wants all the happiness to be got out of his rambles, but it is clear that without the book in his pocket he would miss many interesting things...¹⁶³

Hudson does not seem aware of the irony in including this passage within his guide-book. His defence, however, would be that his writing retains the free-spirit of the rambling in which it originated – the spirit which Forster identified in Jefferies and Bast himself. And this defence could justly be made of all the clerk-ramblers who turned their hand to writing guide-books. Canning, for example, wrote a series of

¹⁶¹ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, p. 77.

¹⁶² Hudson, *Afoot in England*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁶³ Hudson, *Afoot in England*, pp. 16-17.

articles for the *Daily Mail* between 1935 and 1936, which were later collectively published by Hodder and Stoughton as *Everyman's England* (1936) in which he, like Finchley, toured the countryside – most notably the counties of Oxfordshire, Somerset and Devon. Hughes also undertook extensive research into the White Horse region before compiling his part-fictional, part-educational narrative. Likewise *Three Men in a Boat* was a compilation of events that occurred during the many trips Jerome took along the Thames with his friends George Wingrave and Carl Hentschel – Montmorency the dog was a fictional embellishment.¹⁶⁴ The descriptive detail, and at times, emotional response that these authors display towards their landscapes of choice always reminds the reader of the originating ramble and its characteristic freedom of movement.¹⁶⁵

Indeed, a reoccurring feature of these clerical guide-books is the explicit denial that they belong within the 'guide-book' genre. Loftie, for example, states, 'I am not writing a guide-book' and Canning likewise dismisses the 'tired adjectives' of guide-book writing and reminds readers that 'this is not a guidebook'.¹⁶⁶ The objections of both attempt to create distance from the clichéd tourist accounts. As Canning writes, 'the England we treasure, each in our heart, seldom is famous, and sometimes has no claim to the beauty that guidebooks love to extol'.¹⁶⁷ The ramble narrative, then, has more in common with (literary) pilgrimage than in guide-book – as is evident in titles such as *The Heart of England*, *Mr Finchley Discovers His England*, *English Journey*, *In Search of England*. Perhaps a better way of placing the clerk-rambler who preferred to follow some form of guide is by viewing him as travelling with a reassuring shadow-companion, who, rather than acting as a figure of condescension, was a co-conspirator in the clerk's desire to escape the complexities of clerical and domestic life. In this way, the published material acts more as a friend than a guide. Charles

¹⁶⁴ http://www.jeromekjerome.com/About_Jerome/three_men [accessed on 28.08.2011].

¹⁶⁵ One interesting point to note, is that in recent years many of these guide-book routes have been televised. See, for example, *Three Men in a Boat* dir. by Michael Massey (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2006) and the BBC history-travelogue programme *Great British Railways* which follows the routes of Bradshaw – dir. by Marc Beers et. al. (Talkback Thames, 2010-ongoing).

¹⁶⁶ Loftie, *In and Out of London*, p. 19; Canning, *England for Everyman*, p. 10.

¹⁶⁷ Canning, *England for Everyone*, p. 10.

Collingwood's introductory comments to *England for Everyman* puts it this way: 'Victor was quite insistent that this isn't a guidebook. He's right, but it would still serve as an invaluable companion to one'.¹⁶⁸ The key word here is, of course, 'companion' since the ramble-narrative is a companion not only to a guide-book but also to the reader himself.

Finally, we come to the complexity of the Rambler, for despite overcoming his characteristic clerical cautiousness and allowing himself to wander in an 'objectless, loitering, and purely vagabond' way, the prevalent sense is that finally the clerk must return to London.¹⁶⁹ The final line in Hughes's novel is 'And so ended my fortnight's holiday'.¹⁷⁰ Richard Easy is 'creeping' towards Gray's Inn Lane in a cab, just as Finchley's narrative ends as he sneaks back into his home without waking his housekeeper to abandon his rugged new clothes and dress once more as a 'proper' clerk. Lucton likewise comes home, dresses conservatively in a suit, and heads to the office, becoming 'once more a prominent citizen of no mean city'.¹⁷¹ We should not, however, be unduly hard on the clerk for returning to 'real' life. What is important is that he did for a while throw off the chains of respectability, and by doing so shook the foundations of the clerical stereotype. Moreover, Finchley 'would always', we read, 'have [a] memory of peace and beauty to soothe his harassed soul...'¹⁷² Lucton also retains, it seems, some faint memory of the liberation of the ramble, for in the very last line of the novel we read, 'he mounted the stairs that led to his office with a springy step'.¹⁷³ As one reviewer, as far away as the *Montreal Gazette*, commented: 'When Mr Finchley returns at last to London, a wiser but not a sadder man, we part from him reluctantly. We have enjoyed his company, have shared his experiences and have learned the lesson that his strange holiday taught him. He never got to Margate,

¹⁶⁸ Canning, *England for Everyman*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁹ See Hillary Hinds, 'Domestic Disappointments: Feminine Middlebrow Fiction of the Interwar Years', *Home Cultures*, 6, 2 (2009), 199-211, for an interesting discussion of women in middlebrow fiction who escape and then return. Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller* (London: Nonsuch Publishing, 2007), p. 106.

¹⁷⁰ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 286.

¹⁷¹ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 343.

¹⁷² Canning, *Mr Finchley*, p. 251.

¹⁷³ Brett Young, *Mr Lucton's Freedom*, p. 343.

but he got to a far better place; if only a spiritual destination'.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps, though, it is in Richard Easy's reflections that we best appreciate how far the clerk has come:

I felt that another man was journeying back from the one who had come down a fortnight before; that he who was travelling eastward had learnt to look beyond his own narrow cellar in the great world-city, to believe in other things than cash payments and short-hand for making his cellar liveable in, to have glimpses of and to sympathise with the life of other men, in his own time, and in the old times before him.¹⁷⁵

The Proto-modernist Clerk

Leaving the latent industrialisation of the city was not the only personal triumph for these clerk-ramblers – there is another, arguably more impressive, legacy: their foray into the world of literature. If we turn to the creative achievements of clerk-turned-authors like Canning, Bullock, and even Orwell, we see that the ramble captures a development in literary styles as well as the broader shift towards a rural (and national) discourse. In fact, this literary confidence, while being drawn from a more traditionally inspirational scene – the landscape with its much-feted legacy – resulted in the creation of a distinctly modern genre that captured, as we have seen, the imaginations of major publishers.

The clerk-ramblers could thus admire writers like Hudson because they were an inspiration not only as ramblers, but as *writers*. In the fictionalised *ante scriptum* to *The Broad Highway*, Peter Vibart muses: 'the thought came to me that I might some day write a book of my own: a book that should treat of the roads and by-roads, of trees, and wind in lonely places, of rapid brooks and lazy streams...'¹⁷⁶ Vibart's

¹⁷⁴ *The Montreal Gazette* (May 4 1935).

¹⁷⁵ Hughes, *The White Horse*, p. 198.

¹⁷⁶ Farnol, *The Broad Highway*, p. 9.

description echoes his subject; the flow of writing replicating the natural movement implicit in his gentle journey. As Solnit suggests, ‘as a literary structure, the recounted walk encourages digression and association, in contrast to the stricter form of discourse or the chronological progression of a biographical or historical narrative’.¹⁷⁷ She goes on to compare the rambling text to the stream-of-consciousness literary styles of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, a just comparison in which the middlebrow genre of ramble-writing becomes a precursor to a certain kind of high modernism. In this sense, the rural Rambler predates that urban Rambler, the *flâneur*. The clerkly types that mark quintessential modernism – Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Eliot’s J. Alfred Prufrock (1917), and Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses* (1922) – are all city-walkers.

¹⁷⁷ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 21.

Conclusion: Everyman a Clerk

She ran as far as the Tube station, overhauling clerk after clerk, solicitor after solicitor. Not one of them even faintly resembled Ralph Denham. More and more plainly did she see him; and more and more did he seem to her *like no one else*.¹

Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (1919)

Virginia Woolf's Septimus Smith, the shell-shocked former clerk who takes his own life in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), is usually considered Woolf's commentary on fellow modernist T. S. Eliot's deathly 'undone' office workers of the city. And yet, before Septimus – and, for Woolf, before modernism – came *Night and Day*, a novel not only about two male clerk figures but one which explored clerical work versus idleness, upper-middle-class high culture versus lower-middle-class ambition, and authorship versus bureaucracy. It was the story, if you will, of several of the 'many millions of men called Smith' that 'London [...] swallowed up'.² More importantly, *Night and Day* sees one of the first descriptions of the clerkly crowd as a space of enviable inclusivity:

Out in the street she liked to think herself one of the workers who, at this hour, take their way in rapid single file along all the broad pavements of the city, with their heads slightly lowered, as if all their effort were to follow each other as closely as might be; so that Mary used to figure to herself a straight rabbit-run worn by their unswerving feet upon the pavement. But she liked to pretend that she was indistinguishable from the rest, and that when a wet day drove her to the Underground or omnibus, she gave and took her share of crowd and wet with clerks and typists and commercial men, and shared with them the serious business of winding-up the world to tick for another four-and-twenty hours.³

¹ Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: George H. Doran, 1920), p. 440 – my emphasis added.

² Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 1996), p. 63.

³ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 78.

This acts as a précis of my thesis on many levels, with its ‘rabbit-run’ clerks reminiscent of E. M. Forster’s caged workers,⁴ the cohesion of the ‘rapid single file’ evocative of Taylorist organisational concepts,⁵ and the clock metaphor reminding us of the stasis of clerkly life. There are, of course, various ways of reading this excerpt, not least from a gender perspective – especially given that this is a thesis discussing the nature of *masculine* representation – and I will address those in a moment. For now, however, the crucial points are threefold: first, that Woolf’s stream of clerks is synonymous with the modernist city; second, that this stream and the individuals within it hold great power; third, and most importantly, that here we have a high modernist who demonstrates an understanding of a middlebrow theme. In concluding this thesis, then, Woolf’s novel provides a perfect template to reprise the mechanised clerk in his routinised workplace who attempts to carve out a space that is free of the social, economic and cultural restraints of lower-middle-class clerk-dom – if you will, what Woolf would identify as a room of ‘his’ own.⁶ Woolf’s novel, then, will be the focus of this conclusion, the examination of which will bring to the fore one major subtext of this thesis – namely, the tension created by the clerk becoming a figurehead for both the middlebrows and the modernists.

Being Clerkly in *Night and Day*

Mary Datchet, one of four leading characters in *Night and Day*, is a typist in a suffrage campaign office. To date, several studies have discussed, at length, her role in what

⁴ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 175.

⁵ The ‘human stream’ of P. G. Wodehouse’s *Psmith in the City* (Rockville, M.D: Arc Manor, 2008), p. 20; the ‘multitudes hurrying by’ in Shan Bullock’s *Robert Thorne* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907), p. 11, and Victor Canning’s depiction of Francis Jago as a ‘file’ and ‘reference’. Canning (Julian Forest, pseud), *The Wooden Angel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), p. 134.

⁶ Something which Woolf addresses explicitly in *Night and Day* – more on which later.

Gregory Anderson was to call the ‘White-Blouse Revolution’;⁷ indeed, of all the characters in *Night and Day*, Mary has received the most critical attention because she works, just as Woolf did, in a suffrage office, and so is often read as a thinly-veiled autobiographical figure. Mary is, however, only one of many varied clerkly characters within the novel – in fact, Woolf gives the reader a full range of clerical types. These include Mary’s fellow office workers, the spinsterish Mrs Seal, and fussy, middle-aged Mr Clacton, as well as Pooterish civil servant William Rodney and, finally, solicitor’s clerk Ralph Denham. Pamela Transue calls Mrs Seal and Mr Clacton Dickensian objects of ‘disdain’ but does not remark on the latter two clerk characters, both of whom play a more substantial role in the novel.⁸ Steve Ellis discusses the Victorian impulses within *Night and Day* and there is much to be said in favour of it as a novel which looks back, in particular, to late-Victorian visions of the clerical revolution.⁹ Mr Clacton, for example, would fit nicely into any late-nineteenth-century office – note how he:

[i]nvariably read some new French author at lunch-time, or squeezed in a visit to a picture gallery, balancing his social work with an ardent culture of which he was secretly proud.¹⁰

At the same time, the novel also betrays considerable high-modernist disdain for the figure of the Victorian clerk. Witness Katherine Hilsbury, the heroine of the novel, and the privileged granddaughter of a great Victorian poet, discussing Mr Clacton’s cultural aspirations with Mrs Hilbery:

“Still if the clerks read poetry there must be something nice about them.”

⁷ Gregory Anderson, *The White-Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

⁸ Pamela Transue, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 36.

⁹ Steve Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 82.

“No, because they don’t read it as we read it,” Katherine insisted.

“But it’s nice to think of them reading your grandfather, and not filling up those dreadful little forms all day long,” Mrs Hilbery persisted, her notion of office life being derived from some chance view of a scene behind the counter at her bank, as she slipped the sovereigns into her purse.¹¹

In Katherine’s comments we see a hint of what is to come with Woolf’s dismissal of Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* as a ‘half-educated, self-educated [man] whose education is all learnt from books borrowed from public libraries, read in the evening after the day’s work, on the advice of well-known authors consulted by letter’.¹² Katherine’s attitude to Mary Datchet’s office is equally scathing:

Katherine had risen and was glancing hither and thither, at the presses and the cupboards, and all the machinery of the office, as if she included them all in her rather malicious amusement.¹³

Katherine’s scorn for the office is soon challenged, and Woolf’s discussion of the clerk complicated, by two key events. The first is Katherine’s attempt to complete her grandfather’s unfinished biography – a task during which she appears to envy the rigidity of the clerk’s day:

[Katherine and her mother] were to be seated at their tables every morning at ten o’clock, with a clean-swept morning of empty, secluded hours before them. They were to keep their eyes fast upon the paper, and nothing was to tempt them to speak, save at the stroke of the hour when ten minutes for relaxation were to be allowed them.¹⁴

¹¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 100.

¹² Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 64.

¹³ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 92

¹⁴ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 41.

The second event is the *volte-face* that occurs as Katherine falls in love with a clerk:

[...] the people who passed her [had] a semi-transparent quality, [...] the faces pale ivory ovals in which the eyes alone were dark. They tended the enormous rush of the current – the great flow, the deep stream, the unquenchable tide. She stood unobserved and absorbed, glorying openly in the rapture that had run subterraneously all day.¹⁵

Katherine's reaction is not the anticipated dismissal or rejection. Her primal response, like Mary's, is to see the tide of clerks, above all else, as overwhelmingly *alive* – and in ways she feels that she herself is not.

The Wellsian figure at the fore of *Night and Day*, and whose existence is most crucial for this thesis – and for Katherine – is Ralph Denham, solicitor's clerk. He has not always been recognised as such – Helen Wussow, as well as many others, have mistaken him for a 'middle class' solicitor;¹⁶ but Woolf goes to considerable lengths to identify him as both a clerk and, indeed, a clerkly figure: '[He] was shabby, his clothes were badly made, he was ill versed in the amenities of life; he was tongue-tied and awkward to the verge of obliterating his real character. He was awkwardly silent; he was awkwardly emphatic.'¹⁷ Note, too, his autodidactic plans: 'It was part of his plan to learn German this autumn, and to review legal books for Mr Hilbery's "Critical Review"...'¹⁸; his suburban bedroom: 'There was a look of meanness and shabbiness in the furniture and curtains, and nowhere any sign of luxury or even of a

¹⁵ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 439.

¹⁶ Critics have been misled by Katherine's attempts to forcibly improve Ralph: "Mr Denham", said Katherine, with more than her usual clearness and firmness, "writes for the Review. He is a lawyer". Helen Wussow, 'Conflicts of Language in Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, XVI: I (Summer 1989), 360-381.

¹⁷ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 335.

¹⁸ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 27.

cultivated taste, unless the cheap classics in the book-case were a sign of an effort in that direction’;¹⁹ and, finally, his despair:

It needed, in particular, a constant repetition of a phrase to the effect that he shared the *common fate*, found it best of all, and wished for no other; and by repeating such phrases he acquired punctuality and habits of work, and could very plausibly demonstrate that to be a clerk in a solicitor’s office was the best of all possible lives, and that other ambitions were vain.²⁰

Denham, then, is an amalgamation of the ‘hero’ of clerical fiction of the previous fifty years. Indeed, it is a finely grained summation: note that Ralph learns German, for instance, to compete with the German clerks who threatened to undercut London clerical workers with their superior language skills and enthusiasm for commerce.²¹ Note, too, the lure of escape:

“You’re a slave like me, I suppose?” [William] asked.

“A solicitor, yes.”

“I sometimes wonder why we don’t chuck it. Why don’t you emigrate, Denham? I should have thought that would suit you?”²²

However, what most aligns Denham with the clerical hero is his unrealised ambition of becoming an author. Despite being ‘the most remarkable of the young men who write[s] for [the Review]’, Ralph cannot begin what he sees as his masterpiece – a history of the village – because he can only work in his ‘spare time’.²³ Note, once more, obvious parallels with Arnold Bennett’s Larch and *The Psychology of the*

¹⁹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 26.

²⁰ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 127 – my emphasis added.

²¹ Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), p. 62; Lars Maischak, *German Merchants in the Nineteenth-century Atlantic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 254.

²² Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 72.

²³ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 357.

Suburbs.²⁴ Like Wells' Lewisham, Larch, and Woolf herself, Denham lacks the Woolfian 'room of his own' that would allow him creative space. Worse still, Ralph's social position restricts him even further: 'What does it matter what sort of room I have when I'm forced to spend all the best years of my life drawing up deeds in an office?'.²⁵ Ralph's frustration that his large, untidy family cannot respect his privacy is, as Alex Zwerdling argues, echoic of Woolf's own protestations that her father refused to see her room as a sanctuary.²⁶ The limitations of class – or, more specifically, the limitations of being a lower-middle-class clerk – do, in this case, parallel the limitations that Woolf argued stifled female writers. Denham's dream of a cottage in the country (his vision of a classless rural idyll) falls apart as his obsession with Katherine binds him to Chelsea thus preventing him from escaping into cultural freedom. Ultimately, Ralph sacrifices creative ambition to his overriding love affair with the middle classes, just as Larch gives up hope of writing a novel so that he can take his wife into a respectable suburb.²⁷

There are, indeed, still more similarities between Denham and the clerical hero of middlebrow fiction: he is economically responsible for his family, as is Galbraith in Frank Swinnerton's *The Young Idea* (1910), he resents the drudgery of the office as Shan Bullock's characters do, and he is painfully aware of the condescension that Katherine bestows upon him because he is lower middle class.²⁸ Note the calamity of

²⁴ Of note, is that these two fictional works are counter-studies. Where Larch's study demonstrates contemporary concern over the suburbanisation of the landscape and the cultural void that critics connected with this trend, Denham's monograph highlights the move towards nostalgically revering the traditional village setup as the antithesis of suburban growth.

²⁵ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 34.

²⁶ Alex Zwerdling, *Virginia Woolf and the Real World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), p. 163.

²⁷ Ellis discusses how Ralph is not lured towards radical politics, despite being a 'self-made meritocrat' mainly because he is 'swallowed up by the institution of the Hilberys'. I would suggest that this has much to do with Ralph's hatred of his squalid lower-middle-class existence and the embarrassment caused by his position which, ultimately, overrides his intellectual capabilities. Note, in this instance, Ralph is not the only character to sacrifice personal intellectual fulfilment. Katherine also has to set aside her mathematic dreams in order to fulfil what Megan Quinley refers to as her search for 'passion and companionship'. Ellis, *Virginia Woolf and the Victorians*, p. 28; Megan Quigley, 'Modern Novels and Vagueness', *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2008), p. 120.

²⁸ This condescension is what John Carey calls the 'pain of exclusion' in H. G. Wells' works. He continues: '[the characters] are sensitive enough to know that they are shut out, and to know, with horrible shame, that they deserve to be'. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 142.

Denham's first meeting with Katherine which takes place amid tea-cups in a Prufrockian drawing room:

"Mr Denham, mother," she said aloud, for she saw that her mother had forgotten his name. The fact was perceptible to Mr Denham also [...] it seemed to Mr Denham as if a thousand softly padded doors had closed between him and the street outside.²⁹

In a dream-sequence in *A Man from the North* (1898), Bennett remarks upon the same social stigmatism when Richard Larch imagines a remarkable tea-party:

He dreamt he was in a drawing-room full of young men and women, and that all were chatting vivaciously and cleverly. He himself stood with his back to the fire, and talked to a group of girls. They looked into his face, as Adeline used to look. They grasped his ideals and his aims without laborious explanation [...] he saw the gleam of appreciative comprehension in their eyes long before his sentences were finished.³⁰

Like Woolf, Bennett draws attention to the severe social limitations endured by the clerkly class; however, the saving grace that both Woolf and Bennett identify is the street: here, far from the drawing room, the clerk is, once more, comfortable: '[Ralph] thought that if he had had Mr or Mrs or Miss Hilbery out here he would have made them somehow feel his superiority'.³¹ A strikingly similar scenario is found in Forster's *Howards End* (1910) following Leonard Bast's first excruciating meeting with the Schlegels where, once out on the street, '[a]t each step his feeling of superiority increased'.³² Like the modernist *flâneur*, the clerk favours pounding the streets, being subsumed by the urban crowd. Denham's assertion, after meeting Katherine for the first time, that she will be his, can only be made once he has escaped

²⁹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 1.

³⁰ Arnold Bennett, *A Man from the North* (New York: George H. Doran, 1911), p. 228.

³¹ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 12.

³² Forster, *Howards End*, p. 45.

the 'drawing room [that] seemed very remote and still'.³³ In order to be removed from the constrictions of the social self, therefore, the clerk takes to roaming the metropolis and losing himself in the clerical crowd that so overwhelms Katherine. This crowd, which Bullock describes variously as 'surging', 'roaring', and 'hurrying', underscores the need for mobility and indeed flight which is evident in the clerkly ramble.³⁴ In Bast's ramble we see just this: he passes 'gas-lamps for hours' before he finally makes it out of London.³⁵

In *Night and Day* we read of the same impulsive movement towards the rural idyll, for though the majority of the narrative is set in London thoughts of the countryside are still very present:

Late one afternoon Ralph stepped along the Strand to an interview with a lawyer upon business. The afternoon light was almost over, and already streams of greenish and yellowish artificial light were being poured into an atmosphere which, in country lanes, would now have been soft with the smoke of wood fires.³⁶

This *Wind in the Willows*-style call of the wild is hinted at on more than one occasion, and once Ralph finally makes it to the countryside – Mary Datchet's family home in Lincolnshire – we connect these subtle callings to Ralph's new found ease: 'The idea of a cottage where one grew one's own vegetables and lived on fifteen shillings a week, filled Ralph with an extraordinary sense of rest and satisfaction'.³⁷ Ralph's room (or cottage) of his own is, then, bound up with a distinctly pastoral vision. And, typical of the often misinterpreted lower-middle-class, it is not a vision that is forged through commodity culture or emulation but one which focuses, like the clerk-

³³ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 10.

³⁴ Bullock, *Mr Ruby Jumps the Traces* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1917), p. 17; *Robert Thorne*, pp. 9, 31.

³⁵ Forster, *Howards End*, p. 112.

³⁶ Woolf, *Night and Day*, p. 93.

³⁷ On another occasion in the novel Woolf writes: 'the night was very still, and on such nights, when the traffic thins away, the walker becomes conscious of the moon in the street, as if the curtains of the sky had been drawn apart, and the heaven lay bare, as it does in the country'. *Night and Day*, pp. 136, 43.

ramblers did, on the 'good life'. Most clerk-ramblers, as we have seen, only realise this bucolic dream temporarily during their annual summer holiday, but some of those fictional clerks with whom we have become familiar do make a permanent move to the country. Witness Norman Collins's Mr Josser in *London Belongs to Me* (1945), who finally convinces his wife to leave their rooms in Dulcimer Street and move to Conservatory Cottage in Ditchfield; or again, Mr Hope in *Robert Thorne* (1907) who moves to Devon, saved from his fraught and unhappy retirement by the soothing pastime of vegetable growing.

Literary Tensions

Night and Day has not been regarded as a 'true' modernist novel until quite recently, when various elements of the language and style, in particular, have been re-examined.³⁸ Most recent accounts of the novel are more favourable than Katherine Mansfield's damning first criticism of it as a 'novel in the tradition of the English novel'.³⁹ It is, for this thesis in particular, notably (and as Malamud called it 'uncomfortably') a novel about class – or, in the tradition of the *clerical* novel.⁴⁰ If we turn, once more, to the two descriptions of the clerical crowd we see not a ghostly army of the 'undone' but a 'great', 'deep' and 'unquenchable tide'. In the newly office-driven economy of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries the clerk was indispensable in a way which those above and below him in the social strata were not; he becomes, Mihm writes, as vital as 'the fingers of the invisible hand'.⁴¹ Woolf's

³⁸ Wussow, Quigley, and Randy Malamud have recently identified in *Night and Day* linguistic trends which dominate stylistically in Woolf's later novels. Malamud, for instance, calls *Night and Day* a 'full-fledged development of the modernist linguistic experimentation that infuses her late style'. Wussow, 'Conflict of Language'; Quigley, 'Modern Novels and Vagueness'; Malamud, 'Splitting the Husks: Woolf's Modernist Language in "Night and Day"', *South Central Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1989), p. 34.

³⁹ Katherine Mansfield, 'A Ship Comes into the Harbour', in *Novels and Novelists*, ed. by J. Middleton Murray (London: Constable, 1930), p. 111.

⁴⁰ Malamud, 'Splitting the Husks', p. 34.

⁴¹ Stephen Mihm, 'Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts: A Response to Michael Zakim's "The Business Clerk as Revolutionary"', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26 (Winter 2006), p. 609.

novel, then, is the perfect marker of this social and cultural shift – of the impact of this ‘invisible hand’. It marks, if you will, the moment at which the hitherto exclusively middlebrow subject of the clerk began to reach into the modernist consciousness. And this, I stress, was not simply because many modernist authors had worked in an office⁴² but because the clerical class was fast becoming *the* dominant force within modern existence.⁴³

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that the clerk was worth studying in his own right – and as the figurehead for his own class – because of the centrality of the office-working ‘nobody’ to the constructions of British (and Western) contemporary identity. I am not, then, now drawing in modernism in an attempt to rescue the clerk by lifting him retrospectively into more elevated cultural company. Instead, I am suggesting that the clerk’s relationship with modernist writers demonstrates the universality of the clerk’s story; a story that is not only bound up with middlebrow lives but which touches all of modern consciousness. In adding Woolf to the thesis we have an example of the impact of the clerk on all writers of our period and not just those who came from within the clerical class.

Christopher Breward has suggested that the ‘delineation of the clerk as ‘everyman’ [could make him] depressingly uniform in his identity and habits’. The status of everyman, as Breward implies, is easily read as a slur rather than a marker of the centrality of the clerk to modern, capitalist society.⁴⁴ What this thesis has attempted is the rehabilitation of the ‘everyman’ clerk as a significant figure who predates many important socio-cultural developments from the late nineteenth century onwards. In sum, if we can set aside our cultural and social prejudices long enough, we shall see that the clerical authors of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries enable us to understand better not only the British class system, the history

⁴² James Joyce, for instance, worked in a bank in Rome, D. H. Lawrence was a clerk for a surgical appliances manufacturer, and Leonard Woolf was in the civil service in Ceylon.

⁴³ Mihm, ‘Clerks, Classes, and Conflicts’, p. 609.

⁴⁴ Breward, “‘On the Bank’s Threshold’: Administrative Revolutions and the Fashioning of Masculine Identities at the Turn of the Century’, *Parallax*, 3:2 (1997), p. 113.

of bureaucratisation and the construction of Englishness, but also the very nature of what we might call the *writing* of English modernity.

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