**The Willow Pattern Bridge: A novel and a critical study of three contemporary British historical novelists.**

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**Declaration of Authorship**

I Adam O'Riordan hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 2 November 2015

**Abstract**

The thesis consists of a novel (*The Willow Pattern Bridge*) and a critical study of historical novels by three contemporary British novelists; Alan Hollinghurst (b.1954), William Boyd (b. 1952) and Adam Foulds (b.1974).

The novel, *The Willow Pattern Bridge*, is work of historical fiction set in Manchester in 1890s and tells the story of a young family who travel together to America to begin a new life. It is concerned with the transmission of identity and the experience of industrialised space.

The critical part of the thesis explores the writing of historical fiction by three contemporary British novelists. It consists of three chapters. The first chapter looks at the uses of material culture in the work of the three writers as a way of negotiating the pastness of the past. The use of material culture in these historical novels is explored by reference to focalisation, defamiliarization and improvisation across the work of the three. The focus of the chapter is different uses of material culture in constructing the past in contemporary fiction.

The second chapter examines the use of landscape and space in the work of the same three novelists. The focus of the chapter is how the idea of the garden and the larger landscape figures and recurs in the work of each and plays a role in constructing the identity of their characters. The third chapter examines some of the issues around the use of dialogue in recreating the past in historical fiction. These issues are explored across the work of the same three novelists. The conclusion looks at the way these three novelists have influenced the construction of the past in my own novel, with particular focus on the aspects examined in the proceeding three chapters.

**Contents**

# INTRODUCTION

Alan Hollinghurst (b.1954), Adam Foulds (b.1974) and William Boyd (b.1952) are three multi-award-winning British novelists. Each has written historical fiction that engages with the construction of English identities, class and culture, in the colonial and post-colonial world. They have all published novels which present as mainstream contemporary historical fiction, and conform to a number of its conventions, but which also draw attention to the ironies and difficulties inherent in recreating the past or pasts in fiction. Their work is distinguished by a vigorous engagement with previous literatures and movements to reveal the past as a complex and shifting landscape. As a result, as I will show, the work of Hollinghurst and Foulds has a specifically literary self-consciousness: it often explores the manner in which identities are enshrined, captured and transmitted to later generations. Boyd's writing, however, is distinguished by the manner in which it reflects on representations of life through other media, such as photography and cinema. Although most practitioners of the contemporary literary historical novel are female (Hilary Mantel and Sarah Perry being prominent examples), as a male novelist, I have chosen to look at male precursors and, as someone who began as a poet, I am particularly interested in male literary historical novelists who have made a similar transition.

In this thesis I will argue that, between them, Hollinghurst, Foulds and Boyd offer an approach to historical fiction which can embody the political as well as the personal. To this end I will argue that through paying close attention to the way in which the past is presented through objects, landscapes and spaces, the authors provide a sophisticated and nuanced set of tools and that, furthermore, their approaches allow and encourage reflection on the complex processes of past and pastness, on the level both

of the individual and of society as a whole, providing space for previously marginalized or misinterpreted identities. In addition, through my novel, *The Willow Pattern Bridge*, I have aimed to produce a new work of historical fiction informed by, and in conversation with, the approaches and techniques of the authors examined in the critical section.

William Boyd came to prominence with his debut novel *A Good Man in Africa,* which won the Whitbread Prize for a first novel in 1981 and a Somerset Maugham award in that same year. Boyd went on to publish several more novels and received increased popular cultural prominence in 2013 after the commission from the estate of Ian Fleming to write the latest in a series of new James Bond novels.[1] Perhaps due to its popular appeal, Boyd's work, while critically acclaimed and best-selling, has received comparatively little academic scrutiny when compared to contemporaries such as Ian McEwan and Martin Amis. Boyd's more experimental recent work such as *Waiting for Sunrise* has been subject to a mixed critical reception.[2] As I will show, Boyd sits within a tradition of seriocomic novelists traceable back through Anthony Burgess to Evelyn Waugh.

Foulds, the youngest of the three, is a writer who achieved recognition with his debut long-poem *The Broken Word,* a verse novella[3] recounting a young man's experience in the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, which won the Costa Book Award for Poetry in 2008. The success of Foulds' subsequent novel *The Quickening Maze*[4] – concerned with the brief period when Tennyson and John Clare were living in

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[1] Boyd, William. *Solo: A James Bond Novel*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2013.

[2] Jane Shilling writing in *The Evening Standard* on 2 February 2012, described Boyd's novel *Waiting For Sunrise* as 'curiously uninterested in character or emotional authenticity', while David Grylls in *The Sunday Times* on 19 February 2012 claimed the book 'skilfully disguises its preposterous plot with deft descriptions of architecture, garments, paintings, furnishings and objets d'art'.

[3] A term coined by Peter Kemp in his review in *The Times,* 20 April, 2008.

proximity to High Beach in Epping Forest – saw Foulds elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

In common with Foulds, Hollinghurst began his writing life as a poet, winning the Newdigate Prize[5] at Oxford and an Eric Gregory Award from the Society of Authors in 1979, while early poems were published in a limited edition in *Isherwood at Santa Monica* and in Faber's *Poetry Introduction 4.* But it was as a novelist that Hollinghurst first came to literary prominence when *The Folding Star* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 1994; he then became known to a wider audience a decade later, in 2004, when *The Line of Beauty* won the Man Booker Prize. The novel was praised by the chair of the judges that year, Chris Smith, who asserted that 'the search for love, sex and beauty is rarely this exquisitely done' (Ezard 7). As I will show, and as other have noted, Hollinghurst's work is indebted to, and influenced by Henry James and Ronald Firbank.[6]

There is now a substantial and growing body of critical writing on Hollinghurst. A representative selection is collected in Michelle Mendelssohn and Michael Flannery's *Alan Hollinghurst: Writing Under the Influence,* which examines a range of concerns, from John McLeod's essay on Race to Robert L. Caserio's tracing of what he terms the 'eccentric genealogies' (8) which underpin Hollinghurst's writing[7]. Alongside these investigations sit essays on topics as broad-ranging as queer experience and empire. These, of course, are all notable facets of Hollinghurst's work. However, the fact that they tend to be the dominant focus of contemporary critical work on Hollinghurst perhaps say more about trends in literary criticism. My own focus,

[5] 1974 for his poem 'The Death of a Poet'.

[6] Terzian, Peter. 'Alan Hollinghurst, The Art of Fiction No. 214'. *Paris Review*.

[7] See also Mark Mathuray (ed.), *Sex and Sensibility in the Novels of Alan Hollinghurst.* London: Palgrave McMillan, 2017.

deriving from my practice as a novelist, has, as its specific reference, the growing field of material culture, which is to say the meaning of objects and the manner in which they function when embedded in the text. This marks a modest opening up of a new territory within the field of Hollinghurst studies, while my work on landscape and dialogue in Hollinghurst's work provide a new contribution to knowledge in this field.

In comparison to Hollinghurst's work, the novels of Boyd (as suggested above) suffer from a relative paucity of critical attention. The work of Eve Pattern and Guy Woodward for the British Council's online Critical Perspective's series focuses largely on the themes of war and empire in his novels. As with Hollinghurst, my focus on material culture and the use of objects in the work of Boyd, specifically on the phenomenon of the personal and social relevance of smoke and smoking, opens new critical territory. As a result of the universally understood health implications of smoking, with the corresponding reduction in tobacco consumption, what, in the twentieth century was a socially acceptable habit, with an accompanying complex of signifying personal and social customs, is now so thoroughly unacceptable that it is banned by law in all workplaces and public areas. In this context, the practice and semiotics of smoking gains historical significance.

In the case of Foulds, the majority of critical work has focused on aspects of the individual biography and of his presentation of Victorian society. For example, Lena Steveker in the essay 'Eminent Victorians and Neo-Victorian Fictional Biography' groups Foulds alongside Richard Flanagan, author of *Wanting*, as a neo-realist whose novel, part biographical, part fictionalized, creates a contradictory account of eminent Victorians.

My own work shifts the focus away from biography and society to concentrate on an analysis of the functions of the material in rendering the past. It also provides an

engagement with Fould's work from both a critical and creative context, making full use of the range of investigation offered in the Creative/Critical PhD. My novel *The Willow Pattern Bridge*, speaks directly to the devices and concepts used in the work of Foulds and is in conversation with his work, as the work of Boyd, Hollinghurst and Foulds are all implicitly (and at times explicitly) engaged in an ongoing conversation with their own literary forebears.

All three novelists offer *sui generis* historical fictions. Between them they demonstrate the most sustained and inventive versions of what we might, rather cumbersomely, call mainstream, contemporary literary historical fiction. In addition, they have a particular personal appeal to me as a published poet and short-story writer. Our shared hinterlands in poetry (in the case of Hollinghurst and Foulds) and the short story (in the case of Boyd) mark them out, from a rich and varied field of writers of contemporary literary historical fiction, as the three voices that most strongly demand my critical attention.

For example, the work of Costa prize-winning novelist Andrew Miller could have been examined alongside this group. There are significant overlaps in style and approach. However, Foulds, Hollinghurst and Boyd are all in some way pulling against what the historian Raphael Samuel would term 'myth making' (Samuel and Thompson),while Miller's work, although full of arresting visual description and poetic metaphor, does not present the same level of challenge to conventional narrative. In Miller's novels the storylines either tend toward on the fantastical in the case of *Pure* or the farcical, as seen in *Casanova*. Looking beyond the United Kingdom, the work of Philip Roth, particularly the counter-factual historical novels such as *The Plot Against America,* could also have been considered as texts engaged with history and literature. However, it was not my intention to produce a counterfactual novel, rather to engage

in the more oblique fictional histories represented by the work of my three chosen authors.

Georg Lukács opens *The Historical Novel* with an exploration of modern historical consciousness and its uses (Lukács 20). This he traces back to the work of Enlightenment writers, such as Voltaire, who through their writing were objecting to the absolutism under which they wrote. The central impetus behind this act of writing, Lukács argues, was that through understanding history a more reasonable society might be arrived at. However, in Germany, during the same period, Lukács identifies a trend in writers and philosophers not only looking to history to explain the current state of being but also to feed into an idea of past greatness (22). So, for Lukács, nationalism and historical consciousness were shown as intertwined from the outset. Writing about the past is not a simple or harmless exercise in nostalgia but is freighted with a pressing ethical component.

For Lukács, the historical novel which emerged in this period was not a form of true historical consciousness, but rather a backward-looking projection of the attitudes of the time (19). Perry Anderson, writing in the *London Review of Books*, outlines the five principal claims made by *The Historical Novel*:

> The classical form of the historical novel is an epic depicting a transformation of popular life through a set of representative human types whose lives are reshaped by sweeping social forces. Famous historical figures will feature among the dramatis personae, but their roles in the tale will be oblique or marginal. Narratives will centre instead on middling characters, of no great distinction, whose function is to offer an individual focus for the dramatic collision of opposing extremes between whom they stand, or more often waver.

> What Scott's novels then stage is a tragic contest between declining and ascending forms of social life, in a vision of the past that honours the losers but upholds the historical necessity of the winners. The classic historical novel, inaugurated by *Waverley*, is an affirmation of human progress, in and through the conflicts that divide societies and the individuals within them. (24)

In the light of this reading of the relationship between historical consciousness and historical fiction, some novels have sough to reflect a more fractured and unstable view of history. For this we can turn to Frederic Jameson's seminal reading of E. L. Doctorow's novel *Ragtime* in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The 'Ragtime' era covers the period from 1900 through to 1917, which was a moment of profound change in American life across the sciences, arts and culture. Jameson argues that, while the work of the conventional historical novel is to connect the lives of marginal figures and characters from a wider history, *Ragtime*, with its wide array of narrative strands, characters and story lines (the 'fictive family' or the real life Houdini), destabilises those relationships.

Jameson argues that 'a seemingly realistic novel like *Ragtime* is in reality a nonrepresentational work that combines fantasy signifiers from a variety of ideologies in a kind of hologram' (23). He continues,

> My point, however, is not some hypothesis as to the thematic coherence of this decentered narrative but rather just the opposite, namely, the way in which the kind of reading this novel imposes makes it virtually impossible for us to reach and thematise those official "subjects" which float above the text but cannot be integrated into our reading of the sentences' (23).

Jameson goes on to say that, 'the novel not only resists interpretation, it is organized systematically and formally to short-circuit an older type of social and historical interpretation which it perpetually holds out and withdraws' (23).

So the historical novel can play a decisive and destablising role in interrogating notions of the past and the constructs which shape our perceptions of it. Moreover, according to Jameson, historical novels which present as being in the realist mode can in fact act as challenges to older, unexamined, types of historical interpretation. This is underscored by Jameson's reading of *Ragtime* but I would suggest something similar is taking place across the work of Hollinghurst, Foulds and Boyd. This also chimes with the historian Hayden White's work on historiography, the study of the writing of history and of written histories, which has been eager to emphasise the artificial, fictive and anti-realist nature of historical narrative. White's radically original *Metahistory* presents a reconceptualisation of history. The book offers a critique of historical reason; it marks a shift in emphasis away from the traditional focus on scientific logic toward a focus on the linguistic structures as central tenets of the historians work. In *Metahistory*, White offers what he presents as a 'poetics of history', a theory of tropes or what might be construed as the deep structural forms of historical thought. White draws on Kantian and Existentialist ideas of the freedoms and responsibilities, where forms of historical representation become decisions about potential futures.

In his later work, *Figural Realism*, White begins to examine the workings of Western Realism and explores further the literary aspects of historiography. This work is expanded in the same author's *The Content of Form*, which seeks to reconceptualise

the interrelations between mythic, historic and fictional narrative and the possible implications for historiographical theory. *The Content of Form* focuses on the relationships which exist between history and narrative as well as the relationships between historical and fictional narrative. These force a reexamination of the traditionally accepted distinctions that exist between the 'literary' and the 'historical' with White suggesting that the only meaning historical can ultimately have is the one which the a narrative imagination gives to it.

From *Waverly* to *Ragtime*, the representation of the past in historical fiction has undergone a considerable shift. At the same time, as White's work has shown, the writing of history is a complex and contested sphere. Nineteenth-century historiography is invested in narrative modes and ideas of mimetic realism that have been challenged by twentieth-century fiction writers.

As this suggests, recent critical debate has infinitely broadened and enriched both the novelists' and the historians' understanding of the problematics of the writing of the past, while underscoring the similarities in approach and the ethical duties of each. Historical novels are not simply entertainments but come replete with complex layers of meaning, while historians have been forced to acknowledge their kinship with novelists as interpreters of fact and as storytellers themselves.

The key intervention of the critical work is to formulate an understanding of the manner in which the three novelists create, engage with and destabilise ideas of the past, and in so doing provide a model and a set of guiding principals for the construction of *The Willow Pattern Bridge*, which can be conceived of as a response and a challenge to the work of Hollinghurst, Boyd and Foulds. Accordingly, the critical section of this thesis seeks to present the central building blocks of the novels of the three authors and to argue that objects, places and spoken words (in the form of material culture,

landscape and dialogue) are key elements in historical fiction, the elements which most strongly and urgently demand our critical and creative attention.

In parallel to this my own novel seeks to build on these novelists' innovations but also to interpret their spirit of innovation in a movement away from my previous experience as a poet and writer of short stories into the unstable and contested territory of the contemporary literary historical novelist.

## 1. Objects

From Karl Marx to Walter Benjamin, modern conceptions of the past have been built on its materiality. It is unsurprising then that this becomes the key underlying factor in presentations of the past in contemporary fiction. Literature marks the place in which the materiality of the historical passes into the immateriality of literature, where 'things' are made in immaterial words, and the fleeting materiality of the book provides a method of storing the past and preserving a culture. Mixing Marxist theory with Jewish messianic spiritualism, Walter Benjamin in his 1940 essay 'On the Concept of History', conceived of this impulse in terms of 'Erlösung', a form of transfiguration or redemption derived from humankind's impulse to engage with the past. When it comes to representations of the past in literature, this is complicated by the fact that such renderings of the past do not form a direct representation of the past but also involve a version of the moment in which they are written.

In Chapter One I show how, in three works of contemporary historical fiction – Hollinghurst's *The Strangers Child,* Foulds' *The Quickening Maze* and Boyd's *An Ice Cream War*, reconstruction of the past is linked to the material cultures of the period in which each novel is set. Furthermore, I explore how each writer variously

uses the contemporary material culture in order to convey complex ideas about the interiority of characters via objects as varied as a suitcase, a clyster and a poster advertising Russian cigarettes. I examine the manner in which material culture is used in combination with focalization and defamiliarization and how it acts as a spur for improvisation around objects and their attendant acts, showing how each author, in his own particular manner, contributes to contemporary literary historical fiction.

Materiality, of objects and things, has a role to play in constructing a past in literature and this has a relationship to ideas of realism. Ian Watt, writing on Realism and the Novel Form in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, gives a helpful description of the work of the novelist:

> The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects the individualist and innovating reorientation. Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was the individual experience – individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named. (13)

In his close reading of the work of Fielding and Defoe, Watt uses the phrase 'realistic particularity' (17) to define an aspect of the early novelists' style which distinguished their work from the romances which preceded them. Watt suggests that 'realistic particularity' itself is not capable of 'concrete demonstration' (17) without establishing a relationship with two specific narrative techniques: 'characterisation and presentation of background'. He goes on to assert that the novel 'is surely distinguished from other genres and from previous forms of fiction by the amount of attention it habitually accords to both the individualisation of its characters and to the detailed presentation of their environment' (18). It is in this second category, in particular, involving the detailed representation of the environment, where we find the focus moving onto objects and material culture. Watt goes on to expand this idea, suggesting that, although there is nothing in Defoe or Richardson which might compare to the work of Stendhal or Balzac and the importance they 'attach to the environment in the total picture of life' (27), there is no doubt that the pursuit of verisimilitude led Defoe, Richardson and Fielding to initiate the power of 'putting man wholly in his physical setting' which constitutes for Allen Tate the 'distinctive capacity of the novel form' (27).

Watt goes on to argue that the most important of these novelists' technical innovations was 'the adaptation of prose style to give the air of complete authenticity' (27) and that this is also 'closely related to the distinctive methodological emphases of philosophical realism' (27). Watt links this to a set of arguments we see beginning in Aristotle's *De Anima,* with his idea of how a perceiver is informed by the object he views, and developing through the work of philosophers such as Descartes and

Locke.[8] Watt pays particular attention to a semantic tension between words and the objects they stand for in the work of Locke and, in particular, in the chapters at the end of the third book of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* where Locke is concerned with these 'abuses of language'. Watt notes that the figurative language which had featured regularly in the Romances is 'much rarer in the prose of Defoe and Richardson than in that of any previous writers of fiction' (28). This is related to Watt's earlier argument about the parallel between the tradition of realist thought and the formal innovations of early novelists in relation to a focus on the particular individual: 'both philosophers and novelists paid greater attention to the particular individual than had been common before' (18).

Watt famously identifies in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* a particular relationship between material progress and the religious beliefs of the age: 'It would seem, then, that Defoe's importance in the history of the novel is directly connected with the way his narrative structure embodied the struggle between Puritanism and the tendency to secularisation which was rooted in material progress' (83). He then goes on to argue: 'At the same time it is also apparent that the secular and economic viewpoint is the dominant partner, and that it is this which explains why it is Defoe, rather than Bunyan, who is usually considered to be the first key figure in the rise of the novel' (83). As Watt observes, 'The basis for Robinson Crusoe's prosperity, of course, is the original stock of tools which he loots from the shipwreck; they comprise we are told, "the biggest magazine of all kinds… that was ever laid up for one man"' (87). Watt further observes that 'Defoe's hero is not really a primitive nor a proletarian but a capitalist. In the island he owns the freehold of a rich though unimproved estate. Its

[8] Locke made a distinction between the primary and secondary qualities possessed by an object. The first category are those qualities which are connected to the perceivers, for example, shape, size or number. The second category are related to the perceiver, for example colour or texture or scent.

possession combined with the stock from the ship, are the miracles, which fortify the faith of the supporters of the new economic creed' (87). So, in Watt's account of Defoe, we have two lines converging, 'philosophical realism' (and the argument about how objects represent and form consciousness) and the individualisation promoted by Protestantism and capitalist individualism:

> Emile Durkheim derived from the division of labour and its associated changes many of the endless conflicts and complexities of the norms of modern society, the *anomie* which sets the individual on his own and, incidentally, provides the novelist with a rich mine of individual and social problems when he portrays the life of his time. (89)

More recently, the argument about the influence of the global market economy is addressed by Julie Park in *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England*. In this context, Parks emphasises the importance of particular objects in material culture in the construction of individual identity:

> As proponents of Enlightenment ideas questioned and discounted the idolatrous religions of other cultures, members of metropolitan English society practiced their own form of idolatry in their unthinking devotion to the increasingly powerful sway of fashion. These idols of metropolitan life – manifested in strangely flavoured comestibles, household curios and knick-knacks, luxurious textiles and the extravagant accessories for fashionable dress – served not only as decorations for the self, but also as the very instruments for making it. (3)

Park goes on to argue that this 'overloading', which is to say the increased prevalence and variety of new and the previously unknown articles and objects, had a direct effect on self-consciousness. Returning to the idea of a new mercantile class and the importance of 'novelty' to them, Park argues that the abundance of material objects in the eighteenth century was vital to fashioning the modern self and that, as more exotic objects flooded the market, people living in England at that time found increased ways for 'devising novel versions of the self' (1). Park goes on to relate these new ways of devising the self to the abundance of objects in novels such as *Oroonoko*, *Tom Jones, Pamela* and *Clarissa.* Park argues that, 'In short, the integral relationship between real and imagined objects in eighteenth-century England… extends to the related nexus of terms for "self-making" and "world making," (6) which acquired complex resonance during the era that saw the novel's rise'. She further notes that '*fashion*, *fiction,* and *fact'* all derive from '*fingere*, the Latin word for "making things."' (6) . Objects play a seminal part in self-making and can be held up as measures or indexes of this, but they are not the totality; to focus simply on objects is to discount the impact of the immaterial, of ideas transmitted through gossip, songs, prayers and every other form of verbal exchange.

This relationship with the material culture as expressed through fiction was apt to change. Dorothy Van Ghent's early work, *The English Novel* draws attention to the way in which the individual, by the time Dickens was writing in the nineteenth century, had become objectified and the object exalted:

> Dickens lived in a time and an environment in which full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correlatively with the uprooting and

> dehumanisation of men, women and children by the millions – a process brought about by industrialisation, colonial imperialism and the exploitation of the human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit. (157)

Van Ghent goes on to describe how,

> This was 'the century of progress' which ornamented its steam engines with iron arabesques of foliage as elaborate as the antimacassars and aspidistras and crystal or cut glass chandeliers and bead-and-feather portières of its drawing rooms, while the human engines of its welfare grovelled and bred in foxholes described by Marx in *Capital.* (158)

Through an attentive reading of his work, Van Ghent argues that it was Dickens's perception that people were becoming 'things' and 'things' were becoming more important than people. Van Ghent here takes 'things' to mean 'the things that money can buy or that are the means for making money or for exalting prestige in the abstract' (158). She locates this relation between things and money in action in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, remarking upon the manner in which Dickens's use of pathetic fallacy, the projection of human attributes and characteristics upon inanimate objects, might be an 'incidental stylistic embellishment' (159) were it not for the fact that people were described by non-human attributes. Van Ghent terms this process as becoming 'thinged'. In using this term, Van Ghent draws attention to the process whereby a number of Dickens's characters are described by one part of their appearance which relates to an inanimate object and subsequently the readers

apprehension of the character is coloured by that part. Van Ghent furnishes a number of examples from *Great Expectations*: 'the clockwork apparatus in Magwitch's throat that clicks as if it were going to strike' (160) or 'Wemick's post office mouth' (160) being just two examples.

Van Ghent sets these two ideas – that people were being reduced to the status of things and that things were being elevated above people – side-by-side, arguing that they amount to 'general principles of reciprocal changes by which things have become as it were demonically animated and people have become reduced to thing-like characteristics – as if by a law of conservation of energy, the humanity of which people have become incapable had leaked out into the external environment' (160). These may then work 'symbolically in the association of some object with a person so that the object assumes his essence and his "meaning"' (160). However, Van Ghent also suggests that this 'principle of reciprocal changes' has a bearing upon the 'characteristic lack of complex "inner life" on the part of Dickens' people – their lack of a personally complex psychology' (161).

Since the late 1980s there has been an increased scholarly interest in objects in Victorian literature. This can be traced to Asa Briggs' *Victorian Things* in which he discusses a range of objects, from hats to Staffordshire figures, from cameras to postage stamps, and the manner in which they demonstrate the preoccupations of Victorian society. This book, according to Briggs, had the admirably broad ambition to reconstruct the intelligible universe 'or, more properly, universes, for there was more than one – of the Victorians' (42). Briggs accordingly relates this project to anthropology and semiology as the sciences which underpin any study of material culture. As Briggs writes: 'After Bloch and Braudel came Barthes and Baudrillard, setting out systematically to uncover 'signs and meanings in everyday life.' (46)

In addition, it is important to be mindful in any discussion of object and the material culture of the novels, of the novels themselves as a form of cultural product – in short, as commodities. As Zuroski Jenkins argues in *Commodity/Commodification and Cultural Studies*:

> In modern capitalist societies, cultural products function as commodities that are manufactured and distributed to meet the demands of a consuming public. In literary and cultural criticism, 'commodification' and 'consumer culture' are terms that direct us to the intimate relationship between large-scale economic systems, particularly market capitalism, and hegemonic cultural ideologies. 'Commodities' are objects designed or promoted for purchase; the people who purchase them are 'consumers,' a term that indicates the level of desire cultivated in the purchasing public for commoditised things. In a consumer culture, one's desire for commodities feels like a need and is never fully satisfied. The public's perpetual acquisition or 'consumption' of goods drives an economic system based on the production and circulation of commodities. (3)

This body of criticism is clearly derived from Karl Marx's theory of 'commodity fetishism' in *Capital*. Marx argues that, within a capitalist political economy, the market endows objects with a 'mystical character' that makes them appear to be of value in and of themselves, rather than as products of human labour or by virtue of their use-value.

A more recent development in the study of objects is Thing Theory. The work being done on addressing how the inanimate object world helps to form and transform

human beings marks a move away from a conception of objects as understood solely through consumption and commodification. It seeks to address how the material environment shapes us, and aims to talk about the production of value – not just economic value in Marxist terms but also various types of symbolic value. Bill Brown, for example, underscores the importance of questions relating to Thing Theory that probe the ideological and ideational effects of the material world. These questions 'ask not whether things are but what work they perform—questions in fact, not about things themselves but about the subject-object relation in particular of temporal and spatial contexts' (7). This approach is undertaken in order to demonstrate the power of objects, 'to show how they organise our private and public affection' (7).

Brown's essay 'Things', included in the issue of *Critical Enquiry* he edited, asks the following questions: 'Is there something perverse, if not archly insistent, about complicating things with theory? Do we really need anything like thing theory the way we need narrative theory or cultural theory, queer theory or discourse theory? Why not let things alone? Let them rest somewhere else – in the balmy elsewhere beyond theory' (1). He goes on: 'From there, they might offer us dry ground above those swirling accounts of the subject, some place of origin unmediated by the sign, some stable alternative to the instabilities and uncertainties, the ambiguities and anxieties, forever fetishized by theory. Something warm, then, that relieves us from the chill of dogged ideation, something concrete that relieves us from unnecessary abstraction' (1).

Material Culture in fiction is not an under-considered concept, but it is one to which a growing number of critics of both Victorian and contemporary fiction are drawn. In 'On Two British Migrant Novels', for example, Rebecca Mary D'Arcy offers readings of Hanif Kureshi's *The Black Album* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* examining hybrid diasporic identities and the various ways in which material culture and inanimate

objects are linked to their emergence and development. Whether one's critical allegiance leans toward the anthropological or the semiological, objects simply cannot be ignored. And nowhere are they used with more incisive skill than when embedded in the work of Hollinghurst, Boyd and Foulds.

If we turn to the present day, a certain sections of society inhabit an historical moment increasingly aware of material culture. The recent Director of the British Museum, Neil McGregor, in his introduction to the book which accompanied the radio series *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, writes of the work of the project as:

> Deciphering the messages which objects communicate across time – messages about people's places and environments and interactions, about different moments in history and about our time as we reflect upon it. (3)

There are, of course, questions to be asked about McGregor's work, particularly surrounding which objects is he prioritizing and what version of history is he tailoring to his audiences. There is a danger of losing site of the provenance and historical actions which contributed to the assembling of these things in one place (at the heart of the British Empire). McGregor is talking from a position of cultural privilege and giving a story of the past based on objects taken as a function of Empire. McGregor is able to tell the stories he tells only on the back of objects appropriated from other cultures. So while his informed narratives give us a deep sense of the power of objects in creating a past, they also alert us also to the legacies of empire which still inform our present day conflict to which, as I will show, the work of William Boyd speaks directly. In his book *Metahistory*, White argues for 'acts of imaginative interpretation

and appropriation' (6) which are needed to bring the past to life, and this is exactly where the contemporary historical novelist comes in, as I will demonstrate in my first chapter.

## 2. Space

The Oxford dictionary definition of 'landscape' directs us to the predominantly visual concerns of the term: 'All the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal'. Landscape then is the lens through which the more amorphous idea of 'space' might be controlled and ordered. Landscapes are seen, observed, analysed; they form part of orders of symbolic representation. In structured and codified societies they can prove forms of aesthetic pleasure or escape while also broadcasting messages about status. They are necessarily fixed, though also obviously subject to seasonal change. Furthermore, landscape carries an artistic connotation: it is not simply a way of seeing but an artistic way of seeing. The landscape may simply be how the artist sees the land, the confines the artist chooses to place upon the unlimited space.[9]

Space, however, is a more amorphous term. Landscape is the prism through which one aspect of space is understood but it is only a fractional part of its identity. Space encompasses the distance between landscapes, geography and terrain. Space, however, is also not simply limited to terrain: it encompasses sky, sea, air, and everything beyond, spiraling into the infinite and indeed the metaphysical. In its ultimate extension it refers to the universe in its totality. At the other extreme, Space is

[9] In common parlance, landscape indicates something rectangular, viewed with the longest side horizontal, as opposed to portrait, in which the longest side is vertical.

the contested territory between landscapes imposed, or defined, by the human. Doreen Massey, in her essay 'On Space and Time' argues against the idea that Space and Time are in some way separate entities. Here Massey mounts a challenge to Laclau's view in his 'New reflections on the Revolution of Our Time' that space is in some way static and that, accordingly, it is removed from time and therefore by extension removed from politics. For Massey, space is socially contrasted, and society is constructed spatially. As she argues, space is not merely of technical interest but it is 'one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world' (143).

Landscape and space have long been of interest to novelists and their critics. In *How Fiction Works*, for example, the critic James Wood focuses on D.H. Lawrence's description of leaving a Sicilian house at dawn in *Sea and Sardinia.* Woods observes the manner in which Lawrence makes use of repetition, or what Wood more accurately describes as 'alteration', to convey the sense of leaving the specific landscape behind:

> And meanwhile darkness is changing as the day breaks, which is why Lawrence repeats the word 'dark'. In fact, every time he repeats the word, the word has changed a little, because each time Lawrence changes what he attaches the word 'dark' to: very dark, dark still, dark the, dark garden, the dark big eucalyptus trees. (145)

As well as demonstrating Lawrence's use and elevation of repetition as a literary device, Woods draws our attention more broadly to the writer's relationship with the landscape.

Pulitzer-Prize-winning novelist Richard Russo, writing in his essay 'Location, Location, Location: Depicting Character Through Place', collected in *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing*, reflects on the particular importance of landscape and exterior space as opposed to interior or domestic space for novelists:

> The relationship between character and exterior setting is more mysterious. We don't own a landscape, a street, a neighbourhood, or a river in the same sense that we own a cocktail shaker or a claw-footed tub. Nor can they be said to own us, in the way Thoreau meant when he observed in *Walden* that the things we own can own us in return. True, exterior landscapes can 'run through us,' in the sense that the river runs though the two brothers in Norman Maclean's memoir. But because the relationship is more tenuous, less sharply defined, it is more likely to be ignored, either in whole or in part, by apprentice writers. (164)

Russo gives an example of the primacy of space and landscape in a novelist's work by recounting a conversation he had with an editor at a highly-respected publishing house, who described to him how 'his most powerful need as a reader ... was to feel oriented' (165). Russo goes on to argue that, 'In the end, the only compelling reason to pay more attention to place, to exterior setting, is the belief, the faith that place and its people are intertwined, that place is character and that to know the rhythms, the textures, the feel of a place is to know more deeply and truly its people' (169).

Russo cites the examples of Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News,* where the main character returns to Newfoundland from New York to find his physiognomy –

in his case a jutting chin – no longer marks him out and thus affords him a greater sense of freedom and naturalness. Russo also cites Danish author Peter Hoeg and his work *Smilla's Sense of Snow* (published in the United Kingdom as *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*) commenting on how it is in a literal sense Smilla's feeling for snow, her ability to navigate and move through both a metaphorical but also an actual blizzard, which ultimately saves her. Russo's emphasis on place defining or affirming character might be argued to be uniquely North American. However, these examples taken from Canadian and Danish texts suggests its relevance across other cultures.

Russo's account perhaps misses out on some of the complexities of space in the creation of character and does not fully take into account that a novelist's handling of landscape is capable of more than just defining character. It can also destabilise character; for example, a character's perception of landscape can enact tensions or unresolved aspects of their psyche. It is this relationship between landscape, space and character which I explore in Chapter Two, where I focus on ideas of landscape and the garden. In their prose, Hollinghurst, Boyd and Foulds variously manipulate the idea of the garden and the larger landscape: the ancient woodland of Epping Forest in Foulds, the suburban garden at Two Acres in Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* and the formal garden at Stackpole Manor in Boyd's *An Ice Cream War*. For each, the topography and geography becomes something to be manipulated within their vision and their reconstruction of the past.

Denis Cosgrove, in his introductory essay to *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, outlines the debate within cultural geography in which 'the etymology and meanings of landscape have been intensely re-examined' (34)[10]. Cosgrove draws

[10] Olwig offers an argument against the idea that landscape as a symbolic construction replaced landscape as a direct human experience and expression of a social order. In his article 'Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape', Olwig argues that the full complexity of the ideas of landscape and nature have been largely lost due to a modern tendency to appropriate the meaning of landscape to a

on the work of Kenneth Olwig, describing how Olwig, 'has challenged the argument developed in Social Formation that landscape as a way of seeing, of a social construction, largely replaced landscape as a direct human experience and expression of collective social order within a specific geographical and environmental context' (xxviii). Cosgrove refers here to *Landscape, Nature, and the Body Politic From Britain's Renaissance to America's New World*, where Olwig had argued:

> The apparent unity created by the identification of a political community with the physical bounds of a geographical body and its scenic surface can mask a contested terrain – as in Britain where territorial unity has helped conceal rifts between local, state and regional political cultures. (xxiv)

Olwig proposes here that 'the present-day association between country, body politic and the landscape scenery of a particular natural geographical body cannot be regarded as a given. It must be seen as the outcome of a long historical process spanning continents and centuries' (xxv), Olwig goes on to outline how:

> To understand the full meaning of landscape … it is necessary to take a closer look at the evolving relation between the form of representation and what is being represented. The meaning of landscape is closely tied… to questions concerning representation both artistic and political. These questions have deep roots in the era before our language and culture were walled up by the armies and navvies of the nation state, when cosmopolitan Renaissance men

concept of nature as scenery. The resulting conflation of meaning, Olwig argues, has not only led to questionable forms of determinism, it has obscured the substantive meaning of landscape, and related concepts, in European and North American culture.

and women introduced the word *landscape* into Modern English discourse. (xxvi)

It is under these terms, along with the thoughts of geographers such as Doreen Massey, that the use of gardens and landscape in Hollinghurst, Boyd and Foulds are analysed in this chapter.

## 3. Speech

In Chapter Three I interrogate how each writer confronts the problem of writing dialogue in historical fiction. In the section concerned with dialogue in *How Fiction Works,* James Wood discusses a talk given by the novelist Henry Green for the BBC in the 1950s. Wood relates how Green was 'obsessively concerned with the elimination of those vulgar spoors of presence whereby authors communicate themselves to readers: he never internalises his characters thoughts, hardly ever explains a character's motive, and avoids the authorial adverb, which so often helpfully flags a character's emotion to readers ("She said, grandiloquently")' (161). Wood discusses how, for Green, the crucial thing was 'not to hedge the dialogue with explanation'. Green's position, as outlined by Wood is, of course, just one in a range of approaches available to novelists in their use of dialogue and, as Wood concedes, 'Fulsome explainers like George Eliot, Henry James, Proust, Virginia Woolf, Philip Roth and many others would all have to retire themselves in Green's universe' (162).

We see another aspect of the problem of dialogue laid out in more simplified terms in the essay 'Seven Tools for Talk', also collected in *The Complete Handbook of Novel Writing*, where James Scott Bell outlines, albeit fairly roughly, the difference between dialogue which is what he terms 'on the nose', where each line responds directly to the previous line, and dialogue which sidesteps these obvious responses and is by extension 'more interesting and suggestive of currents under the surface' (94). In conjunction with this technique, which Bell terms 'the sidestep', he also suggests that a novelist might 'cultivate silence', citing Hemingway's story 'Hills Like White Elephants' as an example of where this is done to good effect.

Wood offers a slightly more nuanced version of this in his analysis of Green's writing as he focuses on the use of hesitation, describing how a character who has responded ambivalently to an invitation to accompany another character for a drink 'may be in several moods at once': 'As a result, the man's response, "Well, which is it to be?" becomes harder to read, too. Is he irritated, or just mildly resigned? Does he in fact want her to come to the pub at all, or was he just saying it in the hope she would decline?' (163). Wood here draws attention to the problem of tone in represented dialogue (as opposed to actual speech). Wood then draws our attention to the role the reader plays in interpreting this type of ambivalence conveyed in the dialogue, arguing that 'The reader tends to plump for one reading, while being aware that multiple readings are also possible; we sew ourselves into the text, becoming highly invested in our version of events' (163). This points to a potential in the writing of dialogue which the novelist can exploit.

In *Historical Fiction* Alfred Duggan traces the development of the genre from the eighteenth century onwards but also alerts us to the manner in which certain works 'make their effect… by assuming that men and women fundamentally like us

once conducted their lives under very different conditions' (6). This raises one of the crucial questions for historical fiction: whether men and women from the past are to be represented as 'fundamentally like us' or whether those 'different conditions' are such as to render them fundamentally unlike us. Duggan touches on this when he talks about Walter Scott and the differing manner with which he approached his writing about the Civil War where 'the dialect is correct and so are the details of daily life' (6), compared to his writings about the Middle Ages where, for him, 'the idea of a grown man dedicating his life to prayer was so absurd he made no effort to understand' (7). Lukács in *The Historical Novel* had earlier offered a different evaluation of Scott when he described him as the first author to apply a specific historical sense to the writing of fiction. According to Lukács, in the novels which preceded Scott's *Waverley* history is 'treated as mere costumery'; it is 'only the curiosities and oddities of the milieu that matter, not an artistically faithful image of a concrete historical epoch' (15)[11]. The difference between treating the past as 'mere costumery' and the attempt to present 'an historically faithful image' has obvious implications for the handling of dialogue.

In addition to the problem of dialogue in historical fiction, there is also the matter of representing the characters' consciousness. In *Transparent Minds: In Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, Dorrit Cohn outlines three

[11] Jerome de Groot in *The Historical Novel* gives an account of how this complex relationship between historical knowledge and fictional invention functions in Scott's Waverley novels: 'On the one hand the reader is put in the position of the tourist (and indeed the character of Edward Waverley himself), unknowing and passive, pray the worldly, clever, ironising narrator. At the same time the reader is presumed to have some historical knowledge and therefore gains a certain power over the narrative to the extent that the novel cannot shock or challenge events. The notes and extraneous metanarrative of the novel point to the artificiality of the exercise, encouraging the audience of the work to acknowledge the multiplicity of history and the subjective version of it being presented by Scott. The collage effect of authority that Scott creates here is something that points to the generic mixture of the form as well as the indeterminacy of history, and it is something that infuses almost all historical novels' (18).

modes of internal monologue, breaking them down into what she terms 'quoted monologue', 'narrated monologue' and 'psycho narration' – as Cohn writes:

> The problem of delimiting the narrated monologue from narration generally is far more complex, since purely linguistic criteria no longer provide reliable guidelines. Cloaked in the grammar of narration, a sentence rendering a character's opinion can look every bit like a sentence relating to a fictional fact. In purely grammatical terms "He was late" (our sample sentence) could be a narrator's fact, rather than a character's thoughts. Within a broader context it might become possible to attribute it to a figural mind; for instance, if the next sentence belied the idea "He was late"; or if the statement were embedded in a recognisable thought sequence. (99)

Cohn is making an important point about the centrality of narrated monologue to the reader's conception of character. The 'delimiting' Cohn refers to is the work the reader must always undertake but which, as Cohn shows, can lead to a number of readings none of which is definitive. So monologue and dialogue take us into murkier more contested areas but, as I will show, much can be made of this.

In Chapter Three I offer readings of the dialogue in the work of Boyd, Hollinghurst and Foulds, interrogating the speech patterns of the characters on a syntactic level and the manner in which the authors choose to represent normal features of conversation via fluency, non-fluency and inference. The focus will be on the communicative efficacy of pauses and disjunctions in dialogue and the manner in which dialogue creates implied meanings. Furthermore, I explore how Hollinghurst,

Foulds and Boyd all use speech and versions of internal and external monologue, dialect and idiolect, to convey information about their characters and the historical moment in which they are set.

The practice of novel writing is best conseptualised as the nexus at which notions of pastness are employed to capture and represent aspects of the present: because the past is seen through the prism of the literary zeitgeist (or of the here and now), the past is always a present construct. We think we understand the past through fiction but, of course, this is itself a fiction, a form of illusion as we can never escape the present tense, what Miroslav Holub might deem 'the dimension of the present moment'. It might even be argued that novel writing, and specifically the writing of historical fiction, tells us only, in the final analysis, the story of our own appetite to reconstruct the past.

Historical fiction is, arguably, only ever a mark of an appetite in the culture, never a measure of something being achieved. Each fiction signals an awareness of the past but, as suggested above, they are actually no more than evocations of desire or a yearning on some level to make the past more present. We are drawn to the past, to the many possible representations of past, but we cannot ever claim to have captured it in a definitive way. The work of historians and novelists often interweaves, and some historians, such as Hayden White, have argued a greater closeness, the essential fictionality of history. But the crucial distinction between the novelist and the historian, even one working in the narrative mode described by White, is that the novelist is unburdened by any perceived debt to the empirical.

## CHAPTER ONE: OBJECTS

The type of historical fiction with which I am concerned, both as a practitioner and as a critic, is mainstream literary historical fiction. The tradition in which I write, to which the three chosen novelists belong, operates by and large within the conventions of realism, and as we have seen from Watts's foundational work on Defoe, this is a tradition in which the use of objects has a particular place. In the following three sections of this chapter, I will outline the anthropological, semiological and the literary background to key objects in the work of Hollinghurst, Boyd and Foulds and in so doing explore this central element in the model of historical fiction from which my own novel *The Willow Pattern Bridge* is derived. This is a form of historical fiction which privileges mimetic authenticity and the realist mode. I will focus on particular objects in each novel to show how they become the vehicle for subtle and nuanced exploration (or presentation) of character.

### I. The Suitcase in *The Stranger's Child*

Early on in *The Stranger's Child*, Hollinghurst employs a passage of narration focalized,[12] through a fifteen year-old servant boy named Jonah. The boy Jonah has been asked to act as 'valet' to the visiting poet, Cecil Valance, during his stay at Two

[12] The idea of focalisation as a literary technique first entered the critical lexicon via the work of French narrative theorist Gérard Genette in Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method.* Translated by Lewin E. Jane. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980.

Acres, a household in suburban London where Jonah usually fulfils the role of 'boy in all the useful senses of the word' (12), that is to say, 'chopping wood, running errands, going up and down to the station in "Horner's Van"' (12). Cecil Valance is presented to the reader as an aristocratic character, out of place in the affluent but distinctly bourgeois surroundings of Two Acres, a household whose customs and routines have been adapted to cater to what the inhabitants – namely George Sawle, Valance's friend and lover from Cambridge, and Sawle's widowed mother – believe their guest expects. Nowhere is the tension between expectation and reality more clearly embodied than in Jonah, who is asked to act out of character, to accommodate the visitor by performing a role for which he has no previous formal experience. He is asked, not simply to perform the duties of the valet, but to play the part of valet, and in so doing, as the reader discovers, he is exposed to objects, which carry resonances, understood by the reader but encoded and hidden from the characters themselves.

The reader first encounters Jonah when he is alone in Valance's room and has been tasked with unpacking Valance's suitcase. Jonah's examination of Valance's suitcase and its contents is a painstaking, almost forensic exercise, and as Jonah enacts this examination he provides the reader with a subtly eroticised vision of Cecil Valence. At the same time as Jonah goes through the suitcase, we have the customs and rituals of domestic life at Two Acres, implicitly held up against the grander environment, with its more strictly codified behaviours, from which Valance has come. In Jonah's examination of Valance's suitcase, the reader is being presented with aspects of Jonah but also with aspects of Valance. We witness the simultaneous presentation of both characters with the materiality of the objects within the suitcase acting as the conduit for this.

The result is that the reader is given a psychological portrait of Valance, established by Jonah and his quasi-erotic response to the items from Valance's luggage that he examines and on whose use he ponders. What follows is an anatomised Valance, a taxonomy of the young aristocrat provided for the reader through Jonah's examination of this expertly packed case with its layers of tissue paper, its dress shirts and box of collars. The suitcase becomes *pars pro toto* for Valance himself whom Jonah is yet to meet. If we were to conceive of this scene in terms of Genette's triadic topology we might say the reader is given access to information about the psychologies of both Jonah and Valance, but also, in addition to this, despite and because of the focalization through Jonah, the reader is informed in advance of Jonah's own awareness[13]. The reader is privileged in this respect, understanding aspects of Jonah's character – namely his interest in and sexual attraction to Valance – which exist only for Jonah as a burgeoning latency.

The suitcase, as Jonah examines it, is at first remarkable for its 'smooth hard leather' on which Valance's initials 'C.T.V.' are 'stamped in faded gold' (11). If the evocatively named Old Testament Jonah suggests a type of biblical essentialism, then 'smooth hard leather' and 'stamped in faded gold' are epithets worthy of Homer for the classically aligned Cecil Valance. The description 'stamped in faded gold' metrically echoing the fragment of dactylic hexameter 'rosy-fingered dawn' gives the description a distinct Homeric resonance. Two contrasting worlds and positions are thus established: Jonah is unknowing and yet intrigued by Valance; Valance,

[13] William F. Edmiston usefully summarises Genette's position in his essay 'Focalisation and the First-Person Narrator: A Revision of Theory': 'Focalisation is defined by Genette as a restriction imposed on the information provided by a narrator about his characters. His well-known triadic topology (zero, internal and external) is based on a diminishing degree of access to the to psychology of the characters' (738).

however, is praetorian, learned, classical and, most importantly, entirely unaware that he is the object of his valet's thoughts.

As Jonah continues to unpack the case of his temporary master and discovers specialised garments for cricket and swimming in the lower part of the suitcase, Valance is obliquely conceptualised by Jonah as man of action. In themselves, these are by any measure fairly standard, stock activities for a gentleman of the day and do not particularly enrich Jonah's or the reader's understanding of Valance's psychology, or indeed tell us anything particularly meaningful about Jonah. They are, however, complicated by Jonah's erotised response to the garments, which increases as Jonah searches further into Valance's belongings: 'Then there was the body linen, fine as a lady's, the drawers ivory-coloured, vaguely shiny, catching on the roughness of his thumb before he stroked them flat again' (13). For the reader there is a double transformation at work here, not simply the explicit association of Valance with the feminine but the movement from (and contrast between) Jonah's 'rough thumb' in the first contact with the drawers to the implicitly feminine 'stroking flat' which follows. There is a subtlety to this transmission too; the act of unpacking the suitcase has modified the readers' perception of the character of Jonah. It is just one in a series of modifications to characters which occur throughout the novel. It is notable, however, that Jonah, to whose inner and outer psychological workings the reader has been exposed, does not reappear in the novel until much later when he is interviewed by Paul Bryant who is researching the life of Valance. And yet Jonah's work and his psychological position, his consciousness as shown to us by Hollinghurst, is integral to an understanding of the novel as a whole. This is, after all, a book about the way in

which identity is communicated, encoded and transmitted[14]. Jonah, in old age, shares his limited reminiscences about Valance. This is a novel concerned with disclosure and withholding – both inward and outward[15] – and through the materiality of the suitcase and its contents, the reader is placed in a position where we understand more about Jonah than he does, or perhaps ever will, about himself. Or at least Hollinghurst's description of Jonah's interaction with the case and its contents tempts us to believe we do.

As Jonah continues to ponder the contents of Valance's suitcase, the character of the gentleman is truly established, as a further layer is revealed: 'The lid of the case was heavy; it had two wide pockets in it, closed with press-studs, and holding books and paper' (13). There then follows a description of Valance's spidery handwriting and the discovery of: 'Another book rubbed at the corners like the cash-book in the kitchen, had what must be poems in it' (13). The reference to the cashbook in the kitchen underscores the gulf in social position that exists between the two characters. Hollinghurst constructs a cat's cradle of complexity in which the reader finds one character imagining a version of a fellow character through looking at that character's own writing in a notebook which is in turn is compared to a very different type of book, the cash-book in the kitchen, the materiality of the books, regardless of their content and function, looking familiar to Jonah. What is implicit in this comparison is the suggestion that, while Valance's status affords time for poetic reflection, Jonah's

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[14] We see this discussed in Greg Graham-Smith's essay 'Sexuality and the Multicursal Maze in Alan Hollinghurst's The Stranger's Child' in *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2012 pp. 10 -11.

[15] The fallibility of human memory and the role of concealment and falsification in Hollinghurst's *The Stranger Child* is discussed by Marcin Sroczyński in 'The Stranger's Child: Alan Hollinghurst's Dialogues with the Past' in *Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, Issue 2, 2014 pp.32-43

relatively lowly station not only means that his time is taken up by menial domestic tasks but that these tasks and their attendant objects prescribe the limits of his imagination and perceptions.

Jonah's work colours his reflection of the world around him. This might be taken a step further to say that the cash book in the kitchen not only reflects the materiality of Valance's notebook but also, in Jonah's perception, mirrors the status carried by the object, the implication being that Jonah sought to compare the notebook to an object of similar status which had corresponding resonances. The cashbook in the kitchen was selected by Jonah as indicated to us through the internal focalisation. To Jonah's perception, at least, both books are of high status, books whose contents are normally off-limits to a person of his station. But it works both ways as the cashbook comparison also reflects on Valance and the act of writing – and the money which buys Valance the time to write. At the same time, the comparison with the cashbook suggests an unexpected linkage between the two characters in terms of work. Jonah, in inadvertently discovering, if not the source of Valance's creative output then the object which harbours it, observes that this is something that is workaday, habitual, worn down 'rubbed at the corners'; something that lacks the fineness and care other objects in the suitcase are subject to. Hollinghurst thus moves the reader from this cat's cradle into what might be termed a game of cat and mouse as the reader attempts to establish where, precisely, the consciousness of the narrator sits. In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette labels these changes in points of view which occur in the course of a narrative 'Alterations', observing that 'Narrative always says less than it knows, but often makes known more than it says' (198).

So in Hollinghurst then we see a very specific use of objects – the suitcase, the notebook, the cash book – in relationship to focalisation. We can trace a precedent for character being established by an observer of commodities, of objects, of made things, and for the act of observation being a vehicle for insight into character, specifically with reference to social position, in Henry James's *The Lesson of the Master*. James is a central influence on Hollinghurst: in Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* which preceded *The Stranger's Child* it is, after all, a thesis on Henry James, on which Nick Guest is working while living with the socially superior Feddens.

How Mrs St. George is first viewed by Paul Overt in *The Lesson of the Master* is worthy of consideration in this respect. Overt, through whom the narrative is largely focalized, initially sees her as a figure in the distance: 'the fourth figure showed a crimson dress that told as a "bit of colour" amid the fresh rich green' (1). Overt later reflects, 'St. George certainly had every right to a charming wife, but he himself would never have imagined the important little woman in the aggressively Parisian dress the partner for life, the alter ego, of a man of letters' (4). On a first reading, we see we are being drawn into making certain assumptions about the character. At the outset the dress tempts us to read it on the level of the symbolic: scarlet for danger or perhaps residual religious connotations, the scarlet robes of a cardinal or the blood of Christ. But, as the passage proceeds, the focus shifts under Overt's guidance to the specific socially-nuanced reflection on the dress itself as 'aggressively Parisian' as the narration becomes internally focalized through Overt. The word 'aggressively' which significantly modifies Overt's perception lends the reader a nuanced understanding of Overt's viewpoint – if the dress is 'aggressively' Parisian then a dress of a duller or paler colour (or of a different design) might be

‘non-aggressively Parisian’ or perhaps ‘neutrally Parisian’. It intimates a pre-existing acceptable level of continental influence (or flaunted fashionability) in the mind of Overt, locating, with great specificity, Overt among his opinions, presuppositions and prejudices, which the narrative in its full unfolding will challenge. However, the choice of the word ‘aggressively’ also suggests a hostility or prejudice towards the wife of the master on Overt’s part, which the narrative will also explore. When Overt later views Henry St. George himself, ‘in his tall black hat and superior frock coat’ (11), a similar prejudiced, judgmental view is implied. St. George’s appearance apparently challenges Overt’s own conceptions of the figure of the artist. The clothing of both Mr and Mrs St. George apparently stands as a challenge to Overt’s romantic conception of what is appropriate for both a writer and a writer’s wife. However, the narrator is also careful to note that Overt ‘forgot for the moment that the head of the profession was not a bit better dressed than himself’ (183). We are given both Overt’s perception and judgment – and also, through the narrator, an indication of his blindness.

Something similar is at work in the specificity of the description James uses when Overt first sees Marian Fancourt:

> A tall girl with magnificent red hair, in a dress of pretty grey-green tint and of a limp silken texture, a garment that clearly shirked every modern effect. It had therefore the stamp of the latest thing, so that our beholder quickly took her for nothing if not contemporaneous. (21)

James is at once showing the importance of dress in communicating character but, in Overt’s perception of the garment and its fashionable shirking of modernity, James is

again communicating to the reader a specific set of biases Overt possesses – while also offering an ironic comment on the fluctuations in fashion in contemporary society: the dress identifies itself as the 'latest' thing by eschewing the latest or modern techniques. We can also discern within this description the effects of Pre-Raphaelitism on the manner in which women dressed, the move away from restrictive corsets and bodices to loose and flowing garments. This Pre-Raphaelitism is also echoed in the description of Marian Fancourt's physicality and hair colour which evoke Millais's Ophelia, Rossetti's Prosperine or Collier's Lady Godiva. James could easily have been describing the central figure of each painting.[16] So Marian's appearance is fashionable but also connected to several paintings which evoke scenes of classical myth and medieval legend. She is an aesthetic object but also has the status of an aesthetically-aware young woman.

If we analyse the description of Marian further, we see a movement in and out of focalization through Overt and a return to a narratorial perspective, but the precise boundaries between these positions are sometimes difficult to establish. Writing in *Narrative Discourse*, Genette nuances his taxonomic account of focalisation and directs our attention to the fluidity which can exist within the act of focalisation:

> Any single formula of focalisation does not… always bear on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section, which can be very short. Furthermore the distinction between different points of view is not always as clear as the consideration of pure types alone could lead one to believe. (191)

[16] Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *Art of the Pre-Raphaelites.* London: Tate Publishing, 2007.

In the description of Marian, the terms ‘magnificent’ and ‘pretty’ are clearly subjective judgments, but it is often not clear whether they are narratorial or focalised through Overt. The ‘green-grey tint’ and ‘limp silken texture’ relay more impartial analysis, but with the word ‘shirked’ it is as if the focalisation moved from Overt onto the garment itself – with the suggestion of some kind of agency lying with the garment – before returning to a narratorial voice stripped of focalisation (what Genette would term ‘zero focalisation’ (189) in *Narrative Discourse*) as the narrator makes explicit reference to ‘our beholder’ and reinstates its own omniscient privilege.

James and Hollinghurst have a subtly differing relationship in the representation of objects. For James, objects are often presented not just as simple material objects, but as what we might call ‘objects of consciousness’, to use Jean-Paul Sartre’s term in his reflections on Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. James’s *The Spoils of Poynton* can be analysed in this context. This is a novel ostensibly concerned with a family struggle for possession of certain pieces of furniture and artwork, and yet James, by design, resists furnishing an explicit degree of specificity to the objects. Mary McCarthy, writing in the *London Review of Books* framed the novel thus:

> *The Spoils of Poynton* is a Balzacian drama done with the merest hints of props and stage setting. James’s strategy was to abstract the general noun, furniture, from the particulars of the individual pieces, also referred to as ‘things’. He gives us a universal which we can upholster according to our own taste and antiquarian knowledge. In short, he gives us an Idea. *The Spoils of Poynton* is not a novel about material tables and chairs: it is a novel about the possession and enjoyment of an immaterial Idea, which could be *any* old

> furniture, *all* old furniture, beautiful, ugly, or neither – it makes no difference, except that if it is ugly the struggle over it will be more ironic. (3)

In referencing Balzac, McCarthy is zeroing in on a distinction James himself made in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton* when he reflects:

> On the face of it the 'things' themselves would form the very centre of such a crisis; these grouped objects, all conscious of their eminence and their price, would enjoy, in any picture of a conflict, the heroic importance. They would have to be presented, they would have to be painted – arduous and desperate thought; something would have to be done for them not too ignobly unlike the great array in which Balzac, say, would have marshaled them: *that* amount of workable interest at least would evidently be 'in it'. (xi)

The original title, when the novel was serialised in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1896, was 'The Old Things'. However, James is asking something else of the reader than Balzac: we are not given a detailed catalogue of the 'spoils' that would allow us to view the objects as simple social signifiers but rather he gives us the 'immaterial ideal' – the furniture exists only as objects of consciousness. As McCarthy suggests, it is the idea of the object and not the object itself which matters; and it matters because it is the idea represented by the objects that causes the characters to behave as they do. Indeed, the predicament James sought to dramatise is neatly encapsulated in the opening of chapter five:

> ‘I’ll give up the house if they’ll let me take what I require!’ That on the morrow, was what Mrs Gereth’s stifled night had qualified her to say, with a tragic face, at breakfast. Fleda reflected that what she ‘required’ was simply every object that surrounded them. (35)

Again, in *The Golden Bowl* we see James deploying things as objects of consciousness in outlining the manner in which characters conceive and construct one another. We can interrogate the following passage when Maggie Verver, alone, reconstructs her absent husband:

> It rosily coloured her vision that – even such as he was, yes – her husband could on occasion sin by excess of candour. He wouldn’t otherwise have given as his reason for going up to Portland Place in the August days that he was arranging books there. He had bought a great many of late, and he had had others, a large number, sent from Rome – wonders of old print in which her father had been interested. But when her imagination tracked him to the dusty town, to the house where drawn blinds and pale shrouds, where a caretaker and a kitchen maid were alone in possession, it wasn’t to see him, in his shirtsleeves, unpacking battered boxes. (549)

The objects as they exist in the imagination of the characters are subject to the same imagining and imaginative construction as one character by another. Where Jonah constructs the absent Valance though the contents of his suitcase, Maggie Verver evokes her husband, the Prince, via his possessions which are recalled or summoned imaginatively. However, this is a different order of object and operating on a different

plane of phenomenological enquiry. The objects, in this case the books, provide a pretext in which a constructed version of the Prince is offered to the reader and then denied. James gives us the image of the Prince unpacking the books in his shirtsleeves, but then qualifies it by telling us this is not, in fact, what Maggie imagined. We are given instead an alternative version of the Prince – this time as a man lost in thought engaged in very little, possessed of a blankness and alone with his ennui:

> She saw him, in truth, less easily beguiled – saw him wander, in the closed dusky rooms, from place to place, or else, for long periods, recline on deep sofas and stare before him through the smoke of ceaseless cigarettes. She made him out as liking better than anything in the world just now to be alone with his thoughts. Being herself connected with his thoughts, she continued to believe, more than she had ever been, it was thereby a good deal as if he were alone with her. (549)

There is a sophisticated layering of identity at play here, constructed through reference to objects, but this is not so much a matter of socially-coded objects as objects of consciousness. We are given first the busy Prince and then the pensive Prince. In Hollinghurst's novel, the object is the portal to an examination of a character in his or her absence; however, in this case, the object itself is also absent. For James, it is through the objects of consciousness that we begin to understand better, not simply the psychology of the characters, but the complex manner in which they relate and conceive of one another.

Maggie's imagining – an imagining which is, of course, located in the narrator – of her husband alone in the act of unpacking books, echoes the manner by which earlier in the novel she had sought to construct a version of her own identity for the Prince as she described for him the manner in which she and her father habitually travelled:

> These, the smaller pieces, are the things we take out and arrange as we can, to make the hotels we stay at and the houses we hire a little less ugly. Of course it's a danger, and we have to keep watch. But father loves a fine piece, loves, as he says, the good of it, and it's for the company of some of his things that he's willing to run his risks. And we've had extraordinary luck. (47)

Again, Maggie is using the objects, in this case the smaller pieces of art in her father's collection with which they travel, to convey to the Prince aspects of their identity, but crucially, as in *The Spoils of Poynton* and in contrast to Hollinghurst's use of the suitcase, we are not shown the pieces and we do not even know what these pieces are. The Prince's earlier response to such acts of verbal display provides a richly ambiguous complexity. When earlier Maggie announces she does not know what the Prince 'costs' (i.e. his economic value or worth), we learn how he 'had quite adored, for the moment, her way of saying it. He had felt even, for the moment, vulgar. But he had made the best of that' (8). The statement frees the pair temporarily from the constraints of the game they are playing, Maggie of course knows or at least intuits the Prince's 'cost', later describing him as 'an object of beauty an object of price' (8) and in doing so reduces him to an object and the object to a commodity. In James's work, objects can be the vehicle through which ideas of class are transmitted and

received, but he also consciously deploys a distinct resistance to the materiality of these objects. Rather than objects of material culture, these are objects which, when recalled or summoned in the minds of the characters, become the prism through which both pronounced and fine-grained differences are explored and negotiated both explicitly and unconsciously.

In *A Superficial Reading of Henry James: Preoccupations with the Material World,* Thomas J. Otten argues that James's ambiguity is a material state, an indeterminate zone where the difference between essence and ornament disappear:

> Such objects give the reader a purchase on 'the Jamesian'; they offer something like a cognitive handle (they are frequently objects that are meant to be grasped) on the highly, sometimes almost forbiddingly nuanced surfaces of the cultures the texts represent. In other words the golden bowl is the most fungible thing a reader can find in the *The Golden Bowl* because its represented material qualities, such as hardness and its definite form, become cognitive ones the reader can keep in mind. (xvi)

So in Otten's interpretation, the objects are not simply reflecting a culture or set of culturally-specific attitudes or positions, they are an essential mechanism for understanding James's exploration of the inexpressible. Without the objects to offer this 'purchase', the reader would have difficulty understanding the novel. The greater the complexity of the culture, the more socially or intellectually nuanced the age, the deeper the reliance on the material to convey this. Furthermore, the golden bowl, in this reading, becomes remarkable not for its symbolic value, which some critics have

viewed as overwrought[17], but for the specific qualities of its materiality, the hardness and the definite form, so although the bowl may be to some degree indeterminate, the material characteristics are enough for us to hold onto. Otten places too great an emphasis on the fungibility of the golden bowl. Although he gives an account of the materiality of the object, Otten does not offer a reading which takes into account the symbolism of the object or indeed the point at which the symbol and material coincide or inform one another.

In *The Stranger's Child*, when Valance finally appears, Jonah feels 'intimate with someone who is simultaneously unaware of him' (15) and goes so far as to avert his eyes. Valance, who was so carefully and painstakingly constructed by Jonah's examination of his belongings, is suddenly reduced by his presence. Class boundaries are again underscored as Valance moves for Jonah from the realm of the 'imagined' to the realm of the 'real'. These class boundaries can be viewed from the polarised points of view of both protagonists, as Valance (in contrast to Jonah's hyper-sensitivity) does not give a thought for the intimate exposure involved in the valet's unpacking of his suitcase. And far from being an act unique to the period, these exposures continue today: one need look no further than the work of an artist such as the French photographer Sophie Calle who, when hired for three weeks as a chambermaid in a Venetian hotel, examined and documented the belongings of the guests in the twelve bedrooms to which she had been assigned, observing through the details of their possessions, lives which remained unknown to her.

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[17] In *Culture and Conduct in the Novels of Henry James,* Alwyn Berland argues that, although the golden bowl as a symbol is superior to, say, the statue of 'Thirst' in Roderick Hudson, 'the overwrought inadequacy of the image is only one measure of the inadequacy of the novel as a whole' (7).

In this instance, through both Hollinghurst's language and the language of Jonah's thoughts – through the imagined Valance and the fleshed out Valance who appears before Jonah now – Jonah is diminished by his presence though clearly harbouring a degree of attraction to Valance. The scene with Jonah offers an example of the finely-tuned and complex ironies in play as Hollinghurst constructs the past in his prose though the material culture of the age. However, while Hollinghurst is clearly working within realist conventions when constructing the psychology of characters, there are also other influences at work in Hollinghurst's use of objects.

In the *Paris Review* interview of 2011, Hollinghurst designated Ronald Firbank his 'tutelary spirit' (Terzian 30). He had previously examined Firbank's work at length in his 2006 Lord Northcliffe Lectures at University College, London, and it is Firbank's novel *Valmouth* which Will Beckwith reads after a trip to the cinema in Hollinghurst's debut novel *The Swimming Pool Library*. It is interesting to consider Firbank's sparing use of objects, in contrast to the manner in which James deploys them. We can begin by establishing a few commonalities in the manner in which Hollinghurst and Firbank construct characters through an awareness of objects: we can, for example, recognise Jonah's particular fascination with Valance's suitcase and its contents in the observations of the fifteen year-old Mabel Collins in Firbank's *Inclinations*. This is most evident in the detailed descriptions Mabel furnishes in her letters to her mother or in her observations of the bazaar: '"They showed me the smartest set of tea-things," she said, "that I ever saw, it belonged to Iphigenia – in Tauris. Oh such little tiny cups! Such little teeny spoons! Such a darling of a cream jug… And such a sturdy little tea pot…"' (201). Firbank uses Mabel Collins's youth and attentiveness to the made world around her at the same time as he mocks her naivety. Whatever the objects were that she was shown, it is impossible that they were

the things of Iphigenia in Tauris. The objects themselves, we learn, are from an 'Antiquarian's on Priam Place' (201), and there is an anxiety voiced about the final home of the objects – 'I suppose all destined for America' (201) as one character reflects. The character's response to the objects becomes part of the manner in which they project their character and imply their status to the others through their choice of words: thus, with 'little', 'tiny' and 'darling', the objects are personified and the speaker is infantilised. This is the language of the nursery and the doll's house applied to the artifacts. The impulse that causes the character to revere these objects also causes her to inadvertently belittle them, to conceive of them in terms which the author and the reader recognise as perhaps comic or improper, depending on their sympathies and inclinations. There is a sense of reverence for the artifacts, for these objects, but also a palpable sense that connoisseurship is a form of social currency, which is of course satirised by the author: whatever the objects are – they are not the things the voice speaking claims them to be. Firbank is also establishing another frame of reference in mentioning 'Iphigenia in Tauris', casually placing Euripides' drama as the backdrop to the chatter of the upper-class women.

In the *Paris Review* interview Hollinghurst conceives of Firbank as a writer for whom 'style became a vehicle for simultaneous concealment and display' (7). Interpreting the above exchange under these terms we see the 'display' of the social capital and status through the sharing of the supposed provenance of the objects, while at the same time we see the 'concealment' both on the level of the objects themselves (we do not see them and they are not described) but also on another level – as the scene itself is complicated by the fact that it can only be inferred that Mabel is the speaker here. There is no authorial intervention into the free-floating voices to confirm this is Mabel speaking.

A relationship between 'concealment' and 'display' might also be discerned in Hollinghurst's deployment of objects in *The Stranger's Child*. The idea of 'concealment' recurs throughout the novel, not simply in the suitcase Jonah examines, but later when the tomb of Valance is visited, and again at the end of the book when the strong-room behind its sealed door is explored[18]. Hollinghurst repeatedly has his characters misunderstand the nature of objects: meanings attach to objects but then fall away or are misinterpreted. We might consider the scene at Cawley Court, Valance's former family home, now, in 1967, a boarding school where Peter Rowe, the teacher, is asked to curate a 'museum' to which the boys each contribute objects. These objects include an 'Admiral's dress sword' (287), 'a hand grenade' (288), 'a flintlock pistol' (288) and a 'Gurkha kuri knife' (288), all of which are assembled around a desk, 'part of a jumble of Victorian furniture and household objects, clothes baskets, clothes horses, coal-scuttles, that had been roughly stacked and locked away in an adjacent stable at some unknown date' (290). Rowe's role here is to create sense from the array of superficially meaningless objects. These are objects we might assume all have their own narratives, but Rowe's role is to guide us towards an image of Valance. Where Firbank had Mabel Collins and the upper-class women who surrounded her valuing the objects but projecting onto them facile qualities, which undermined a complex history, here Peter Rowe and the boys at Cawley Court have an abundance of valueless items from the past. However, it is from among these objects that a photograph of Valance is retrieved.

It is interesting to compare where Firbank and Hollinghurst place the reader in relation to material objects. In the scene after the bazaar, Firbank's reference to

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[18] As Christopher Talyor reflected in his *London Review of Books* review of *A Stranger's Child*, this is a novel 'depicting familial and literary memory as hopelessly blurred and manipulable' (9-10).

‘Iphigenia in Tauris’ indicated to the reader that tea set was of less value than the women who discuss it believed (to whomever the tea set may have once belonged, we can reasonably assume it did not belong to a mythological princess in a time before tea came to western Europe). The women seek to inflate its social value by ascribing a mythological origin to the tea set but then go on to describe these objects in infantilising terms as one might a child’s toy or a piece of clothing. Firbank is gently mocking the women and their relationship to antiquity and the classical world: they aspire to possess its objects but then discuss them in a language which reduces their stature – the tea-set is elevated to relic then immediately reduced to simple commodity; the historical becomes the collectable – and then a toy. The actual origin, whatever that may be, is missed entirely.

By contrast, Hollinghurst places another emphasis on objects, which is not to do with misreading the past, but rather with the inherently empty value of any object before a narrative is given to it. The scene forms a direct counterpoint to Jonah’s unpacking of the suitcase, as Rowe examines the photograph of Valance with the same detailed observation that we saw earlier when Jonah unpacked the suitcase. The pretext for this close examination of the photograph is provided by one of the boys asking if Rowe can date the photograph:

> There was just the gilt stamp of Elliott and Fry, Baker Street on the blue-grey mount. Little evidence in the clothes – dark striped suit, wing collar, soft silk tie with gemmed tie pin. He was half in profile, looking down to the left. Dark wavy hair oiled back but springing up at the brow in a temperamental crest. (291)

Hollinghurst is here directing our attention to the way both the past is recalled and reconstructed and the centrality of objects to the construction of characters. There is an artfulness to this, as first Jonah then later Rowe look to discover aspects of Valance through their focused consideration of objects which belong or belonged to him. The photograph of Valance is temporarily rescued from this vast detritus of the past. The vestigial memories of Valance which are subject to change, misremembering, reconfiguration are thus evoked over the course of the novel through objects – the suitcase, the tomb, the photograph. As new characters meet with each, a new version of Valance is reconstructed whose meaning changes depending on how the character is interpreting him.

Thus Hollinghurst shows that there is always more than one story being told in every story. The object is a bridge to this. The air of memory Hollinghurst creates around the shifting versions of Valance produced by the objects is also a hub of other identities. Through the use of focalized narration in relation to the objects, Hollinghurst reminds the reader that, although characters may be forgotten by history or worse misremembered (in the case of Valance), the essential interconnectivity remains and is enshrined in the object which once, however briefly, united them.

## II The Clyster in *The Quickening Maze*

Like the suitcase in Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child*, the use of the clyster on the patient, Mr Francombe, in *The Quickening Maze* offers Foulds an opportunity to dramatise the relationship between two characters, in this case Matthew Allen and his son Fulton:

> ‘Fulton if you want to take part’ Allen said in a surprisingly weary voice ‘you might usefully go in now. Go in behind him and get hold of his head. Get hold of his ears’. (37)

The ‘surprisingly’ is central here, and the reader might ask, surprising to whom? Surely not to Saunders or Stockdale, the attendants present. It must therefore be Fulton to whom the tone comes as a surprise and, if it is, that is our cue that the scene is being focalised through Fulton. Fulton fleetingly demurs asking his father ‘really’, but before he has a chance to revise his position his father steps in. Allen’s subsequent engagement with Mr Francombe, in lieu of his son, sees Francombe’s physicality – and behaviour, as Allen and the stewards attempt to administer the enema – couched in terms of decay and rotting: his ‘greasy hair’ his ‘curdling with rage’ and ‘the slimy gristle of his ears’. Francombe is described in terms usually reserved for rancid meat or other foodstuffs, with the word ‘curdling’ evoking butter or milk gone sour. Likewise the ‘gristle’ evokes the butchering of meat, the remnant or useless off-cut, the matter discarded in the process. These combine to suggest the organic process of the human entering into a stage of decay, moving beyond its usefulness, alerting us to the limited lifespan of the organic and the inescapability of decay, despite the efforts or innovations of a material culture.

If the suitcase and its unpacking in *The Stranger’s Child* becomes a subtle method of establishing the character through specific use of the objects of the age, the clyster in Foulds’ *The Quickening Maze* here provides a much more forthright entrance into the lived world of the novel. To achieve this end, Foulds draws on a poetic tradition of associative and highly visual description when engaging with the

objects of the historical moment about which he writes in *The Quickening Maze*. Where Hollinghurst used the narrative technique of focalization in relation to objects, Foulds draws on his experiences as a poet. More specifically, Foulds' prose style with its abundant use of complex simile and metaphor owes a debt to the Martian School of Poetry, poetry distinguished by a prevalent use of surprising visual metaphors. Martian poetry was a minor movement in British poetry beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the early 1980s. In the poems classed as Martian poetry, everyday objects and human behaviours were described in a strange and alienating ways as if by a visiting Martian who is unable to fully understand them.

The leading figures of the movement were the poets Christopher Reid and Craig Raine, both of whom published collections of poetry in 1979. In both Reid's *Arcadia* and Raine's *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home* they transform everyday objects, in a playful kind of defamiliarization. Indeed, the term 'Martian Poetry' is derived from the title poem of Raine's book, in which the reader is shown familiar earthly sights through the eyes of a visiting Martian ('Rain is when the earth is television'). The movement was not limited to Raine and Reid, although they predominated, and similar effects are accomplished by David Sweetman in *Looking Into the Deep End* (1981) and by Oliver Reynolds in *Skevington's Daughter* (1985). The approach can be linked to the surrealist approaches to the types of imagery pioneered by British Surrealists 1930s, in particular, the work of David Gasgoyne who, in 1935, penned the first English Surrealist Manifesto, influenced by the decadent, surrealist and symbolist French poets Gasycone had encountered in Paris.

It is not surprising to learn then that Raine was one of Foulds' first publishers at *Areté*[19] where Foulds' long poem *The Broken Word* first appeared. This suggests a clear genealogy for Foulds' writing style. In Foulds' prose, this Martian sensibility and aesthetic position is incorporated, perhaps for the first time, into the context of mainstream literary historical fiction. The process of defamiliarisation that Martian poetics engender is the engine for much of Foulds' prose. Defamiliarisation as a term was put into circulation by Lennon and Marion in their 1965 Russian Formalist Criticism. The term has its roots in Viktor Shklovsky's 1917 essay 'Art As Device'. Here Shklovsky argues the purpose of poetic language is defamiliarisation or estrangement,[20] which is to say, presenting an action, object or behaviour as if the writer is experiencing that thing for the first time. Shklovsky begins with the premise that 'perception becomes habitual' (1) and that the writer works to disrupt this:

> And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. (Rivkin and Ryan 16)

[19] Tri-quarterly journal of fiction, poetry, reportage and reviews published and edited by Raine since in 1999.

[20] As Benjamin Sher reflects in his translators note to 1990 Dalkey Archive edition: 'There are, to my knowledge, at least three translations of this key term of Shklovsky. First, let me state the problem: The Russian word ostraniene (noun) or ostranit (verb) is a neologism, a fact in itself of supreme importance in a critic as given to serious wit and punning as Shklovsky is. There is no such word in Russian dictionaries. It is clear that the o prefix (o-straniene), often used to implement an action (though this is only one of its many and even contradictory uses), may be understood to apply to two stems simultaneously, that is, to both stran (strange) as well as storon (side, which becomes stran in such verbs as otstranit' (xviii).

Shklovsky uses the example of Tolstoy in the story 'Shame' where he defamiliarises the act of flogging: 'He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something he avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects' (16). So how is this technique related to Foulds' engagement with the various objects of the Victorian period of which he writes in *The Quickening Maze*?

In the first place we see a younger character being used by Foulds to usher the reader into the world the novel inhabits – in this instance it is Fulton Allen, Matthew Allen's son, who is 'only just sixteen' (33). Fulton accompanies his father to Leopard Hill Lodge, which is 'full of real madness' (36) when compared to the forward thinking, relatively benign and sedate inhabitants of High Beach. Leopard Hill Lodge is home to people who are 'lost to themselves': 'They were fierce and unpredictable. They smelled rank… They made sudden noise' (36). It is more like a zoo than a bedlam as the name Leopard Hill Lodge itself subtly suggests. Already in this description we might discern the influence of the Martian poetics at work as the lodge is transformed into a zoo.

En route to Leopard Hill Lodge, the attendant, William Stockdale, explains how a Mr Francombe 'hasn't evacuated for three weeks now' (34). Mr Francombe appears to be suffering from a delusional condition rendering him unable to evacuate his bowels, and accordingly a clyster is resorted to to inject fluid into the bowel via the rectum. The clyster becomes the object through which the patient is brought back to the reality of the novel, drawn down from their disturbed fantasies. The detail with which the operation is recorded is of interest here: 'Allen bent and then inserted the nozzle into the dark, crimped entrance of Mr Francombe's rectum' (38). The second

qualification in the description of the rectum – it is both 'dark' and 'crimped' – suggests something hand-made. It is fabric, but it also echoes the natural world, the rectum defamiliarised into the texture of an organic substance. We might even venture that, encoded in this description, is a reference to Craig Raine's famous Martian poem 'Arsehole' which describes its subject's 'soiled and puckered hem' (66). There is also the semi-suppressed comic reference to 'Mr Francombe's rectum', the comedy coming from the formality and propriety of the address set against the intimacy and baseness of the body part. This precision and the double qualification is repeated as the procedure takes effect and there appears 'a tiny hard stool folded like a sea-shell' (39). By 1840, the year in which *The Quickening Maze* is set, the clyster was already becoming a relatively archaic method of delivering an enema. The clyster, also sometimes known as a syringe enema, was a method that had been in use since the 1400s; however, what were known as 'bulb enemas' were beginning to be introduced around 1840 (Whorton). This is a scene grounded in the observation of the physical and the patient's movement between two physical states. It begins with the repressed physicality of the patient, Mr Francombe, refusing to open his bowels and moves ultimately to the unresisted state when the clyster is used: 'he had the clyster ready, in one hand the pipe in the other the bag of warm salted water' (39). The object, in this case the clyster, is a bridge between states of physicality and also states of character, of Mr Francombe as delusional and Mr Francombe as temporarily relieved. Fulton's role here is to view for us the physicality of the procedure and the men who are about to be engaged in delivering the enema.

There follows a slackening in the language from the taut formality of 'Mr Francombe's rectum', to the now almost conversational description of how 'an astonishing quantity of shit bloomed from him across the table' (39) as the clyster

begins to work. The precise, double qualifications of the earlier descriptions have gone, replaced by the verb ‘bloomed’, which maintains the link to the natural world: the shit spreads as a tight and bursting bud would blossom. So we might characterize Foulds’ prose as possessing an atunement to the material culture of the age but an atunement that is then exposed to Martian poetics. This combination is deployed to take the reader closer to the physicality, to the lived physical experience of the characters in the reconstructed past of *The Quickening Maze*. At the same time, the element of estrangement serves also to register the historical distance between the reader and the time represented. The language of other registers (in this case nature and the natural world, of sea-life and flowers sea-anemone??) in intensifying the readers’ experience of the scene, defamiliarises the act in the manner Shklovsky described.

We can observe a similar effect in action on the level of character description: ‘Saunders was short and strong and cheerful’ (35). Here the repetition of ‘and’ again suggests that this is a child’s apprehension, that we are viewing the man as Fulton views him. This is further suggested by the description of the action having taken place ‘with blunt, capable hands that Fulton stared at’ (35). Here the ‘blunt’ marks the start of a passage of description where the tools of the working man and their conditions are appropriated to describe the man himself:

> His fingertips were wide, the nails thick and yellow; his thumbs were jointed at two right angles, turning parallel to the palms. His eyes were bright among pleats of aged skin. Beneath one eyebrow hung two small growths, smaller than berries. (35)

The spatial and depth references located in the ‘wide’ and ‘thick’ are augmented by the ‘jointed’ which follows and the subsequent ‘right angles’. This is the language of construction, of making, of craftsmanship – if the ‘nails’ and ‘thumbs’ were to be removed the language which describes them might just as easily be applied to the construction of a house or the building of a room, the ‘jointed’ suggestive of carpentry or joinery, of something manufactured from wood. The ‘nails’ too, while obviously referencing the fingernails, also carry a resonance of builders’ nails, which adds to this overall impression. If we return to Shklovsky, we recognise that Foulds here ‘avoids the accepted names of its parts and instead names corresponding parts of other objects’. The process of defamiliarisation then continues but with a shift in focus with the ‘pleats of aged skin’ evoking a fabric, since ‘pleats’ is a word commonly associated with curtains or garments. So, in sum, we begin to see Saunders’ physicality overlaid with an abstract wooden and fabric construction, with resonances of something theatrical perhaps, a wooden puppet or a wood frame covered with fabric. A third layer of defamiliarisation is enacted with the description of the ‘growths, smaller than berries’ which both evokes the growths but is also subject to the register of the description which preceded it, so we see, not simply the berry-like growths, but berry-like growths made from wood, growths which share some of the materiality of the objects evoked earlier in the description.

We thus have a layering of the material culture in the description of the man, as the man himself echoes the made objects of the age. Embedded in the description of Saunders are aspects and resonances of the hand-turned carvings made by the patients in the hospital. Furthermore, the perceptions of Saunders focalised though Fulton both engender defamiliarisation in the manner Shklovsky would recognise, but also suggest a mild visual hallucination on the part of Fulton, as he projects

characteristics of inanimate objects onto the living Saunders. Fulton is partially conceiving of Saunders in a dehumanized way, as if the man were inanimate. So while the defamiliarisation enriches our perception as readers of the physiological characteristics of Saunders, Fulton's own psychological condition is also being suggested to us by the method of narration. Saunders as perceived by Fulton in the unfamiliar environment undergoes what might be considered a type of derealization. Alternatively (and here Foulds strategically builds in room for doubt) we might decide that Fulton experiences a disruption to his consciousness, manifested in his perceptions, as he experiences the external reality as stripped of its human resonances and significances. In terms of today's understanding of the psychopathology of the scene, Foulds is presenting a disturbed child in the midst of more strongly defined madness around him through an adaptation of the estranging techniques of Martian poetry.

This is a modification of the Martian techniques as they are co-opted into prose. The defamiliarisation no longer simply exists in the primary metaphor or similes (as they might if this description were offered as a poem) but spreads in a broad and more diffuse manner across the body of the prose. The overall effect is to deliver a vivid, richly human character for Saunders, centred in his physicality, which acts as a prelude to Mr Francombe being returned unwillingly to his own corporality.

In Foulds' work, this Martian technique is combined with a more traditional lyric mode. Paul Giles, in his essay 'From Myth Into History: The Later Poetry of Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes', outlines the genealogy of the Martian poets as he traces them down from Thom Gunn and Ted Hughes. Giles observes that the 'affinity between Hughes and Raine (Hughes's editor at Faber during the 1980s) was recognized by A.D. Moody, who wrote in 1987 of the poets' shared interest in

translating nature into a realm of analogical "fancy," a "a use of similes to view the world through alien eyes."' (156). Giles goes on to suggest that:

> During the later 1970s and 1980s, the poetry of both Gunn and Hughes came to exhibit greater self-consciousness about the potential of language. If their early work was characterized by iconoclasm, their mid-period by superstructures of myth, we might begin to talk of the late period of Hughes and Gunn as distinguished by an amalgamation of different styles and influences, between archetypal resonance and ludic play. (154)

We might detect a similar balance of elements in the work of Foulds in his combination of material objects and Martian poetics. Furthermore, the objects in *The Quickening Maze,* by and large, do not do the things the characters think they will. The limitations and failures of the objects to mediate or improve upon the organic state of the human being, across the spectrum of class and social position, is represented in *The Quickening Maze* from the pragmatic, ideologue Allen with his writing desk and its 'phrenological bust' (22) – an interesting material symbol both of his search for knowledge and of the intellectual climate of the age which embraced the pseudoscience of phrenology – the introverted Tennyson with his stoop and 'screwed in monocle' (22), the dreamy Allen daughter, Hannah, at her piano, the reticent Allen son, the disturbed Francombe, to the wandering John Clare. For each of these characters, the material objects delivered by society's commodification does not free them but embeds them more deeply in their attendant conditions. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the image of Tennyson walking in his ice skates:

> Tennyson teetering over the girl, who wondered why he didn't think to unstrap his skates and walk comfortably in his boots, but said nothing. She walked beside him proudly at his careful slow pace, as though in a procession and was only slightly distracted by the sweet-sharp human odour that came from his clothes. At the door he finally did remove his skates, bending down so that she could see the top of his head. Thick hair, actually thick hairs – a wide diameter to each hair –flowed from the crown in strong waves. (76)

The ice skates which, if used in their proper context might have temporarily lent the poet an uncommon movement and grace, instead actively inhibit him and draw his companion's attention to the all-too-human aspects: his smell and the nature of his hair. Once again, objects fail to do the things they might have done and instead we are returned to the human and the natural. In both cases, however, as the passage above suggests, we see a poet's awareness of 'the potential of language' in the representing of objects and the sensual presence of the human.

In Foulds' work, we see a prioritizing of the natural world over the man-made world.[21] Thus, in Clare's return to nature, his sleeping in the woods, his lack of reliance on the material culture, he is posited as perhaps the least deluded, the least deceived, of all the characters presented in the novel. This becomes clear if we compare the language used to describe Francombe, the language of nature debased by industrial process, to the care and exactitude with which the gypsies living in the woods beyond the asylum are observed by Clare as they 'dismantle' the stolen deer with which they have returned to the camp. The verb choice ('dismantle') enacts the

[21] In his New Yorker review of *The Quickening Maze,* the critic James Wood observes the precision with which Foulds verbally recreates the natural world, observing the book to be 'remarkable for the precision and vitality of its perceptions and for the successful intricacy of its prose'. Wood, James. *Asylum A novel about the poet John Clare,* 28 June, 2011 pp. 23

initial defamiliarisation – it is not the ‘dismember’ which the reader might expect in the context of a body; the word ‘dismantle’ carries with it both the making strange, a mechanical resonance rather than an organic one, but is also suggestive of a care and reverence, the body taken apart rather than imposed upon. It also implies that the thing itself (in this case, the deer) has been put together at some point prior to its dismantling:

> He watched with great pleasure the skill of the men, their knives quick as fish. They said nothing, only the work made noises, knockings on joints, wet peelings, the twisting crunch of a part disconnected. First, a trench was dug to receive and hide the blood and the deer was hung from a branch upside down above it. With sharpened knives they slit it quickly down the middle and found the first stomach. Very carefully one man cut either side of it, and knotted the slipper tubes to keep the gut acid from the meat. This made something like a straw-stuffed cushion, filled with undigested herbage. (48)

This is the language of human expertise, a process undertaken ‘quickly’ and ‘carefully’. Foulds is here connecting the reader to an older material culture. This is a pre-industrialised process; it is both ancient and expert, and portrayed as such. We have the early association of the knife and the fish, which reinforces the naturalness of the act, while the ‘straw-stuffed cushion’ lends an air of the domestic to the whole undertaking. Here Foulds’ language and image choices seek to naturalise and normalise the process of dismembering the deer. This is precise and descriptive language but it is by no means sensational. Those ‘wet peelings’ and that ‘twisting crunch’ keep the reader vividly present in the scene because they capture exactly the

process rather than seek to exaggerate it or estrange it in any manner. Foulds then uses the object, in this instance the knife and its uses in butchering the deer, to ground the reader in the lived experience of his characters by combining it at points with Martian poetics and at others with simple observation, producing both the recognitions and defamiliarisations engendered by both.

Foulds himself identifies and articulates something similar in the work of John Clare and the poet's own relationship to objects. Writing on Clare in *The Guardian,* Foulds suggested: 'His poems reveal a subtle kind of alertness, an elastic intelligence finding its way through the world, finding objects that gather and contain complexes of thought and feeling' ("Everywhere in Exile"). Foulds goes on to describe how, a passionate egg collector as a boy, Clare wrote a number of poems about birds' nests[22]. Overtly they are descriptive, notational, often sounding like entries in a naturalist's notebook but in Foulds' own opinion 'the observations seem… to be charged and illuminated by what was most alive and unresolved in Clare's psyche'. For Foulds' this unresolved element in Clare's psyche has to do with seeking a home. Thus Foulds remarks that 'Homeless as he was, each nest offered a compelling image of a centre', going on to suggest that what the reader hears in the lines of Clare's birds' nest poems is 'the poet's fascination that a structure so seemingly fragile can withstand the world' (17). We can start to establish a sense of Foulds' own relationship to objects and materiality through this statement on Clare's work[23]. In Foulds' prose, objects and characters' perception of objects become a method for transmitting views or opinions

[22] Poems such as 'The Nightingales Nest' and 'The Yellowhammer's Nest'. The placement and selection of these poems is discussed by Mina Gorji in *John Clare and the Poetry of Place.*
Gorji, Mina. *John Clare and the Poetry of Place*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008.

[23] This idea is echoed in Jonathan Bate's biography of Clare where he describes how: 'As both a boy and a man, Clare used his imagination to turn humble objects into grander things. Like a bird building a nest, he collected fragments and made them into wholes, into homes (31).

but also for communicating what is ‘alive and unresolved’ in the psyche of his characters. Objects and the way in which they are perceived (as relayed through focalised description) allow the reader to understand better defined aspects of his characters – such as Clare’s attachment to nature, but also the complex nature of Foulds’ characters’ worries and fears. Through objects we learn about the things they know about themselves as well as the parts of themselves and their inner lives, which remain in conflict.

There is also an ethical component to this that requires consideration. Foulds is playing a double game fictionalising the lives of historical figures who have not appeared in literature before (the doctor and his boy), while at the same time fictionalising the lives of literary figures about whom much more is known and documented. Foulds’ work opens up the question of historical legitimacy and the ethics of giving voice to the dead. The novelist Guy Gavriel Kay in *The Guardian*, referred to: ‘a general erosion of the ethical value of privacy and a parallel emergence of a widespread sense of entitlement to look at – or to make use of – the lives of others.’ (17) Kay’s comments came in response to earlier comments from A. S. Byatt, who was reported in a *Guardian* interview with the organizers of The Booker Prize as saying ‘I really don’t like the idea of ‘basing’ a character on someone, and these days I don’t like the idea of going into the mind of the real unknown dead’ (22). That same year, in a different context (relating to the use of his great-great grandmother in a Kate Pullinger novel *The Mistress of Nothing*), Anthony Beevor protested that ‘The blurring of fact and fiction has great commercial potential, which is bound to be corrupting in historical terms’ (7). Beevor here is betraying a belief in history, which implicitly posits a ‘pure’ form of the past rather than one which is continually constructed and reconstructed by historians and writers. While at the same time his

comments, importantly, bring into play the question of the degree to which novelists are responsible to the past, exactly how far their license extends. And of course the comments of Kay, Byatt and Beevor return us to the fact that this is continually contested and negotiated sphere, how far a novelist can go, what liberties they can take with the past are never fixed. Indeed the existence of the debate itself can be held up as evidence of the health (literary and economic) of the genre.

## III Cigarettes in *An Ice Cream War* and Elsewhere

William Boyd's novel *The New Confession* raises other questions about the use of objects in literary historical fiction. In this case, we are not looking at a poet making the transition from poetry to fiction, and retaining some of the techniques and experiences of writing poetry, but at a novelist who uses objects in his fiction with an understanding of their cultural significance. In this case, Boyd uses an object with an awareness of the history of its representation in another medium: the cinema. Accordingly, *The New Confession* contains an essayistic passage on the uses of the cigarette and what we might see as the birth of the cigarette's visual grammar in a cinematic context. Director John James Todd recalls filming Rousseau's *Juli*e in Germany in the 1920s:

> It is late one evening. An albescent moon shines on Baron Wolmar's chateau. On the terrace Saint-Preux wrestles with his conscience as he smokes a cigarette (remember, it has all been updated) Moths flutter round the lights (thank you, Georg). Then further up the long terrace Julie steps out through the French windows of her boudoir. She is wearing luxuriant flimsy negligee which billows occasionally in the night breezes. She advances towards Saint-

> Preux, their eyes fast upon one another. She stops eighteen inches from him. Caption: 'I love this time of evening. May I have a cigarette?' With one movement Saint-Preux slides his silver cigarette case from his pocket. Close up of Julie's finger as she selects one – her lacquered nails on the slim white cylinder. Saint-Preux – cigarette in mouth – goes for his lighter in another pocket, but a slight hesitation on Julie's part halts him. She puts the cigarette in her mouth (close-up: those wide red lips, that white paper). She sways towards him. Tip of cigarette meets tip of cigarette. Ignition, burn, smoke wreaths. They move apart, gazing at each other. They draw on their cigarettes, exhale. Smoke, backlit by the moon, coils and swoops thickly about them. (152)

Boyd offers a sequence of images and interactions which are now enshrined in the culture as cinematic clichés but are here re-energised by the pretence that what the reader is witnessing is their first expression.[24] The implicit terms of the interaction between author and reader require the reader to suspend their disbelief and to allow themselves to imagine this is the first time such a series of acts have played out on camera. In so doing Boyd is asking the reader to re-examine these images, to see them anew, to inhabit an historical moment, to be present at the birth of a cliché, the birth of a visual language formed by the cigarette and its attendant gestures. It is this knowingness, and this desire to reconstruct cliché and to reinvigorate it, that characterises Boyd's engagement with material culture.

[24] As this passage suggests, it is difficult in the context of cinematic practices to separate the object, the cigarette or pipe, from the attendant activities of smoking.

At the same time, Boyd is also recording and memorialising the manner in which western culture came to invent the praxis and grammar, the conventions of the visual language which accompanies these scenes, how the figure of the cigarette and its varied intimate positions and postures came to mean what they are taken to mean – scenes that would become as ubiquitous across cinema and literature as the cigarettes that enable them.[25] While the film itself portrays the act of smoking as an act central to the cultural experience, as Rousseau's novel is translated to the cinema in Weimar Germany, so what might be read initially as superficially playful satire is in fact making a serious point about the transmission of ideas in western culture, about the formation of sets of conventions, both cinematic and literary, across forms and with specific reference to objects and their attendant processes. On the reader's part, this is a knowing form of pleasure which is manipulated by the author; the reader is implicitly aware of the conventions and further pleasure is derived from anticipating how Boyd will structure his characters' relationships to them; how he will deploy the clichés the objects offer but how he will also overcome or comment on these clichés. At this point, with this self-consciousness, Boyd pushes the boundaries of realism by making the reader aware of conventions of representation. Thus, like the novels by Hollingsworth and Foulds, Boyd's writing creates a space in which the object is used as a shorthand or prop for swiftly establishing character and verisimilitude, but what distinguishes and elevates his work is that he builds in scenes which also offer implicit comment upon this process, as we see in the John James Todd's reflection on Rousseau's *Julie*.[26]

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[25] A discussion of this subject can be found in Richard Kleins, *Cigarettes Are Sublime.* Duke UP, 1994.

[26] Or indeed in the essayistic reflection on smoking given by Logan Mountstuart towards the conclusion of *Any Human Heart*.

Boyd distinguishes himself by seeing the potential to improvise upon an aspect of material culture to reveal aspects of his characters and in doing so afford them a broader and potentially more modern set of sexual, cultural or political mores. Boyd signals and negotiates the gap between the historical time of the events represented and the present situation of writer and reader through this literary self-consciousness. Whereas Foulds' prose pulls the reader back toward a preindustrial past which the writing implicitly seems to privilege for its unmediated connection with nature, Boyd overlays contemporary sexuality and desire onto an historic fictional setting. For example, consider a scene early on in Boyd's *An Ice-Cream W*ar, where shortly after his arrival back at the family home we are presented with Felix Cobb in his bedroom, smoking a cigarette:

> He lay on his bed and smoked a cigarette, watching the blue braided fumes curl and disintegrate. (56)

The poetic language employed in the description alerts the reader to a potential link to the aesthetic concerns of both Hollinghurst and Foulds.[27] Boyd is employing a mode of description which lends the act a visually poetic tenor (that extended focus on the smoke and its disintegration) and also describes it in a fittingly musical manner: the shift in register from the clipped, flowing prose that preceded it to that poetic, lyrical 'blue braided fumes' with its internal rhyme and the repetition of the plosives 'bl' and 'br', then the 'um' and 'ur' before the Latinate 'disintegrate'. The reader is encouraged through the lyrical nature of the language to experience an aural pleasure equivalent to and representative of the act of smoking. A quotient of beauty is

[27] In his review of *The Quickening Maze,* published in the *Guardian* on 2 May 2009, Andrew Motion was the first to make this link between Foulds and Hollinghurst when he observed: 'The key to this success is the concentration of Foulds's writing, which manages to seem both simultaneously poised and flowing in its urgency. Alan Hollinghurst is one of the few other contemporary novelists to catch this blend of something essentially poetic and something essentially to do with prose'.

assigned to the act by Boyd; the description is verbally pleasurable, visually arresting, after the manner of poetic writing, but furthermore, it not only triggers these experiences in the reader but alerts us to the feelings Felix clearly wishes to feel himself. The act is aesthetically rich for both the reader and for Felix, while it also communicates and designates a set of culturally encoded feelings and responses to which Felix aspires. Felix is performing the act of smoking, with Boyd casting Felix as the aspiring decadent. The reader is given privileged information – as with Hollinghurst through the device of focalised narration – about how Felix wishes to view himself, how Felix wishes to construct his sense of self, through the act of smoking and through this focus on the object, the cigarette and its smoke. Once again, made things have moved the reader closer to the mind of the man. However, Boyd does not rest there but rather builds in a more detailed level of complexity when engaging with this aspect of the material culture of the age as he begins to allow himself to improvise and to augment the material with a self-conscious awareness of representational codes.

The passage segues into a disquisition on the erotic potential inspired by an image on a poster which has been acquired by Felix after sending off used cigarette packets as proof of purchase in return for the object:

> He took out some books and a cardboard cylinder. From this he removed a coloured poster. It was an offer from de Reske cigarettes… one of the brands he smoked. On receipt of six empty packets the poster was sent free of charge. It portrayed a young couple sitting at table. A slim young man in evening dress leant forward, cupping his chin in one hand his other hand behind him, languidly resting on the seat back, a smoking cigarette held between two

> fingers. He gazed dreamily into the eyes of an equally slim woman, who leant forward also, thereby causing her considerable bosom to press against the low-cut bodice of her silk gown. (57)

In this ekphrastic passage, we are presented with a representation of the sensual pleasure of smoking alongside self-representation through objects. This is Felix as the informed consumer, whose character is established through the implied broadness of his taste and aspirant connoisseurship: this is after all not simply the 'brand' he smoked but 'one of the brands'. The image on the poster is said to have 'fascinated and stimulated': it leads to an abortive attempt at masturbation for which the poster was the usual and usually successful stimulus. What is of note here is the manner in which Boyd makes reference to the historical commercialisation of the tobacco industry[28] while making use of the dramatic potential the scene presents. Again the material culture of the age is integral to the drama. The object – in this case the poster – provides a portal for a greater understanding of the inner life of the protagonist. It is interesting to trace the modifications and improvisations that have been made here: De Reske (without the letter 'z' as Boyd spells it) is obviously a reference to 'De Reszke' the brand of cigarette named after the Polish opera singer Jean De Reszke and produced by J Millhoff, a Russian cigarette maker based on Piccadilly in London. Millhoff was perhaps more notable for their cigarette cards than their poster advertising. Their cards included a dancing couple illustrated by Rillette as well as pictures of antique pottery, historic English buildings and famous test cricketers (Vankin). A series of advertisements with the dancing couple ran on the back cover of

[28] In *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World,* Macy Norton maps the way in which tobacco was initially regarded as a sign of 'Indian diabolism' but becomes the largest source of state revenue for Spain.

various magazines such as *Graphic* as well as in *The Sphere* (*Selling in Wartime*), but in May 1914 at least, these were somewhat tamer and less sexually suggestive than the image Boyd describes. Boyd's elaboration and sexualisation acts as a way of dramatizing Felix's burgeoning and frustrated sexuality while at the same time referencing the mass production of the era and the growing influence of brands and commodities as ways of forging – in both senses of the word – self in the process of finding pleasure.

Once the original cultural climate is considered, it is perhaps unlikely that an image quite as risqué as the one Boyd describes would have appeared in the marketing materials for cigarettes. It is worth considering the climate across Europe two years earlier when, at the Stockholm Olympic Games, the bill-posters' censorship body ordered modifications to the depiction of nude athletes on the poster, designed by celebrated artist Olle Hjortzberg. The posters were sent to over six hundred cities across thirty countries worldwide but the nudity of the figures (despite the addition of a ribbon to disguise their genitalia) caused shock among the public.[29] Boyd's inflation and elaboration of the original pair of male and female characters appearing on the 'De Reszke' cigarette cards and their transposition onto the 'De Reske' poster reveals an area in which contemporary recognitions of sexuality might be found with the modern reader. This invention or amplification on Boyd's part is central to the understanding of Felix's psychological makeup. Felix's sensibility combines aspects of modern sexuality interlayered with the historical moment. From an historical perspective, this could be argued to be a flaw in the writing, but, from the perspective of historical fiction, this can be seen as an interesting innovation. As I felt when

[29] *Olympic Summer Games Posters from Athens 1896 to London 2012*, Research and Reference Service Olympic Studies Centre, 2013.

writing my own novel, a degree of alloying the present to the past is important for the success of an historical novel, in order for it to achieve an emotional resonance with its readership. Every book about the past is to some degree unavoidably also about the moment in which it is written. Boyd negotiates this through attention to the representational codes of the period presented through an ekphrastic model informed by modern understandings.

There is an historical basis for Boyd's focus on the advert. G. W. Goodall of the London School of Economics estimated, in his 1914 publication *Advertising: A Modern Business Power*, that 'as much as a hundred million sterling is annually spent in the United Kingdom' (1). As well as the nuance of character, sexual appetite and aspiration to identity, Boyd's novel also uses this object to track the global changes in the rapidly industrialised world, the increased visibility of advertising and how these commodities might measure status. He also shows how things can be used to tell us what people think about the world and how they interpret their place within it. The global reach of the tobacco industry and the significance of smoking is neatly captured in the exchange between Felix Cobb and Cyril, the gardener, who Felix is sent out to find when the generator fails during supper:

> 'How are you then Felix, looking forward to this wedding, then, are you?'
> 'Well, I suppose so. I haven't met my future sister-in-law yet. She's not long back from India. Cigarette?'
> 'Thanks. Don't mind if I do.' Cyril wiped his hands on his trouser seat before accepting one. He looked at it. 'Turkish?'
> 'Egyptian.' Felix lit both their cigarettes
> 'Not bad' Cyril exhaled 'Think I'll stick to Woodbine all the same.' (71)

The easy, informal rhythm of the exchange between Cyril the gardener and the sympathetically class-conscious Felix (whom we first meet in the opening chapter at Ashurst station having been reading 'Kroptokin's *Social Anarchy*'[30] on the train to Kent) has the quality and seeming inevitability of a joke about it. Cyril inadvertently reveals that he possesses enough connoisseurship to know the tobacco is unusual but not enough to place its origin correctly. The exchange shows how class divisions are marked by commodities. The exchange also reinforces the globalised world in which the characters exist – even those such as Cyril, who are not able to access the wider world beyond their locality where their employment keeps them, are able, albeit tangentially, to access the fruits of the globalised world, in this case the tobacco. In play we have Felix's longed-for cosmopolitanism and Cyril's relative lack of worldliness: he is able to identify the fact there is a difference between these cigarettes offered by Felix and the brand he usually smokes, but guesses incorrectly that what he is being offered must be a Turkish cigarette, and this leads to the assertion at the end of the exchange, 'I'll stick to Woodbine' – which acts as a punch line – Woodbine of course being the brand most closely associated with soldiers and those serving in the armed forces in both the first and second world wars. The reference to 'Woodbine' acts as both a stock prop to anchor us to the age and increase the verisimilitude of the scene but is also made poignant for the modern reader by the fact that neither Felix nor Cyril is aware yet of the coming World War in which Woodbines would acquire a particular emotional resonance. The joke, with its oddly flat punch line, is really no joke at all, as the reader is necessarily aware of the fate

[30] Peter Kropotkin (b.1844 – d.1921) A key figure in Anarchist Communism who believed that under communism workers would self-organize to produce the goods needed for the functioning of society.

that awaits the generation represented by these characters. Nonetheless, through the objects and their attendant processes, a great deal of complex information about each man and his interrelation to the other has been revealed.

Boyd's establishment background[31] might not immediately place him among post-colonial writers, but he is offering a critique which is both informed by a class consciousness and an ironised gaze at the colonial world. We can class Boyd's work then in the genre of the 'skeptical historical novel' to borrow the term used by Margaret Scalan in *Traces of Another Time: History and Politics in Postwar British Fiction.* In Boyd's work, we see the embodiment of an historical fiction moving towards the margins of Empire, not to the capitals but the hinterlands, and of history experienced by characters who would perhaps rather be doing something else than taking part in the seismic and epoch-altering events they find themselves caught up in. This speaks to the history to which Franco Moretti draws attention when he proposes a 'history of literature as history of norms'. He writes:

> But this is exactly what most of life is like, and instead of redeeming literature from its prosaic features we should learn to recognize them and understand what they mean... A flatter, more boring literature. But then, are we so sure that boredom is boring? Once we learn to confront it, the flatness of literary conventions will appear for the genuine enigma it is. (150)

Boyd's work acts in some ways as direct engagement with this. It is a movement towards the margins and to marginal lives, which reluctantly become involved in

[31] Boyd was educated at the Scottish public school Gordonstoun, alma mater of Prince Charles, and afterwards at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford.

major events. It is a movement that chimes with the Walter Benjamin pronouncement in 'On the Concept of History' that 'the chronicler, who recounts events without distinguishing between the great and the small thereby accounts for the truth, that nothing which has ever happened is to be given as lost to history' (3).

In this context, we should register how mass-produced ubiquitous props are used throughout the work of Boyd to convey information about the relationships between characters. And the significance of this is not lost on Boyd, who even builds a comment on this into *Any Human Heart* as, imprisoned in solitary confinement in Switzerland, Logan Mountstuart reflects (in a journal, fittingly written on cigarette papers):

> It's most peculiar possessing so little in the world. You could say that the clothes I wear, my bed and its bedding, my table and chair, my chamber pot (and its rag for wiping my arse). My tin of tobacco and my thin sheaf of cigarette papers and my safety pin.… (270)

In addition to the sophisticated improvisations with cigarettes in *An Ice Cream War,* Boyd has shown, across his novels, a repeated interest in, and engagement with, the culture of smoking. Consider Boyd's 2003 novel *Any Human Heart,* where all the most significant moments in the life of Mountstuart are in some manner linked to, or indexed by, the act of smoking. For example, Gloria Nesmith, the adulterous second wife of Peter Scabius, is first encountered 'sitting at the bar with a gin and tonic in front of her smoking a cigarette in a holder' (288). Again it is a cigarette that leads to Mountstuart's meeting with the Prince of Wales while stationed in the Caribbean. Finally at the end of Mountstuart's life in Saint-Sabine, his friend Gabrielle is

described as having ‘smoked a cigarette in a careful way that suggested this was a rare illicit pleasure’ (459). The potential of the relationship between Gabrielle and Mountstuart is performed in the description of Gabrielle’s smoking of the cigarette. Gabrielle herself, for Mountstuart, is after all a type of illicit pleasure, even if she represents a pleasure he will not have: a love affair that remains firmly stalled in the platonic state. Furthermore, smoking is at the centre of Mounstuart’s final sustained reflection, his pre-penultimate entry into the journal before his death, which focuses on a group of young people, ‘four boys, four girls’, the girls ‘all smoking’ (482) at the beach at Milau-Plage. His reflection zeroes in on one particular girl who had, a few moments earlier, asked him the time:

> The girl who asked me the time lights yet another cigarette. I’m sure it’s not so much the pleasure of the nicotine that makes these girls smoke so much – they hardly puff at their cigarettes – it’s having the thing in their hand to complete the pose. They all smoke with practiced ease and naturalism, yet this girl has the gestures off more perfectly than most. How to define it some equation of extended fingers and wrist bend, lip-pout and head tilted exhalation. She smokes with great sexual grace: her body is brown and lean and she’s pretty with long milk-chocolate brown hair. And somehow she knows that her perfect manipulation of that perfect white cylinder of packed tobacco sends a subliminal signal to the boys – all their eyes are flickering like lizards’ – they are ready. (483)

Smoking and its attendant forms of display are a bridge back to sensual pleasure for the elderly Mountstuart – both the pleasure of watching the young women smoke and

the remembered pleasure of the nicotine itself combined with the pleasure of remembering his own youth. Smoking has a privileged position; it can be symbolic as seen in the display of the girl at the beach in *Any Human Heart* but also sensual – the cigarette is an object which is a pathway to pleasure. There is also the way the object embeds itself in gesture: as Mountstuart puts it 'her perfect manipulation of that perfect white cylinder' where the word 'perfect' carries within it an echo of Plato's 'ideal forms'. The observation of the smoking young woman is also the cue to reflect for a final time upon his own life. Indeed, the paragraph preceding the observations of the girl begins 'And for some reason this makes me contemplate my own life' (483). So the cigarette as an object is a source of sensual pleasure, a symbol to be manipulated and an object to observe when it is being manipulated by others. In addition, the cigarette in Boyd's fiction acts as the famous Madeline does in Proust's *Swann's Way*[32] introducing the concept of involuntary memory. This is the cigarette as a trigger for remembering (as in Mountstuart's final contemplation of his own life), as a way of connecting and re-entering disparate parts of time, which is precisely its usefulness for the historical novelist.[33]

Thus Boyd is adept both at manipulating the imagery around cigarettes to convey interior experience and also in employing them as objects in a more pervasive, less sophisticated, way throughout *Any Human Heart*. The cigarette (and the various attendant paraphernalia and processes) is a shortcut to quickly establishing character

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[32] As John Mace notes in *Involuntary Memory*: 'It is unfair to base the Proustian view of involuntary memory on this one example … the reader can refer to a quick succession of involuntary memories Proust describes in the final volume of his novel *Time Regained*' Mace lists among these the an unevenly placed flagstone, a servant knocking a spoon against a plate and the narrator wiping his mouth with a heavily scented napkin. Mace, John *Involuntary Memory.* Blackwell, 2007 pp.117.

[33] We see the same technique in Boyd's earlier novel *Brazzaville Beach* in which Hope Clearwater recounts how 'As I walked I took out a cigarette. It was a Tusker, a local brand, strong and sweet. As I lit it and drew in the smoke I thought of my ex-husband, John Clearwater. This was the most obvious legacy of our short marriage – a bad habit. There were others, of course, other legacies, but they were not visible to the naked eye' (96).

and type but it is also cleverly manipulated to offer comment on class and social position. An object capable of carrying many types of emphasis and meaning, the cigarette's ubiquity offers Boyd an opportunity to comment on the complexity and interconnectivity of the world, as in *An Ice Cream War,* and on the boundaries that exist between the stages and phases of life as in *Any Human Heart.*

Tobacco in Hollinghurst and Foulds

Both Foulds and Hollinghurst also make use of smoking (and the ubiquity of it as a cultural act) in reconstructing the past in their fiction. Foulds is notable for the manner in which he employs objects and processes – in this case pipes and pipe smoking – to reach back to deep-rooted traditions. We can consider Tennyson's arrival in *The Quickening Maze*, throughout which he is continually aligned with or involved in the act of smoking. Matthew Allen, on meeting Tennyson, observes him in the act of smoking: 'He felt excitable at the literary young man's presence in his study… He watched Tennyson relight his pipe. Hollowing the clean-shaven cheeks as he plucked the flame upside down into the bowl of scorched tobacco' (23). The act of smoking (or, more precisely, the act of lighting a pipe) provides a means of capturing the character's physicality, and again we might recognize the elements of the Martian poetics in the description, in the words 'clean', 'plucked' and 'scorched' as if Tennyson himself is a fowl prepared for the oven perhaps suggesting the vulnerability of his psychological state. Meanwhile Allen's daughter, Hannah, when visiting Tennyson, observes 'the short-stemmed pipes that roosted on nests of ash and spent spills on ledges all around the room' (96). Those short-stemmed clay pipes emphasise another older England, the Elizabethan England of the woods and their current inhabitants in the form of Tennyson and Matthew Allen. Tennyson's smoking is one

of many links to this older England that Foulds establishes throughout the novel.[34] It is also worth considering that strangely inexact metaphor 'nests of ash' used to describe one of the by-products of this process: it is a nest in the sense that the proceeding 'roosting' suggests a woven or gathered object made from twigs and sticks, an interlocking thing; but ash on the other hand piles and builds, is made largely of indistinct, monocultural material. The inexactitude of the metaphor is, perhaps, a suggestion that the imaginatively excitable Hannah has given herself over to a fit of whimsy, that her own imagination is engaged when faced with the poet.

After Hannah's visit we learn 'Tennyson sat and smoked on in the darkening room after the girl left' (106). Later in the year, when she plays the piano for him, he deems it 'very eloquent', an opinion emphasised by his nodding and exhaling smoke from his nostrils' (146). Tennyson's smoke is a miasma, a fog, a physical distillation of the space between the thinking man, the cerebral poet mourning his lost friend Hallam, and the girl who, we are led to believe, may be in love with him. The smoke emphasises the difference between them but also physically animates the space, underscoring the physical distance. The image of the smoke-wreathed Tennyson contains within it visual echoes, suggestive of a druidic Tennyson, in the ancient forest; we might even refine this and say this is the Tennyson as informed by the archetype of Merlin.[35] Foulds, in his portrayal of Tennyson and his attachment to him of aspects of the druidical portrayal of Tennyson as a 'priest of nature', is keenly alive

[34] We might detect here – in the interplay of native landscape, tobacco and material culture – the influence of Ford Maddox Ford on Foulds. Ford Maddox Ford who gives the following description of Tietjen's preparing and lighting his pipe in *Parades End*: 'Tietjen lit a pipe beside the stile, having first meticulously cleaned out the bowl and the stem with a surgical needle, in his experience the best of all pipe-cleaners, since made of German silver, it was flexible, won't corrode and is indestructible. He wiped off methodically with a great dock-leaf, the glutinous brown products of burnt tobacco, the young woman, as he was aware, watching him behind his back' (111).

[35] We see this image in G. F. Watt's statue of Tennyson and the link to Merlin made in the statue's dedicatory plaque: 'Over all one statue in the mould of Arthur made by Merlin' Bills, Mark. *GF Watts: Victorian Visionary.* Yale: Yale UP, 2008.

to this connection. The sexless, frisson-less exchange which occurs between Hannah and Tennyson is not the conduct of lover and suitor; this is more a quasi-mystical rite, a quasi-intellectual exchange. More broadly, in the woodland and forest context, we witness being enacted a dramatic trope with a long history. The act of smoking becomes the central symbolic act in this exchange. Thus Foulds, through the short-stemmed pipes and their attendant clouds of smoke gives us a composite Tennyson, one made up of various cultural resonances enacted and encoded within his relationship to tobacco, its practices and its apparatuses.

In Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child* the focus is not on cigarettes or pipes, but rather on cigars. In addition, the smoking is entirely more full-blooded and, rather than acting as a mechanism for establishing distance between characters, it acts to complicate their positions, allowing them to occupy richly ambiguous and undefined positions well beyond the social constraints of the day. It affords the characters a way of talking about desire, and its fluidity, even when they are not aware of it themselves. Thus, in an after-supper recital at Two Acres, Cecil and George retire outside to smoke a cigar: 'Cecil, apparently not wanting to pollute the house, had seized the moment to open the French windows and take his cigar outside' (28). This behaviour on the part of the aristocratic house guest contrasts with that of Hubert, the eldest son of the house, 'standing on the hearth rug… fiddling with a cigarette case, tapping a cigarette on the lid, and flexing his face as if about to complain, or make a joke, or anyhow say something, which never came' (38). Focalizing the narration for a moment, not through Hubert but through his disdainful mother, suggesting some impatience on her part with her son's behaviour, lends an added piquancy to the irony here, as Hubert has already been shown to be emotionally, although not physically, intimate with another man, the affluent bachelor neighbour Harry Hewitt from whom

Hubert has received gifts and has exchanged notes. In contrast, Cecil's confidence in 'seizing the moment' sets him apart from the conventions and social mores, the understanding of which his hosts are eager to demonstrate to him.

Daphne, on pursuing the smokers, is drawn to the 'gentlemanly whiff' (33) of Valance's cigar. Again, habit informs appearance, and as Matthew Allen observed the poet Tennyson in the act of lighting his pipe so Daphne[36] observes the poet Cecil Valance in the act of drawing on that gentlemanly cigar of his:

> She looked up and saw the scarlet burn of its tip and beyond it, for three seconds, the shadowed gleam of his face… the same glow from the hot cigar a few moments later cast Cecil Valance's face in a faint devilish light. (34)

There are several references to the phallus enacted through the text at this point. Hollinghurst invokes the phallus in the 'hot cigar', but then a complicated interlayering takes place in relation to aspects of the female genitalia: the labial 'scarlet', the 'gleam' suggestive of wetness, are projected onto the cigar and the act of smoking it, as the narration is focalised through Daphne. The sexual characteristics are atomised and then appropriated by Cecil, who now embodies a panoply of male and female sexual characteristics. This impressionistic intermingling and its comment on the instability of sexual and gender identity adds another layer of richness to Hollinghurst's writing. 'I know girls aren't meant to have them', Daphne's response to her drawing on the cigar leads to a premonition of death: 'the bitter smoke was

[36] It is perhaps also interesting, given the context and dynamics of the scene, to note the classical resonance of the name 'Daphne'. Associated with water or fountains, Daphne was the nymph who was chased by the Olympian god Apollo.

horrible but so was the unexpected feel of the thing, dry to the fingers but wet and decomposing on the lips and the tongue' (42).

It is a fitting allusion as the novel carries Daphne from girlhood into old age. As well as foreshadowing the death – Daphne will go on to marry Cecil's brother, who dies – smoking as a right of passage, as a form of initiation, returns us to the central concern of the novel that protagonists are not aware of what it is that they are being inducted into. And objects and their processes are the conduit through which time and time again this is played out. The scene operates on several levels: the simple social comedy, the ingénue meeting with a new experience, itself a species of social comedy; the adult knowledge; but beyond that, the act of smoking has become the slippage that takes place, in the complicating of the gender roles and sexual identity. Smoking allows Hollinghurst to guide the reader through the known and received stations of the characters' lives but it also proves the object and the attendant act through which he is able to comment on the ironies and the complexities (and indeed instabilities) this character-forming act carries with it: the reader, in effect, sees the characters as they are but also as they might wish to be before that desire is necessarily known to themselves.

## CHAPTER TWO: SPACE

In this chapter I want to explore space in contemporary historical literary fiction through attention to the same three authors. I will argue that their sophisticated engagement with space – in the form of frontiers and borders, gardens and woodland – allows each of them, in varying ways, to write fiction, which acts to counter ideas of grand narratives or over-arching narratives. This was central to my work in *The Willow Pattern Bridge* which explored both the curtailing and the continuation of narratives across space and time: initially in internal domestic space of the house and garden in Manchester, then the frontier space of Oregon and then in the traveling though spaces (American and European) by Wallace in the third part. *The Willow Pattern Bridge* set out to explore what happened to the narrative, the story of the family, when it was subjected to these shifts in geographical space, but at the same time sought to understand the family by tracking the characters as they moved through and navigated these spaces. I will begin with the motif of the garden that recurs, in various forms, in the work of all three authors.

### I. Gardens and Beyond in Boyd's *An Ice Cream War*

In 1900, George Moore, writing in *The North American Review* on 'Some Characteristics of English Fiction', noted: 'There are too many rectory gardens in Tennyson for the delight of any age except the Victorian Age'(11). In this essay, Moore alerts us to the ubiquity of the image of the garden in Victorian literature and to the changing tastes regarding its deployment in the Edwardian critical conception

of literature. Although the garden may have faded from prominence and preponderance in literature over the last hundred years, it remains a key image and the nexus at which various representations of power, status and selfhood arrive and are symbolically represented. The idea of the garden, and by extension what lies beyond the garden, is subject to various deployments and manifestations in the work of Hollinghurst, Foulds and Boyd for whom cottage gardens, private gardens, hospital gardens and the woodland beyond are central to the architecture and structure of their work.

Writing in the 'Spatial Stories' section of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau discusses the role of stories in the delimitation of space, arguing that 'one can see the primary function is to authorize the establishment, displacement or transcendence of limits' (123). We can read the manner in which Boyd deploys the various landscapes in *An Ice Cream War* in the light of this. As de Certeau argues, 'Places are fragmentary and inward turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state' (108). For de Certeau, then, the place itself contains already both a story and a history, irrespective of whether that story is actively told or not. Discussing stories and space, de Certeau proposes what he calls a 'dynamic contradiction' (126). He proposes that 'the story tirelessly marks out frontiers. It multiplies them but in terms of interactions among the characters – things, animals, human beings' (124). Thus, in these spaces, the points of differentiation become the points of commonality. De Certeau also discusses what he terms 'the theoretical and practical problem of the frontier: to whom does it belong' (127). The idea of the frontier or the contested space can be located in the work of each of the three novelists. For Boyd it exists as played out in the portion of East Africa where the

reader is literally taken to the heart of the contested area. For Hollinghurst the spaces are marked by other forms of border and boundary – in the garden at Two Acres or perhaps most notably in the social movements needed to gain access to the private West London garden in *The Line of Beauty*. In Foulds we see the woodland itself become a frontier between sanity and madness but one which functions in the way de Certeau identifies, which is to say, not simply to mark a space between one thing and another but one in which the two states cannot help but interact and inform one another.

For each author, the spaces themselves might be interpreted as manifestations of ideas: the borders and boundaries in *An Ice Cream War* are, after all, arbitrary lines on a map based on colonial ambition and desire, though these lines have impact on the lives of those who inhabit them, as the novel shows, especially if (like the American farmer Temple Smith) your property happens to be on the wrong side of the boundaries at the outset of war. The similarities between Temple Smith and his half-English, half-German neighbour, Von Bishop might be read as embodying the very 'dynamic contradiction' de Certeau outlines; after all, there is as much if not more linking Temple Smith and Von Bishop as there is dividing them; your closest neighbour remains your closest neighbour even if they are on the other side of a border. So in *An Ice Cream War* Boyd invites us to occupy these border spaces, to enter them during conflict and to see them not as discrete and distinctly organised spaces but as spaces whose identity is in flux and unformed. These are spaces in which desires and agendas, stories and histories collide and, of course, nowhere is this more apparent than on a frontier in war time.

So at one extreme we have the complex and contested frontier space where both the identity of the characters inhabiting it and the place itself are all unstable and

susceptible to radical change, but in *An Ice Cream War* Boyd also makes use of a more formal space: the garden at Stackpole Manor.

In *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic*, Kenneth Olwig argues that the history of the formal British garden and the growing popularity of the country seat are intimately connected to the landscape as what he terms a 'scene of power' (102). Olwig locates the emergence of the garden as a locus of power and identity in the years that followed the Glorious Revolution. As Olwig notes:

> What the powerful Whig oligarchy needed was a means of preserving the image of legitimacy identified with the English country idea while transcending the country ways of life, regulated by custom, that hindered agricultural 'improvements' and commerce. This sense of country would be English in aspect, but British in its ability to embrace a world imperium ruled from a countryseat in a united Britain. If this new image was to be effective, the aura of country legitimacy would have to be transferred from the England of custom to the Britain of Empire. (102)

While over the generations the number of these great seats diminished, the iconography has remained powerful and continues into the present. Olwig locates several issues here, which can be seen being enacted in the uses of the garden in Boyd's *An Ice Cream War* in which aspects of the garden unambiguously align the characters to a ruling elite, act as a source of income generation and prosperity, and become a symbol of imperial ambition. For instance, if we consider this description of Felix shortly after his return home to Stackpole Manor at the opening of the novel we begin to see the way in which space and selfhood are interwoven:

> Felix gazed out of his bedroom window at the south lawn and the fishponds. He saw Cyril, the gardener, trudge across it from the orchard, a heavy bucket in his hand, on the way to feed the carp… the brilliant day had suddenly clouded over, as it can in a English summer, and had become cool. The fishponds, before a deep and placid blue, were now mouse-grey and crinkled by a breeze. (51)

Boyd is deploying some key terms and images of the cultural geography of the country house. To begin with there is the reference to the 'south lawn', which implicitly suggests there must be multiple lawns at Stackpole Manor. In the same way, the use of the plural 'fishponds' acts as a form of amplification without which the description would be depleted of the necessary sense of grandeur and scale required of a manor. If Felix simply looked out across the lawn (singular) toward the fishpond (singular), this would have instantly located him in a middle-class or a lower-middle-class environment; the amplification of the plural is both key to the description of the garden and to alerting the reader to the garden as a marker of the Cobbs' position – or aspiration towards a position – within the British power elite of the time.[37]

The 'carp' too, play a role, as a quintessential icon of a manor house. A table-fish that began life as an aristocratic privilege, then becoming a symbol of aspiration, carp were introduced to Britain in 1450 and 1500, brought over from the east via Cyprus. The keeping of fish as a marker of status can be seen in The Franklin in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* who is characterized by how, 'According to the season of

[37] The presence of a gardener points to a more up-market garden.

the year / He changed his diet and his means of cheer / Full many a fattened partridge did he mew / And many a bream and pike in the fish pond too' (6). The fish at Stackpole Manner embody, in a limited way, the aspirations of the Cobbs and link them to a longer line of elites. By comparison, the 'trudge' that describes the gardener's movement suggests an inherent resistance to the work of feeding these now merely ornamental fish. It establishes the tensions between the work needed for the good running of the garden and work that is merely superficial or artificial, 'the transcending of the country ways of life' (102) which Olwig identifies.

It is important also that this is Stackpole Manor, that both the house and the gardens taken as a whole receive this specific designation – it is not 'Stackpole Lodge' or 'Stackpole House' or 'Stackpole Hall'. The title of the building, along with the stock elements of its garden, connote and designate ancestral power; they secure the Cobbs within the landscape as its rulers. This is, of course, being used to ironic effect by Boyd as we learn earlier in the novel that 'Stackpole Manor had been bought by his late uncle, Gerald Cobb, who had astutely invested the eager Cobb inheritance in the electroplating industry' (47). Boyd is satirising the traditional divide between inherited wealth and wealth earned through industry, providing a premise for why the Cobbs might seek to display these signifiers of inherited power and status.

Before the disclosure about how the Cobbs came to inherit the house, the manor itself is described with its clumsy, ad-hoc mix of architectural styles: the 'three storey Georgian brick façade', the 'squat turret' and 'half-timbered study', the 'enlarged servants' wing ' and 'Neo Gothic Loggia' (47). In lampooning the pretentiousness of the characters who possess the house, Boyd is offering an ironic commentary on the vicissitudes that elevate one family in status above another and the manner in which they attempt to embed and control the objects which pronounce

this status to the wider world. But while the edifice itself proves a focus for Boyd's satire, the garden is, in contrast, a much more carefully constructed and mediated space, as we see in the description:

> From the back of the house a long lawn sloped gently down about fifty yards to three large ornamental fishponds, planted round with bushes and stocked with fat, slow carp. On the right was an ornamental rose garden separated from the lawn by a neat briar hedge. Carefully aligned screens carried a riotous freight of ramblers. A path avenued with pleached lime trees led through the screen and flowerbed to a dark yew bower, decorated with spanking new classical busts. Neglected for a few years, everything now evinced the most careful cultivation. Ornamental gardens, Mrs Cobb intuited, would be back in favour soon. On the left of the lawn was an orchard with wooden beehives scattered about it. Beyond the orchard a beech and oak wood grew. (48)

The description offers the reader a version of the English garden of the period containing all of what we might consider the classical components: the rose garden, the yew bower, the beech and oak wood. It is, as the satirical manner requires, too perfect a replica; everything that could be present is present. It is, in many ways, the quintessence of an English country garden. But this works against the sense of verisimilitude in the text as it is deployed as a symbol, or rather set of symbols, for the idealism of the period.[38] This is, after all, a novel which repeatedly, and in unexpected

[38] An account of the social and political climate of the period before the outbreak of the First World War, a period that became know as the long Edwardian Summer, is given by Ronald Hyam, 'The British Empire in the Edwardian Era', in Brown, Judith and Louis, William Roger (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Oxford UP,1999, pp.47-64

ways, returns the reader to the theme of how expectations are perpetually confounded; how the reality is often gravely worse than the expected outcome.[39] Also, running through the passage are references to briar hedges and screens which organize the space. As the ordered world moves towards the catastrophe of the impending war, in which class division and the decisions of officers being promoted purely because of their class will have dire consequences for those serving under them.[40]

Boyd shows the first signs of something negative within the outwardly prosperous world of the Cobbs embedded in the garden itself – in the screen carrying the ramblers (keeping the wider world from looking in but also from being seen) but also in the 'slow, fat carp', the kept and artificially fattened fish not only a motif of lazy or excessive privilege but also, it is perhaps tempting to suggest, emblematic of the calcified class system as a whole. Boyd, however, avoids explicit social comment, and this novel (and his oeuvre as a whole) is always more concerned with the randomness of events and the random manner in which their consequences go on to shape his characters' lives.[41] With this as the energizing force for Boyd's writing and the plotting of his novels, the garden becomes the perfect locus in which to create the illusion of a controlled and controllable world before the utter randomness – intensified and focused through forging warfare – has its effect on the lives of the characters.

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[39] Michael Gorra picks up on this idea in describing how the novel 'fulfills the ambition of the historical novel at its best: to comprehend the past, not as the colorful backdrop to a costume drama, but as the controlling force in the lives of its characters' where the characters are 'mercilessly knocked about by the force of historical circumstance'. Gorr, Michael 'The Edges of the Great War', New York Times, 1987

[40] Set against this is the pragmatism of Temple Smith who is not forced to function under the same social code.

[41] Rachel Darling discusses how Logan Mountstuart's use of a diary transmutes daily experiences into potential fiction, mirrors the process by which the novelist makes art out of the seemingly mundane day-to-day life. Darling, Rachel "'I Write This Sitting in the Kitchen Sink': The Novelist as Observer and Journal-Keeper in Dodie Smith's *I Capture the Castle* and William Boyd's *Any Human Heart*" Kings College Post Graduate English Journal, no.29 2014, pp2-20

We see this sense of the wider world, and the working man suffering to accommodate the wishes of the Cobbs, extended even further in the cottage garden belonging to the stone cottage in which Gabriel and Charis plan to live where 'the lawn had been freshly mown and the flower beds hoed and newly replanted' (48), a symbol of innocent folly but also sharp-elbowed aspiration as it transpires that Cyril the gardener has been moved out of the cottage to accommodate the young couple in their bucolic fantasy. Karen Sayer, in her essay 'The Labourer's Welcome: Border Crossings in the English Country Garden' reflects on this scene of play and playing at country life which the cottage garden has traditionally embodied:

> Quintessentially English, evocative of embeddedness, of rootedness and community, the *cottage* garden in particular was synonymous with Nature tamed. Always already old-fashioned and representative of earthy vitality cottage gardens with their resident flowers, cultivated or self-seeded, vegetables and livestock, conjured up powerful and nostalgic associations of dwelling in a time of heightened colonial territorialism, as the import and export of goods and capital connected people world-wide. As a component of the idealised country cottage, the cottage garden was encompassed by the domestic sphere, and, like the cottage itself was therefore seen as a private space or retreat from capital, not as a place of visible work, or of wider social relations. (35)

Sayer locates the cottage garden as belonging to 'a wider landscape, a palimpsest of power relations, the special morality of which constituted a set of historically specific identities' (36). Boyd has given us the garden as icon, and now in the stone cottage

we have the theatre of the garden, the space in which a fantasized or imagined life is to be played out by Gabriel and Charis. However, this is an imagined life which will not be realised due to the intervention of the impending war. The characters in the novel seek to define themselves through the landscape at Stackpole Manor – through manor house garden and cottage garden. They even seek to perpetuate themselves within its landscape, as seen in Gabriel and Charis's dream of setting up home there. The garden becomes, not only a place to display power and status, but a place in which the young couple's dreams (underscored by the social position) are to be played out. The fragility of their fantasy life is at once comic (as they will simply be pretending to live in a certain way) but also tragic as the landscape (the garden, the cottage) is central to preserving their innocence, an innocence which will swiftly be taken away from them by the war.

The innocence of Gabriel and Charis is, of course, a luxury Cyril the gardener does not have access to. As Felix observes him, the gardener's movement from the orchard to the pond marks the sort of progress which animates the 'palimpsest of power relations' described by Sayer. It is a movement between two fixed points in the domestic landscape's iconography. The landscape is not peopled, tended or populated by those who possess it, by those who derive and reinforce their status from its features, namely the Cobbs, but by Cyril the gardener. It is a culture of ornamental display in which the orchard and the fishponds reflect the status to which Stackpole Manor residents aspire and seek to maintain. As Sayers reflects,

> The 'Historical Matrix' of power relations, it should be noted is both experiential and textual. This is to say that it is not enough to undertake a

> reading of the (or a) cottage garden as material space; it is also necessary to consider the conflicts around the space, the struggle for meaning. (36)

Sayers argues that the cottage garden is a construct created through art and literature. So where do we locate the sources for this literary construct for Boyd? It is a vision of England we find in P.G. Wodehouse's *The Man Upstairs* (published in December 1911 in *London Magazine* and in 1914, collected as part of *The Man Upstairs*, the year in which *An Ice Cream War* is set). In Wodehouse's novel, George the writer tells Peggy the Broadway actress:

> Way over in England, Peggy, there's a county called Worcestershire. And somewhere near the edge of that there's a grey house with gables, and there's a lawn and a meadow and a shrubbery, and an orchard and a rose-garden, and a big cedar on the terrace before you get to the rose-garden. And if you climb to the top of that cedar, you can see the river through the apple trees in the orchard. And in the distance there are hills. (389)

It is an evocation of an English idyll we also recognise from G.K. Chesterton's first novel *The Flying Inn*, published in 1914:

> On an evening when the sky was clear and only its fringes embroidered with the purple arabesques of the sunset, Joan Brett was walking on the upper lawn of the terraced garden at Ivywood, where the peacocks trail themselves about. (302)

Clearly, Boyd's text is recreating the iconography of the English garden, as described by his forbears in works contemporary with the action of his novel. In so doing, as we have seen, Boyd is also destabilising the idea through the reconstruction of its elements in such clarity that he draws attention to its artificiality as a construct. Several versions of Englishness are culminating as Boyd describes the garden at Stackpole Manor. We may, for example, look further back to another vision of English rectitude, to discern something of Christopher Clutterbuck, in Edward Buwler Lytton's 'Pelham Or the Adventures of an English Gentleman', visiting an old university friend in the melancholy surroundings of the 'reverend recluse's habitation' where 'a small formal lawn… adorned with a square fish-pond bricked round, and covered with the green weepings of four willows' (244).

The orchard image, which is often associated with that of the grounds of the manor house, also persists well in twentieth-century fiction, albeit exposed now to the exigencies of modernity. For example, the orchard is the central image in the prologue to that classic country-house novel, *Brideshead Revisited*:

> The camp stood where, until quite lately, had been pasture and ploughland; the farm-house still stood in a fold of the hill and had served us for battalion offices; ivy still supported part of what had once been the walls of a fruit garden; half an acre of mutilated old trees behind the wash-houses survived of an orchard. The place had been marked for destruction before the army came to it. Had there been another year of peace, there would have been no farmhouse, no wall, no apple trees. (1)

Like Waugh, Boyd deploys the familiar images of the English country landscape, the resting places of the English ruling elite, in part to set up the contrasting and ironic effect of the following chapters with their picture of the chaos and carnage of war. Much of this bucolic apparatus, the idealised English landscape, its stock forms, shapes and material, is being established as a powerful counterpoint to the horror of the chapters that follow. Boyd is both recreating a ficitonalised and idealised vision of England recognisable in the work of Waugh, Chesterton and Wodehouse but generating an ironic juxtaposition with the landscapes Felix will go on to experience.[42] This is Boyd as the ironist and the inventor, a facet of his style often hidden behind the seemingly accessible nature of the writing. It is a comic mode in the classic English style.[43]

Stackpole Manor plays an important role structurally as the house and gardens act as both a symbol of what is lost when Felix travels abroad to war but also as an illustration of the confusion upon which the beliefs of that ruling class were built .The light comedy of the ramshackle Stackpole Manor finds its counterpart in the arresting and horrific image when the expatriate American farm owner, Temple Smith, returns to his farmstead where German soldiers have been billeted.

> He stirred himself into action and scampered from his sheltering tree into a small grove of dead banana trees nearer the house. He noticed that the tops of the trees had been neatly cut off to prevent them bearing any further fruit. (212)

[42] My focus has been on specific works by Wodehouse and Chesterton contemporaneous with the time of the events of the novel. There is not space to deal with the topic of gardens and landscapes in these two authors more generally.

[43] Boyd is a Scottish writer though his predominant influences are from the English canon.

Whereas the gardens at Stackpole was a centre of ornament and display, the fruit-bearing trees of Temple Smith form an essential part of his livelihood. The precision with which the trees have been prevented from bearing fruit provides a sinister echo of the war, offering a counterpoint to the horror narrated in the scenes of conflict earlier.

When Temple Smith eventually reaches the house, the timbre of the prose moves swiftly from the blank annihilation embodied in the banana tree, the horror of nature stunted, to a contrasting form of horror – the horror of nature untamed and overwhelming: 'The house smelt like a giant's shit hole. It was humming with flies too. Millions of flies, the air seemed solid with them'(212). The narration navigates both extremes in the aftermath of the conflict: the trees that can no longer bear fruit and the superabundance of the flies with their attendant Mephistophelian and diabolical resonances. This is a vision Hieronymus Bosch might have painted:

> Every surface – shelves, table chairs, cooking trough –was decorated with coils of human faeces, as was the floor. The air danced with black sated flies. Streaming plumes of them escaped though the newly opened windows. (213)

The horror of the image is not simply the despoiled house but that the human act of defecation has transformed the house from a domestic space into a space occupied by nature. Despite the set-pieces of graphic violence which propel the novel, it is in the domestic landscape that Boyd shows the ravages of war at their most powerful and destructive. The reader is steered to this apprehension through the specific details – the manner in which the tops of the banana trees were 'neatly' cut off to prevent them

bearing fruit implying a coldly premeditated approach to the systematic destruction and despoiling of the landscape.

It is interesting to compare the manner in which Boyd locates Gabriel and Felix in their native landscape to the manner in which he locates Temple Smith, the immigrant American farmer in the East African landscape. Temple's existence in East Africa and his relationship to the landscape is more tenuous, living as he does on the edge of a contested space, on the border with German East Africa near Mount Kilimanjaro. Whereas Gabriel and Felix, are shown as inheritors of privileges signified by and enacted though the native landscape, Temple, formerly 'the manager of a small iron foundry in Sturgis, New Jersey' (17), is attempting to construct an identity by imposing his will upon a non-native landscape, through his work on the sisal plantation he owns.

Temple's own predicament is mirrored in that of his neighbour across the border in German East Africa, Eric Von Bishop. The colonial space becomes one upon which the characteristics of each nationality are tested and examined. We might consider Temple Smith's perception of Taveta, the small township he passes through an hour before his own farm: 'The place reminded Temple strongly of a small western township he had seen in Wyoming, which he visited once as a young man in the 1890s' (36). Boyd is both enriching the reader's sense of Temple as a character with a unique history but also using a landscape with which his readers might be more familiar (if only from Western films), that of the American West, to more accurately and economically construct East Africa. Thus the reader's perception of the East Africa constructed by Boyd will have within it the American West to which it has been compared, communicating both the visual similarity in terms of the nature of the landscape but also alerting the reader to the fact that this is a zone in which identity is

unstable, in which character is being created and identity won from the land by its inhabitants. Of course, it also implies their willingness to overlook the land's native inhabitants. It is both a visual short-cut and also a short-cut in terms of the resonances contained within the landscape itself.

When Temple, returning home before the war has been declared, first views the house, we learn how 'His house was built on a small hill; or rather it was being built. The two storey wooden frame house had been incomplete now for over two years' (38). This is a zone in which identity is contested and hard won. Through Temple Smith, Boyd is challenging the conventions of post-colonial literature by representing the settler experience, not simply as one in which land and landscape are occupied by the settler as a fait accomplit, but rather as one in which ownership and possession are continually contested and unstable. Through the manner in which he locates Temple Smith in the landscape, Boyd is complicating the modern reader's sense of colonial experience. This is particularly evident in his description of the landscape around the farm in Smithville:

> From the house the land sloped gently away towards the small patch of water – some two miles distant – that was Lake Jipe. Across the border in German East (which ran beyond the lake) rose the Pare Hills, along whose other side Temple had travelled that morning in the train from Bangui to Moshi. (38)

Here we have the lake and the hills with their anglicized spellings of indigenous names, we also have the railway, crucial for crossing and connecting the terrain. This is reminiscent of the earlier description of Stackpole Manor: the occupier's gaze that

constructs an orderly, organized landscape. The later description, however, complicates this sense of assured possession:

> At the moment Temple's farm was divided into plots of sisal, with their great spiky leaves like hugely enlarged pineapple crowns, and fields of linseed plants. At the foot of the hill on which the house stood was the 'factory'. This was the large, corrugated iron shed which contained Temple's pride and joy: the Finnegan and Zabriskie sisal 'Decorticator', a towering massive threshing machine that pulverized the stiff sisal leaves into limp bundles of fibrous hemp. A small shed beside it contained smaller, more domestic-sized crushers for processing linseed berries. Grouped around this central nub of the 'factory' were other shaky lean-tos, relics of failed enterprises of the past. (38)

In the same way the 'fishponds' and 'lawns' of Stackpole Manor construct identity for the Cobbs, the inverted commas around the 'factory' alert us to the irony of the dilapidated building, the text exposing both the reality of this working landscape but also the characters' hopes and desires about the manner in which they will impose themselves upon the landscape and the landscape's record of failures.

It is also perhaps worth considering the importance of the dissonance created by the naming of the objects in this landscape – 'the Finnegan and Zabriskie sisal Decorticator' is a phrase which those without a background in pre-war farming methods in East Africa will meet with a degree of pleasure at the linguistic energy of the phrase but with perhaps also a degree of apprehension regarding its exact meaning. Indeed the 'Decorticator', and Temple Smith's quest to regain the machine once it has been confiscated, is central to the arc of his narrative. The Decorticator

embodies both the desire to apply industrialised processes to the landscape but also functions as a symbol of the ambition and folly which the colonial enterprise became. We might even be tempted to suggest that work of the Decorticator 'pulverizing' the sisal leaves offers an analogy for the imposition of colonial rule upon the indigenous population. Boyd establishes a hierarchy of machinery, which includes the over-reaching, mock-heroic sounding Decorticator which seeks to apply large-scale industrial processes, and the more 'domestic-sized' crushers for the linseed berries. The names of the manufacturers 'Finnegan and Zabriskie' point to other histories of colonization and settlement: the Irish settlement of America in the face of English colonization of Ireland or Polish settlement of America in response to Russian autocratic control. The manufacturers' names also contain nested within them other resonances which further link Smith to his native America. 'Zabriskie' invokes the cult 1970 film, Michelangelo Antonioni's 'Zabriskie Point', which, in turn, took its name from the area of Death Valley in the United States, an ancient, arid dessert landscape named after Christian Brevoort Zabriskie of the Pacific Coast Borax Company. The landscape around Smithville thus attests to the zeal of colonial ambition, but also the hardship experienced when attempting to impose that ambition upon the landscape.

By contrast, the domestic landscape in *An Ice Cream War* becomes a vehicle through which Boyd introduces ideas of futurity, maturity and continuance. Consider the scene where Felix and his brother Gabriel decide to swim in the river:

> They had reached the river. It ran turbidly between wheat fields, before some subterranean impediment caused it to take an unusually sharp bend. At this point five mature weeping willows grew over a large pool formed by the

> swerve in the river's progress. The gentle current eddied and swirled, slowly cutting into the facing bank. On one side of the pool was a mud and pebble beach. On the other the overhanging bank shadowed a wide channel some six to eight feet deep. It was possible to climb the willow trees and drop into the cool green waters from a considerable height. (4)

This is the text moving into an other mode, not the satire we saw in the description of the garden at Stackpole Manor with its stock objects and icons, but instead offering a mode of nature writing elevated by the manner in which it observes how complication in the natural realm forms the 'subterranean impediment' which alters the course of the river and shapes the landscape. The narration is arguably directing the reader to take this scene more seriously than the others – this shift in styles and registers across the course of the novel is central to its function, as tone moves from simple satire, farce, dark comedy to passages and scenes of tenderly and acutely observed action, intimately linked to landscape. The narration is implicitly reminding the reader that, although the vicissitudes and fate may be grotesquely random, darkly comic and brutal, the characters to which these events occur are not merely ciphers but are to be understood to have complex interior lives. The mood of the novel is not a single sustained note but relies on these subtle shifts in register and tone. The proximity or juxtaposition of the one serving to amplify the other.

Gabriel and Felix are shown to have a relationship to the land which is radically different from that of their parents. The brothers engage with and use the semi-domesticated landscape in a way which reveals aspects of their character and their healthy relationship with the landscape. Not simply the manner in which it links the two young men to their native countryside and more richly embeds in them a

sense of home but also in the manner in which Felix's perceptions of his brother begin to mirror aspects of this very landscape:

> Felix stared for a moment at his brother's powerful naked body, dappled with the knife-like shadows of the willow leaves. He had a broad slab of a chest covered in a sprinkling of fine blond hairs. His abdomen was flat and muscled and the line of his pelvis was clearly marked. His ruddy, pink cock and balls, tensed from the cold water, were compact in their nest of gingery brown hairs that spread across his groin over his heavy thighs. Water runnelled off this chest and stomach and dripped in a stream from his stubby cock. His scrotum, big as a fist, was wrinkled and firm. (50)

Gabriel is being perceived in the same structured manner in which the landscape was earlier described, as if he himself were some form of geological formation. 'broad slab', the 'line of his pelvis' but also in the 'nest of gingery brown hairs' describing his pubic hair as if his sexual organs we some riverine animal. Gabriel is also, of course, literally covered in an element of the landscape, the 'knife-like shadows of the willow leaves' linking the characters with the land, the land taking possession of him in the form of the shadows which cover his body. At the same time, in their description as 'knife-like', these shadows rehearse and foretell the wound which awaits Gabriel at the end of a bayonet when fighting in East Africa.

The rural landscape provides occasion in the novel for this otherwise unusual display of nakedness and Felix's perception of it, while bringing the reader close to Gabriel's physicality in advance of his own wounding. For that to be fully effective it is important for the reader to have seen Gabriel naked but also to have seen him naked

in this particular landscape with its particular and distinct set of resonances. We can conceive of this scene as the centre, or in poetic terms, the turning point, of the novel, a point from which the later decisions and actions radiate; this is Gabriel in his element and secure in the landscape, which is to say in his proper place. The tenor of the description of Gabriel's physique, the effect of the cold water on his body, is neither flattering nor unflattering; it is simply truthful, and this element of realism is central to the novel. As this shows, the landscape provides Boyd not only with a manner of satirising his characters but also an avenue to embedding them and imbuing them with complex inner lives. Seeing Gabriel naked and so recognisably human, so realistically rendered, means we cannot simply interpret the action of the following chapters as comic, or even darkly comic. There is a deeper connection established, and therefore a much more powerful and disturbing set of responses are called for from the reader. Once Gabriel has been shown in this way, as the object of this sympathetic fraternal gaze, he cannot be laughed away. The reader is, from this scene onwards, complicit in his plight. No matter how extreme his suffering becomes, we have seen the man in nature, in the landscape, and are now connected to him in a way we would not have been were this scene removed from the book. It can be seen, from this, that the landscape of Boyd's graphic description is a sophisticated and sophisticating element of the novel.

The movement between landscapes also forms a distinct part of the novel's structure. There is a specific delineation of time-frame and geographical space. The text is asking the reader continually to consider these differing geographical realities side by side. They are intimately and implicitly connected. The actions in one place have specific ramifications in another. In this way, the text is offering a de facto critique on the workings of empire, by means of the webs of interconnectivity it

creates by precisely curating the reader's movement through these time-frames and spaces. Doreen Massey, writing on 'Travelling Imaginations' in *For Space* argues:

> Unlike Time, it seems, you can see space spread out around you. Time is either past or to come or so minutely instantaneously *now* that it is impossible to grasp. Space on the other hand, is *there*. (117)

Massey argues that the relations in space that exist between humans, landscapes and their work in them is central to understanding both power and politics:

> One immediate and evident effect of this is that space comes to seem so very much more *material* than time. Temporality seems easy to imagine in the abstract, as a dimension, as the dimension of change. Space, in contrast, has been equated with 'extension', and through that with the material. It is a distinction that resonates too… with that understanding of time as interior, a product of (human) experience, in contrast to space as material, as in *opposition to* time's incorporeality: it is the landscape outside the window, the surface of the earth, a given. (117)

Lukács argues in *The Historical Novel* that what matters is not simply the detailing and outlining of historical events as they happen, but what he terms the 'poetic awakening' of the characters to whom the historical events occur. Through his use of place, Boyd offers a series of historical selves with a range of mood and motifs from the socially ambitious Cobb mother at Stackpole in Kent, altering the landscape in the belief it may become fashionable and by extension maintain a place within a social

order, to Temple Smith in East Africa seeking to reinvent and industrialise the uses of the land and in so doing, define and sustain himself and his family.

Boyd is cataloguing and deploying these tropes, these fixed positions of character which are understood and signalled through their interaction with the landscape. As I have suggested, this technique is inherited through forebears such as Waugh and Wodehouse, and Chesterton, but in placing characters such as Temple Smith on the periphery, the edge of the landscape, the furthermost point at which the culture, ideas and beliefs represented at Stackpole Manor extend, he is asking the reader to examine what becomes of characters in the attempt to achieve this domination of land. Through these means, I would argue, the characters are being asked to achieve their poetic awakening, or to confront what Lukács calls the 'hic et nunc' - the here and now of their inner motives and behaviour' (60).

Temple Smith as an American is doubly peripheral, an outsider on the edge of empire. The text is at once memorialising a version of English identity inherited by Temple Smith while also exploring and expanding the texture of colonial experience. This drive towards both memorialisation and expansion is mutually sustaining. The map Boyd draws through his prose demonstrates that what happens in Kent, in terms of the beliefs and wishes of the culture, has ramifications in East Africa. The text offers archetypes in Gabriel but also ultra-specific *sui generis* – characters in the form of Temple Smith or Eric Von Bishop, his half-English, half-German neighbour across the border. These two poles find their expression in the landscape. Temple Smith allows for an enriched understanding of the absurdities of colonial experience, while the archetypes being sent out into the conflict-ridden colonial zone underscore the comic impulse in the novel. The landscape mediates the play between the comic and the horrific elements in the novel. Thus Stackpole Manor is both the seat of simple

comedy but also of genuine and profound connection to native ecology and environment. Likewise, Tavena in East Africa is both the seat of Temple Smith's serious ambition, the site of bureaucratic absurdities manifest in Wheech-Browning, but also the place of abject horror. It is the text's attunement to the landscape which allows for this sophisticated interleaving of moods generated by place. Raymond Williams, writing in *The Country and City*, describes the reconfiguration of landscape, challenging the ideas propagated in the standard accounts of the development of the English landscape and drawing his reader's attention to what he calls 'the real history':

> But the real history is very much more complicated. It was the application, in special social and economic circumstances, of ideas which were in themselves very far from new. Yet as always, in such cases, the particular application, in a real social context, had new and particular effects. (120)

It is the invention and exploration of this particularity which animates Boyd's prose, prose which enshrines and memorialises historical configurations of the landscape but also examines the legacy of the ideas attached to these landscapes when applied abroad. Felix Cobb and Temple Smith inhabit two positions on a continuum, one at the heart of the empire in a landscape symbolically rich and referencing the power structures of the society, and the other at the outer edge, the sophisticated limit to which the rules of that society might be applied, in a landscape which seems to allow the chance to define character and self but ultimately denies it due to a war between two colonial nations thousands of miles away. Bridging these two points we see the figure of the destined to be wounded Gabriel Cobb, a character lent his 'poetic

awaking' by his native landscape as seen in the swimming scene, but destined to be brutally wounded in the foreign landscape over which the jurisdiction of his native land is contested.

## II. Woodland in Foulds' *The Quickening Maze*

In *The Quickening Maze*, rather than the formalised construct of the English country garden, the ancient woodland of Epping Forest provides the all-encompassing *mise en scène*. This is a landscape which comes with a deeper set of historical contexts but also a space where less formal control has been applied to the landscape, a space in which a wider range of human impulses and instincts might be explored and played out. It is a space in which aspects of human nature which destabilise identity are manifest. Epping Forest is also the site of John Clare's walk home from the asylum. John Barrell has written on Clare's engagement with the natural world and his response to the enclosure movement of the eighteenth century, and, more recently, Simon Kovesi has situated Clare's response to landscape politically. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century the Romantics 'graded' areas of natural beauty according to their effect on the senses and imagination in terms of the beautiful, the picturesque, and the sublime (Shaw). It is interesting to consider William Wordsworth as a counterpoint to Clare. Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* makes use of the idea of woods, and how they transport us to a place free from human contact or trace, a place pre-human in its composition:

> He may see or hear in fancy the winds sweeping over the lakes, or piping with a loud noise among the mountain peaks; and lastly may think of the primeval

> woods shedding and renewing their leaves with no human eye to notice, or human heart to regret or welcome the change. (38)

Elsewhere though, Wordsworth[44] makes a more direct connection with the human presence in the woods and the traces this presence has left. At first, his description of human habitation, the 'mountain cottage', effectively merges the dwelling with its natural surrounding:

> These dwellings, as has been said, are built of rough unhewn stone; and they are roofed with slates which were rudely taken from the quarry, before the present art of splitting them was understood, and the slates are therefore rough and uneven in their surfaces. Both the coverings and sides of the houses have furnished places of rest for the seeds of lichens, mosses, fern, and flowers. Hence buildings, which in their very form call to mind the processes of nature, do thus, by this vegetable garb with which they are clothed, appear to be received into the bosom of the living principle of things, as it acts and exists among the woods and fields.... (56)

However, once his thought turns to 'the humble-minded inhabitants' of such dwellings, he conjures up the garden as a scene of labour and human activity:

> Add the little garden with its shed for bee-hives, its small beds of pot-herbs, and its border and patches of flowers for Sunday posies, with sometimes a

[44] Discussion of Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes as one of the first systematic geographical studies of the region and its distinctive approach to the description and analysis of landscapes can be found in Whyte, I. (2000), 'William Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes and the geographical tradition', *Area*, 32, pp. 101–106.

> choice few too much prized to be plucked; an orchard of proportioned size; a cheese-press often supported by some tree near the door…. (65)

So Wordsworth in his analysis gives the reader a sense of the woods which have multiple and interchanging identities, sometimes free of human interaction, sometimes integral to it.[45]

In The Quickening Maze, the woods are a space expansive enough to harbour the various versions of humanity from the gypsies, to the lost souls of the Leopard Hill Lodge to the reforming Matthew Allen. Whereas the formal gardens seek to project a singular identity, the shielding and enclosing woods lean towards multiplicity, or to couch this in the terms Doreen Massey discusses in *For Space,* the woods are a product of interrelations, what we might think of as an interconnected nexus of ongoing processes. Massey's conceptualisation of space is relational and therefore fundamentally open. Moreover, space is, in Massey's terms, 'constituted through interactions from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (9). For Massey, distinct trajectories co-exist in space – she terms this 'coexisting heterogeneity' (9) – and while these trajectories co-exist, space is constantly in the process of being constructed. Therefore space can never be closed or finished or, as Massey puts it, 'multiplicity and space are co-constitutive… Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories so far' (7).

[45] A reconsideration of Wordsworth's views on human integration with nature as evinced in his poetry can be found in Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition.*

It is tempting to apply this conception of space to the Epping Forest described in *The Quickening Maze*. Epping Forest covers in excess of two thousand five hundred acres of ancient woodland, rich with historical associations to Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's Arden or the myriad manifestations of the forest at the heart of the English imagination.[46] So the action of the novel occurs in a space deep with historical resonances but also a space in which the 'multiple trajectories' Massey would recognize are narrated by the text. Indeed, John Clare's wanderings in the woods and the scene where he meets the gypsies might be connected directly with Massey's conception of space as Clare, in the gypsies, finds though entering the space of the woods a way of constituting, albeit temporarily, a new form of identity for himself. As Massey writes:

> Understanding space as a product of interrelations chimes well with the emergence over recent years of a politics which attempts a commitment to anti-essentialism … this politics takes the constitution of the identities themselves and the relationships through which they are constructed to be one of the central stakes of the political. 'Relations' here, then, are understood as embedded practices. Rather than accepting and working with already-constituted entities/identities, this politics lays its stress upon the relational constructedness of things. (10)

It is these very interrelations *The Quickening Maze* examines in the space of Epping Forest. Thus Hannah seeks to understand her identity as a young woman in talking

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[46] *Landscape and Literature* by Stephen Siddall provides a summary of the various ways landscape has been interpreted from traditional, idealistic, through to materialist and Marxist.

with Tennyson; Tennyson seeks to better understand his brother Septimus or at least define his own condition through the differences pronounced through his proximity to his brother; Fulton Allen enters in the space of Leopard Hill Lodge with his father Matthew Allen and while there is induced by his father to take on a different identity – that of a forthright helper, which he resists. Repeatedly, the book sees these identities reconceptualised in 'relational terms', to use Massey's phrase. John Clare, a patient from the asylum, meets the gypsies to find his identity temporarily changed and enriched; Hannah, the Allen daughter, meets with Tennyson and discovers aspects of her own personality and identity revealed to herself; Tennyson converses with Matthew Allen and both men have their senses of self subtly challenged; patients, family members, gypsies, porters, a range of different identities are continually brought into contact in the space of the forest.

In *The Quickening Maze* the woods provide a space in which identities are continually brought into contact but they also prove a source from which character is drawn, most evidently in the form of the woodwose or wild man, an ancient wood dwelling figure, aspects of which we might be tempted to see as manifesting themselves in the descriptions of Clare and Tennyson. Paul Thompson traces the history of the figure of the 'woodwose' in his essay 'The English, The Trees, The Wild and The Green: Two Millennia of Mythological Metamorphoses':

> The Oxford Dictionary describes the woodwose as a term going back to the eleventh century, 'a wild man of the woods; a savage; a satyr; a faun' … Satyrs and fauns, however, are not synonyms, even though they shared the wild man's lusty sexuality; they are figures from Greek and Roman mythology, not especially associated with the woods, and only partly human,

with goats or horses ears, tails and sometimes legs; satyrs were also associated with bacchanalia drunkenness. (28)

Aspects of the 'woodwose' are to be found embedded across the representations of both Tennyson and John Clare. We thus witness in the text a reimagining of historical figures from the literary past but a reimagining that is imbued with aspects of more ancient characters, such as the woodwose, who have long inhabited what we might term the woodland imagination. With Clare wandering off into the woods to brawl and spend time with the gypsies, and Tennyson appearing wreathed in smoke, we might be tempted to think that the qualities of the 'woodwose' have been split between the two characters. The fictionalised lives of two canonical poets are thus reinterpreted and represented through mythological tropes and archetypes. There is an awareness of the literary history of the woodlands embedded into the text. For instance, when Hannah goes to visit Tennyson in his cottage, their conversation turns to Copt Hall: 'I understand it is where A Midsummer Night's Dream was first performed, for a wedding' (97), to which Tennyson eventually responds: 'So they were all here, were they? Hermia and Lysander and the other were all lost in these woods. Puck appearing on a branch. Oh, I am pleased you told me that' (97). So there is also to be discovered a historical literary woodland (that of Shakespeare) over layering the woodland of the novel, and an implied degree of self consciousness (for Tennyson at least) for this new crop of poets who find themselves 'lost in the woods'.

## III The Garden as a Locus Amoenus in Hollinghurst

Hollinghurst, too, makes use of traditional tropes in his fiction – in his case, tropes of place. The *locus amoenus* or 'pleasant place' is an early convention of the

pastoral mode of poetry. David Mikic in *A New Handbook of Literary Terms* helpfully defines the term and give several examples from literature:

> The description of the garden in Alcinous in Homer's Odyssey (Bk.7) is an early, and influential example of the locus amoenus… Edmund Spencer, with his Bower of Bliss in Bk 2 of The Faerie Queene (1590-96), draws a picture of a deceptive locus amoenus, ready to seduce an unwary knight into languorous, soul-killing illusion. (171)

In *The Stranger's Child* the garden at Two Acres is clearly an example of the *locus amoenus*. It becomes the place for which Cecil Valance is best known, 'best remembered for his ode to the suburban garden' (108). It is Valance who conceives of the suburban garden at Two Acres, in the tradition of the *locus amoenus*, as an 'airy chambered garden' (a fragment of dactylic hexameter aligning the suburban garden to a set of classical design). But when, years later, Paul Rowe visits Two Acres, he finds it changed almost beyond recognition:

> But he saw already that the 'airy-chambered garden' had gone; and even the house itself, which Paul had no doubt was the house, seemed resistant to being looked at. (316)

However, despite coming up against the reality of the garden in its current state, the association of the garden with the poetic in the mind of Rowe is hard to shake. For instance, when Paul meets Daphne he conceives of her in the garden:

> To Paul her natural habitat was the English garden not a dusty defile off the Tottenham Court Road. Poems had been written for her and set to music. She remembered intimacies that were now legendary. (316)

Hollinghurst gently mocks the distance between the actual and the imagined, as what happens in the garden and what the garden comes to represent become detached over time. The Two Acres we learn about in snippets from Valance's famous poem, as it is gradually revealed to us over the course of the novel, is not quite the garden we experience in the novel itself. So Hollinghurst shows a distance between the Romanticised ideal promoted by Valance and the lived experience from the outset. The garden when converted into verse by Valance is, we know, misremembered (the secrets the garden are more intimate than the gentle melancholy romance of Valance's poem) just as the novel is about the way in which a poet (famous for writing about that said garden) is himself misremembered. Hollinghurst is mapping what exists beneath this idealised location as commemorated and captured in art (in this case Valance's poem). The reality (that the garden at Two Acres is no longer – and, as we the reader know, never quite was – that described in Valance's poem) is subsumed by the tropes and shapes which already exist. Its status is elevated by the existence of the poem itself. In the same way, Paul perceives Daphne as having had great poetry written about her, but the truth we know is more tangled and complex. Time causes stories to decay into clichés and even those inclined to move closer to the truth – Paul is, after all, one of only a handful of people with an active interest in Valance – will misunderstand the past, will misinterpret events.

Again, in *The Line of Beauty* this idea of the *locus amoenus* might be detected in the private garden of the Feddens, but this time as a trope used by Hollinghurst

rather than by one of his creations. The garden represents respectability and status but is then destabilised by what takes place within it. In the case of the Fedden's garden, it is where Nick goes to have sex with his new boyfriend Leo. It becomes (supplementary to its initial identity) an amorous and erotically-charged location:

> 'Oh just over here…' – Nick giggled because he did not know if Leo's grumpiness was real. He went ahead a bit, anxiously responsible. As his eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness nowhere seemed private enough – there was more show through from the street lights, voices on the pavement were unnervingly close. And of course on a summer night there were key holders still at large, picnickers charmed into long later reminiscence, walkers of white dogs. (33)

As the narration, focalised through Nick, populates the garden with potential exposers of their sex act, the territory itself becomes re-appropriated. The phrase 'at large' used to describe the key-holders reflects back a degree of criminality onto them, while the 'charmed' picnickers lend the scene a Shakespearean resonance (with its connotations of enchantment such as they played out by the characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream), which reflects Nick's own sensibility. And yet the space is in the process of becoming re-purposed, no longer belonging – in Nick's consciousness at least, as the narrator invites us to share – to its lingering inhabitants but the two young men who occupy the space. Several layers of myth and narrative all collide here in the garden. Hollinghurst is inviting the reader to at once acknowledge the literary and common mythological antecedent of the garden but also to become implicit in the acts of trespass and of congress which they witness taking place:

> He stooped under the copper beach, but the branches were rough and confusing and the mast crackled underfoot. He backed out again, bashing into Leo and gripping his waist for moment to steady himself. ‘Sorry…’ The feel of his warm hard body under the silky shirt was almost worryingly beautiful, a promise too lavish to believe in. (34)

Hollinghurst thus allows his characters to both inhabit and subvert an idealised space, whether it is the pastoral trope applied by Valance to Two Acres or the private garden in *The Line of Beauty.* These spaces and their legacies are important but literature does not give a full account of their uses or of the types of beauty which inhabit them, and Hollinghurst’s work stands as a subtle and playful corrective to this.

## CHAPTER THREE: SPEECH

In addition to the use of objects for verisimilitude (and other effects) and the necessary navigation of different spaces and places, another essential component of fiction is the representation of speech. Speech and dialogue in fiction raise a number of issues, and I will explore some of these in this chapter. My particular focus is on stylistic elements such as dialogue and monologue, punctuation and ellipsis rather than, for example, the presentation of difference through attention to regional or class-based 'special forms' of speech.

### I. Dialogue and Ellipsis

In his study *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction*, Raymond Chapman outlines one of the fundamental problems that surround any author's attempt at conveying speech in fiction along with some of the solutions and adaptations employed:

> Even in the most realistic fiction, dialogue has an artificial quality; trying to read a novel which accurately reproduced real conversations would soon be wearisome. The novelist selects and economises, excluding the many features which are accepted in reality but would become intolerable if they were reproduced on the printed page. Speech is full of hesitations, repetitions, anacolutha and non-semantic noises. (1)

Chapman elaborates on the difference between actual speech and fictional speech by contrasting what he describes as the 'ear-code of speech' with the 'eye-code of writing' (2), remarking that 'there can be no perfect visual recreation of the auditory experience without the use of a phonetic alphabet inaccessible to most readers and writers' (2). Instead, Chapman suggests the best that can be done is to develop what he terms 'a visual convention that will suggest the deviations and idiosyncrasies of speech' (2). For Chapman, these visual conventions range from quotation marks, which signal the narrative has changed to dialogue, to 'deviant spellings' used to convey Cockney, Scots or other 'special forms' of speech. Chapman also lists punctuation, exclamation, and incomplete sentences among the devices which are used to denote intonation or provide a richer source of information about the words being spoken and how the author intends the reader to interpret them. However, he goes on to argue:

> The prosodic features of speech, stress and intonation can only imperfectly be suggested by the resources normally available. Written dialogue may be naturalistic and idiomatic in its choice of words and syntax, well marked by punctuation, but it can never give a full impression of what we hear in life. (2)

The absence of the voice is another factor in fiction's inability to 'give a full impression of what we hear in life':

> The individual qualities of voice are many, in terms of natural pitch, smoothness or harshness and so on. Qualities may be affected by physical changes, as the slurred speech of intoxication or the huskiness of a cold; or

> situationally by whispering or shouting. In all these things the novelist must use the equivalent of stage directions, indicating by verbal commentary how the character is to be heard by the reader. (3)

Chapman suggests some of the devices a novelist can use to give the impression of real speech, but even realistic novels do not attempt to reproduce 'what we hear in life'. The novelist is always dealing with conventions of representation, and the novelist's selection and economy is based on these conventions.

In this context we might look at the Authors Note which accompanied the New York edition of Henry James's *The Awkward Age*, a novel consisting almost entirely of dialogue. In this Note, James addresses the issue of what he calls 'really constructive dialogue' (14). James had earlier explained:

> One had seen good solid slices of fiction, well endued, one might surely have thought, with this easiest of lubrications, deplored by editor and publisher as positively not, for the general gullet as known to THEM, made adequately 'slick.' '"Dialogue," always "dialogue"!' I had seemed from far back to hear them mostly cry: 'We can't have too much of it, we can't have enough of it, and no excess of it, in the form of no matter what savourless dilution, or what boneless dispersion, ever began to injure a book so much as even the very scantest claim put in for form and substance.' (13)

In effect, James is arguing that speech cannot be imported wholesale from life without the novel suffering from 'savourless dilution' or 'boneless dispersion'. In contrast to this artless importation of speech, James asserts the 'claim' for 'form and substance':

> …in any artistic attempt the basis and groundwork of which are conscious of a particular firmness. On that hard fine floor the element of execution feels it may more or less confidently dance; in which case puzzling questions, sharp obstacles, dangers of detail, may come up for it by the dozen without breaking its heart or shaking its nerve. It is the difficulty produced by the loose foundation or the vague scheme that breaks the heart--when a luckless fatuity has over-persuaded an author of the 'saving' virtue of treatment. (14)

This strict attention to form, he asserts, is the basis on which he builds his own novel, *The Awkward Age*, with its narration presented entirely through dialogue.

Another novelist who relies completely upon dialogue to present narrative – not only in a single work but across an entire *oeuvre* – is Ivy Compton Burnett. Jonathan Bolton, writing of Compton-Burnett, describes her development of dialogue in the novel as her 'major technical achievement' (90) reflecting on how, although the novels contain 'minimal description' (90), limited usually to a character's dress or physical description, nevertheless the plot is advanced and character revealed almost entirely through conversation' (90). Bolton draws our attention to the distinction first made by French novelist and critic Nathalie Sarraute that one must not take Compton-Burnett's dialogue as 'realistic presentation' but instead understand that it functions on two separate planes 'the conversation level, which includes ordinary small talk, platitudes, and observations on the weather, and "sub-conversations," which

constitute a verbalisation or open articulation of what is thought, felt, and perceived but rarely spoken' (90). Bolton also reflects that Sarraute includes as 'sub-conversations' passages of dialogue using 'long stilted sentences… that do not recall any conversation ever had' (90). Here we have come a long way from Chapman's concern with 'a full impression of what we hear in life' to a full embrace of the artifice of literary dialogue.

The line of influence from Compton-Burnett to Hollinghurst was suggested by Hollinghurst himself in the *Telegraph* in a piece he wrote on Penelope Fitzgerald:

> The forebears of Fitzgerald's fictional children can perhaps be found in the articulate nurseries and schoolrooms of Ivy Compton-Burnett, though to a friend who found them 'precious' Fitzgerald replied, 'I don't agree… They're exactly like my own children, who always noticed everything.'

We can detect both influence of James and Compton-Burnett at play in the scene in the Two Acres section of *The Stranger's Child* where Hubert encourages his mother, Freda Sawle, to recount for their guest Cecil Valance the story of her meeting with Alfred Lord Tennyson on the ferry to the Isle of Wight. Cecil Valance has disclosed to the group that he and Daphne have devised a game where each member of the party will read a favourite poem of Tennyson's aloud. There then follows a poly-vocal exchange between as series of characters beginning with Freda Sawle's statement to the group:

> She said, ‘Well, then – after dinner..!’ And then, ‘You know we met him, of course..?’
>
> ‘Now this will interest you, Cecil,’ said Hubert
>
> ‘Met whom, my dear?’ said Elspeth
>
> ‘Oh, Lord Tennyson. Yes, indeed,’ she said warmly, laying hand for a minute on Cecil’s sleeve. (54)

On the one hand, as in *The Awkward Age* and Compton Burnett’s novels, the reader has to negotiate presented dialogue with minimal additional guidance. On the other hand, as in standard realist fiction, the choice of register or phrasing gives us clues to the characteristic of the speakers. Consider the statement, ‘Now this will interest you Cecil’ spoken by Hubert. Hubert, here, is arguably adopting the voice and turn of phrase of his missing father, that is to say, the voice of knowing authority, the voice of experience, despite the relative closeness in age to Valance, his intended interlocutor, and despite Hubert’s own lack of worldliness and experience when compared to Valance. While Valance is engaged in a sexual relationship with Hubert’s brother, Hubert himself is engaged in a correspondence with their neighbour, the homo-erotic undertones of which Hubert seems not to be fully aware. From this we might also infer a tension arising, the eldest son Hubert employing language which might more properly belong to his father, especially toward a person with social status, the aristocratic Valance. In this context, it is tempting to read Elspeth’s informal ‘my dear’ as further outlining the social and power relations that exist among the group of speakers. Freda Sawle then continues:

> ‘It was on our honeymoon,’ she repeated, to steady herself; she let her eyes rest speculatively on Harry, as that intriguing word glowed in the candlelight. She did think he’d heard the story before, but she wasn’t completely sure. ‘We went over to the Isle of Wight – Frank said he wanted to take me over the water!’ (55)

Here Hollinghurst moves the reader between Freda’s thoughts and her spoken words, providing the reader with privileged information about Freda’s, mildly intoxicated, state of mind. As a result of the narrator ‘going behind’ in this way, we learn not only what she said but also her worry that she may have told the story before. We also see another register being employed as Freda relays the desire stated by her late husband Frank that he wanted to take her ‘over the water’. This is a joke about the literal fulfillment of the promise but the disappointed expectation of a somewhat longer voyage, but the image is also symbolic of their crossing over into married life.

> The conversation continues:
> ‘Very typical of him,’ said Hubert, with a fond shake of the head.
> ‘You know you go over on the ferry, from… Lynmouth, isn’t it?’
> ‘Lymington, I believe…’ said Harry
> ‘Why do I always get that wrong?’
> ‘You can get across from Portsmouth too, of course,’ said George; ‘but it’s a little further.’
> ‘Do let Mother tell the story,’ said Daphne, sounding frustrated equally with the story and the interruptions. (56)

In their study *Style in Fiction*, Geoffrey Leach and Michael Short outline what they describe as 'features of normal non-fluency' – these are the aspects of speech that are classed as non-fluent in that they fall short of an 'ideal' delivery, and 'normal' in that that 'habitually occur in speech' (129). The first they term 'hesitation pauses' which are 'filled pauses' that are 'plugged by stopgap noises such as *er* and *erm'*. The second are 'False Starts' according to Leech and Short: 'These can take the form either of a needless repetition of words or 'of a reformulation of what has been said' (129), with the result being an 'ungrammatical sequence of words'. The final group are what they term 'Syntactic anomalies': these are 'anomalous constructions which, while not entirely ungrammatical, would nevertheless be regarded as awkward and unacceptable in written composition' (129). Hollinghurst makes use of hesitation pauses signified by the ellipses which appears in the passage above; however, the use of the ellipsis in Hollinghurst's characters' dialogue is arguably subject to multiple meanings. In the case of Freda's utterance cited earlier, for example, it signifies a pause or a hesitation in her speech as she seeks to locate in her memory the port of departure for the Isle of Wight; however, in the statement of clarification from Harry which follows, the ellipsis arguably plays a different role: it could suggest the elapsing of time before Freda re-enters the conversation or it might be used to encourage the reader to interpret Harry as speaking the words more softly or perhaps abandoning or thinking better of making a longer and more complete statement on the matter. In not specifying which, Hollinghurst is both structuring the flow of the conversation and also creating in the reader a sense of not quite knowing what Harry's statement was meant to mean exactly, much as they would if they were witnessing a conversation in real life rather than reading a written account of a fictional conversation. And as we see in the earlier quoted passage from the same

scene the ellipses are also used in conjunction with exclamation marks and question marks to place a subtly different set of emphases on the characters' speech.

In her study *Ellipsis in English Literature: Signs of Omission*, Anne Toner reflects on the use of ellipsis in dialogue:

> In contrast to written language's propensity to high levels of preplanning and editing, speech is usually produced in a more provisional and contingent way. It is usually interactive and strongly context dependent, and it relies on prosodic or suprasegmental features. In other words, meaning is converted by elements other than word-choice and grammar, such as intonation, volume, tempo, gesture and pausing. Speech is also subject to what in one sense may be understood as lapses in performance. These include false starts, sudden changes of mind, errors and attempts at repair, hesitation, inaudibility and interruption. (4)

Toner offers a somewhat fuller account of the various functions of ellipsis than that found in the work of Leech and Short. Toner also draws attention to the areas where fictional dialogue, in order to convey a sense of verisimilitude and complexity, begins to rely upon direction and narratorial description. Toner suggests that ellipses 'intimate rather than delineate the paralinguistic' (5) and that 'many attempts have been made to refine their accuracy' (5). Hollinghurst's use of the ellipsis in conjunction with exclamation marks and questions marks may be seen to represent one such attempt. Toner also draws our attention to the aspect of intimation, which is central to their use. Accordingly, despite his efforts to append his ellipsis with

exclamation or question marks to guide the reader, Hollinghurst's ellipses will always require a degree of interpretation and imaginative invention from the reader.

Toner also draws our attention the idea of error in dialogue, something Hollinghurst exploits in the previously quoted passages. When Freda, Harry and the others are involved in a conversation about the sighting of Tennyson, it is the error in the placing of the port that lends the dialogue an air of verisimilitude. Through this error we also witness aspects of George's character, his desire to salve the situation and his potential embarrassment for his mother. He re-assures her: 'of course you can get across from there too' when she mistakenly names Lynmouth not Lymington as the port of crossing. The ellipses which accompany Harry's correction are perhaps the most intriguing. They are the hardest to define and require the greatest degree of interpretation by the reader. They might variously represent a pause in the conversation, a brief passage of time in which the conversation moves along before we re-enter it, or some slight hesitation on Harry's part in sharing the information. They might even in some way subtly reflect the tone or volume with which Harry chooses to share the information with the group. As Toner notes, they invite interpretation and resist a definitive reading.

One aspect of Hollinghurst's use of dialogue, as seen in the quoted extract, is the way in which he manipulates various aspects of natural dialogue – for instance, engineering error and subsequent hesitation in order to convey character – while also inviting interpretation on the part of the reader to decide for themselves exactly what the ellipsis represents. It is notable, for example, that he chooses not to gloss Harry's statement with 'Harry said softly' or 'Said Harry quietly,' instead allowing the ellipsis to invite interpretation from the reader. This further deepens the sense by requiring the reader to decide the precise nuance of Harry's tone as she or he might if listening

to a conversation in real life. Here he has clearly learned from the example of Compton Burnett.

## II. Monologue and Interiority

As Toner notes: 'Every punctuation mark, however has the capacity to be a carrier of feeling. Feeling can be conveyed in the vocal instructions a punctuation mark transmits, in the semantic nuances it creates and in its potential for metaphoric transformations' (12). Toner distinguishes between the types of punctuation and the effect they might have on ellipsis; arguing that 'some marks are more intrinsically signs of feeling than others and an exclamation mark is more transparently a marker of passion than a full stop' (12). She concludes from this that 'Ellipsis marks are strongly associated with the affective' (12). Toner develops her argument into a consideration of the role ellipses play in relation to the interiority of the characters, arguing that 'From a sign of interruption, ellipsis marks evolve into tokens of passion, interiority and complexity' (13). Toner locates as crucial to this 'their absorption into a novel where they present difficulties in speech, but also obscurities in the characters' thoughts, as well as irresolution in narrative explanation' (13). This is the very irresolution we have already noted in Harry's potentially multi-faceted interjection on the correct port for the ferry to the Isle of Wight.

The question of interiority moves us from the representation of dialogue to monologue and self-address. In *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*[47], Dorrit Cohn discusses what she terms 'the special style

[47] Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983. Print.

that comes into being with the modern monologue' arguing that 'we must consider a number of distinctive features that differentiate monologue from dialogue generally' (92). Cohn continues:

> The most important of these is a frequently noted semantic pattern peculiar to self-address: the free alternation of first and second person pronouns in reference to the same subject. Collapsing the normal dichotomy of speech, in which 'you' always refers to the person spoken to, 'I' to the person speaking. (92)

Cohn argues that:

> The effect of quoted monologues in third-person novels depends very largely on the context in which they are lodged. In authorial narrative situations, especially where they are accompanied by explicit quotation signals, monologues tend to increase the distance that separates a narrator from his character, to induce ironic remove by dramatizing figural fallacies. (76)

Cohn then qualifies this by adding:

> In figural narrative situations monologues are most effective when special devices are brought into play to insure the smooth blending of the narrating and the figural voices: omission or discreet use of inquit signals, espousal of the character's vantage point on the surrounding scene. Omission of psycho-

> narration, syntactic ambiguity, or coloration of the narrator's language by a character's idiolect. (76)

Discussing the psychological implications of this, Cohn argues that:

> Within the medium of third person narration, monologues take on the meaning of mimetic reproductions of figural language, with the narrator lending the quotation of his character's silent thoughts the same authority he lends to the quotation of words they speak to others. (76)

We can observe a number of the characteristics Cohn outlines in presentation of the character of Margaret, the anorexic, who is preserving her body for Christ, in *The Quickening Maze*. Her monologue alone in the woods, as Cohn would have it, increases the distance that separates a narrator from his character. However, an extra level of complication is added to this monologue as Margaret believes her own internal monologue to contain messages sent directly from God:

> She liked the pinch of absence, the hollow air, reminiscent of the real absence. She wanted to stay out there, to hang on her branch in the world until the cold had burned down to her bones. She could leave her whitened bones scattered on the snow and depart like light. Whitened bones. *A whited sepulchre.* The phrase came to her. Was it aimed at her? Is that why she'd thought of it? Habitually, she tested every bit of scripture that came to her for significance. (57)

In this passage, after the initial third-person introduction of the character, we see precisely the omission of inquit signals and the espousal of the character's vantage point that Cohn describes. However, as I have suggested, we also have the internal dialogism produced by the Biblical citations that are part of the character's vantage point.

Cohn refers to the 'character's idiolect'. One particular case of that is when the character uses non-standard speech. Raymond Chapman, in *Forms of Speech in Victorian Fiction,* draws our attention to representations of non-standard speech in the novel. Chapman traces the influence of the 1870 Education Act on the implementation of standardized speech, i.e. Received Pronunciation popularized in British Public Schools of the time. Chapman argues that the 1870 Education Act was 'responsible for an irruption of prescriptive teaching into classes where it had not penetrated before. The new standard passed from universities through training colleges to teachers who regarded it as part of their mission to secure 'correct speech' (15). As a result,

> Double standards and a clash between school and home often developed, and for the first time widespread diglossia appeared in England. Even earlier in the century the notion of correctness was descending from above and causing concern among serious or upwardly mobile speakers of other dialects, a fact which novelists were quick to notice. (15)

The corollary of this for novelists was that they were now faced with the task of representing forms of speech which were now seen as non-standard:

> the effect of such deep and frequently controversial concern about correct speech was a gift to novelists. In particular it enhanced the effect of deviant spelling to indicate dialect of other non-standard speech, and it opened ever-widening possibilities for showing social relationships with the minimum of authorial comment through the speech of the characters. (17)

Hardy registers this in his presentation of the bi-dialectal Tess Durbeyfield in *Tess of the D'Urbevilles*, who speaks one dialect at school and another at home. However, the use of deviant spelling to indicate dialect is at least as old as the regional novels of Maria Edgeworth and Sir Walter Scott.

The question of 'character's idiolect', however, takes us in a different direction in the work of my chosen novelists. Its use apparent if the following scene from Boyd's *An Ice Cream War* which takes place in The Domino Room of London's Café Royal on 29 March, 1915, is analysed:

> 'I can't think where Enid is,' Holland said. 'Look,' he pointed out a tall man with a bushy beard and a crumpled suit. 'That's the artist chappie who's painting her.' He shrugged. 'Maybe she'll turn up at Amory's.'
> 'This is an extraordinary place,' Felix said.' Who are these women?'
> 'Oh, art students,' Holland said nonchalantly. 'Models, quelques putains'. (216)

Holland's idiolect is distinguished by his noun choices: 'chappie' freighted with a slight condescension but also the language of his particular social strata and class.

This is enhanced by his casual use of French at the end of his description with its taxonomic movement from Art Students to Models to *Putains*. The list as Holland articulates it reveals his view of the *habitués* of the Café Royal – the gender biases, the easy elision of art student with model with prostitute. His use of French, in this context, serves to heighten his sense of distance and disdain. There is also that 'polite' use of foreign languages for *risqué* material that children or servants should not understand in his recourse to French to describe the final category of women.

The dialogue in the novel seems to contain within it an awareness of the various slippages of language and, in particular, the role played by foreign languages in augmenting or obscuring meaning. Consider the following passage as Rutke is taking leave of Gabriel:

> 'Don't worry,' Rutke shouted. Then he spoke some phrases too quickly for Gabriel to translate. 'November,' Rutke then said. 'Wait until November. We have *Das chinesiche Geschäft*. He asked Liesl for a translation.
> 'What would you say? "The Chinese Exhibition"? Perhaps. "The China Show"? It's curious. What is it?'
> 'I don't know,' Gabriel said. 'I heard the men saying it in the ward.'
> Liesl shrugged. They left it at that. Gabriel wondered if it was important. (325)

As well as using an ambiguously German phrase with multiple possible meanings and, by extension, multiple resonances, the narration is also deliberately withholding aspects of the speech which were made 'too quickly for Gabriel to translate'. Here, Boyd draws attention to the complexities of multilingual dialogue, but he also remains

within the character's vantage point. The dialogue is explicitly filtered through the linguistic limitations of the character.

By way of comparison, Oswald's arrival at the home of the Allens' in Adam Foulds' *The Quickening Maze*, is an exchange worthy of consideration for the interplay of narratorial guidance and reported speech.

> Eliza Allen opened the door to someone whose face was familiar but unplaceable. The face had evidently been out in the cold for some time, the skin grey and granular. The man blew a fog of warm breath around his hands. He smiled.
>
> 'Do you not recognise me, Eliza?'
>
> With the voice, the accent she did. 'Of course I do. It's Oswald. Come in, come in. I had no idea you were in the area. Matthew hadn't mentioned it to me…'
>
> 'Because he doesn't know. I thought I'd surprise you.'
>
> 'And you have. Come in. Do.' (58)

The scene is set with judicious and sparing use of description which is ambiguously situated as narratorial or focalized through Eliza, furnishing simply the context of the exchange and the prominent physical characteristics of the visitor. The exchange begins with the question from Oswald 'Do you not recognise me, Eliza?' the articulation of the interlocutor's name doing away with any need for further narratorial intervention. There is a then a brief narratorial intervention which further enriches our understanding: we are given a sense of Oswald and his 'accent', though the specifics are withheld. The 'accent', however, is perhaps suggested in the syntax,

lexis and formality of Oswald's initial question, 'Do you not recognise me, Eliza?' (rather than the more colloquial and direct 'Don't you recognise me, Eliza?'). This form of dialect, and we might also infer accent, clearly identifies him as a member (or aspiring member) of the educated or upper classes.

Later on in the same chapter we see Oswald engaged in another conversation, this time his brother with Matthew Allen. Here Foulds opts for a more supple form of narratorial intervention. The conversation between the two men acts to narrate retrospectively Oswald's journey from the station. To use Sarraute's distinction about dialogue in Compton-Burnett, we might class this as a 'sub-conversation' designed to convey information but also to dramatise, through the focalised passage of narration which follows, Matthew Allen's own intellectual and social anxieties. These are highlighted by Oswald referring to his brother as 'Horatio'. The scene runs as follows:

> Eliza returned with a tray of tea things just as her husband had launched himself into the room.
>
> 'Oswald, I had no idea,'
>
> 'I didn't give you any idea,' his brother smiled. 'And I'm delighted to see you too.'
>
> Matthew blended a smile and a frown to indicate fondly that the implication was foolish. 'I'm pleased to see you, too, of course. Your journey was comfortable?'
>
> 'Perfectly agreeable, at least so far as these things are. And I rounded it off with a pleasant walk from Woodford.'

> ‘You walked up? Carrying your bag? You could have hired a cab, you know. Mr Mason is known around the station to take people.’
>
> ‘Oh, no. Thrift, Horatio, thrift.’ (59)

Foulds reflects aspects of normal speech with the shortened, staccato sentences in which meaning is partially withheld though implicitly communicated, much as it is in normal conversation: ‘Oswald I had no idea’ and ‘Your journey was comfortable’. Another aspect of natural speech is heard in Matthew Allen’s response to his brother revealing that he walked up from Woodford. Matthew Allen replies, in echo of his brother, ‘You walked up’, again adding to the sense of realistic dialogue which Foulds is attempting to create. The archaic phrasing ‘known around the station’ again signals to the reader the period in which the scene is taking place but also subtly suggests Matthew Allen’s own social position and standing, what we might read as an implied superiority over Mr Mason as ‘to be known’ is after all implying an act for which someone might acquire a reputation, and Allen is placing himself in the class who might comment upon those who possess such a reputation and make themselves available for such work. The Shakespearean allusion which follows from Oswald again acts to place the brothers in a specific social class but also complicates the mood between the two, leading Matthew Allen to anxiously reflect:

> Horatio that meant *Hamlet,* Oswald was reminding Matthew of the cultured company he kept in York, that not only in London was there literary conversation to be had. Typical of him to arrive stealthily like this, unannounced, and full of messages about himself, all his little flags flying. (59)

Oswald being ‘full of messages about himself, all his little flags flying’ is focalized through Matthew, but it also suggests a further hypertextual level of authorial reflection on the scene – Foulds presents Matthew Allen reflecting on his brother’s arrival, but the manner in which he reflects – and particularly the metaphors he uses – injects a layer of literary self-awareness into the scene.

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