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**"BRITAIN AT ITS WORST":
THE FICTIONAL MILIEU OF PATRICK HAMILTON**

By

Rosemary Erickson Johnsen

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1997

ABSTRACT

"BRITAIN AT ITS WORST": THE FICTIONAL MILIEU OF PATRICK HAMILTON

by

Rosemary Erickson Johnsen

The work of novelist and playwright Patrick Hamilton (1904-1962), while well-respected by his contemporaries and always followed by a general readership, particularly in England, has been largely neglected by the universities. This dissertation argues that Hamilton's creation of a distinctive fictional milieu of lower-middle class boarding houses and pubs addresses the same societal ills examined by many of his contemporaries, but with a circumstantial verisimilitude that offers significant advantages to later readers.

The first two chapters situate Hamilton's novelistic world, review the principal secondary literature, and identify existing critical contexts for his work. Subsequent chapters represent specific aspects of Hamilton's characteristic setting, the private and public faces of lower-middle class Britain between the wars. Chapter Three analyzes Hamilton's portrayal of life in an Earl's Court residential hotel, while Chapter Four examines the at-risk residents of a genteel, but impoverished, private boarding house. Chapters Five and Seven are devoted to different aspects of pub life, investigating Hamilton's highly-nuanced presentation of saloon bar culture and connecting his

fiction to the developing field of literature and addiction studies. Chapter Six discusses Hamilton's Marxist dystopia, while Chapter Eight, on his World War II homefront novel, draws together the major elements of Hamilton's milieu and illuminates how war conditions affected that sphere and its inhabitants. The concluding chapter provides a final assessment of the significance of Hamilton's novelistic research into the condition of lower-middle class Britain under stress.

Primary texts are the twelve novels Hamilton published from 1925 to 1955. The results of research conducted in the Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, Brighton, U.K., are used to corroborate the accuracy and value of Hamilton's fictional milieu for literary sociology and to provide a cultural context for Hamilton's agenda. Throughout the dissertation, other literary texts function as points of contrast or signs of alliance, including essays, memoirs and fiction by Elizabeth Bowen, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Storm Jameson, Doris Lessing, Julian Maclaren-Ross, and George Orwell.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thanks must go to the director of this dissertation, Professor Victor Paananen, for his support through many phases of my academic career, and for his interest in Hamilton's work.

I would also like to thank those who served on my guidance committee--Professors Goodson, McClintock, Sherbo, and Stoddart--for their time and effort. I am grateful to Professor Erik Lunde for graciously agreeing to serve as outside reader. For their continued support and encouragement, I would like to thank Professors Howard Anderson and Roger Bresnahan.

A College of Arts and Letters Special Research Abroad Fellowship made it possible for me to consult the holdings of the Mass-Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, Brighton, U.K. I would like to thank the staff there for their assistance, particularly Joy Eldridge, Assistant Archivist. I acknowledge the permission of the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive to cite Archive material.

Brian McKenna graciously shared his D.Phil thesis on Hamilton, and I am grateful to him for trusting me with his work. The members of my dissertation writing group provided encouragement and assistance in writing about Hamilton for a

general audience, unfamiliar with his work.

Throughout the long and sometimes exasperating process of completing my degree, my family has provided the valuable service of keeping that process in perspective. Bill, thank you for always believing in the value of my work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	1
A World of Temporary Refuges	
Chapter Two	37
"The Taste of the Don and the Whim of the Film-maker": Hamilton, his Critics, and Class	
Chapter Three	70
"Conversational Centres" at the Fauconberg Hotel	
Chapter Four	106
Reduced Circumstances: The Paying Guests of Craven House	
Chapter Five	146
"Conflict and Community": Pub Culture in <u>Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky</u>	
Chapter Six	190
Hamilton: A First Class Fellow Traveller?	
Chapter Seven	222
"The Whole Poisoned Nightmarish Circle": Drinking in <u>Hangover Square</u>	
Chapter Eight	250
"Not a War to be Taken in a Local-Library Way": World War II and <u>The Slaves of Solitude</u>	
Conclusion	289
A Literary Sociology of the Ordinary	
Works Consulted	297

Chapter 1

A WORLD OF TEMPORARY REFUGES

[Hamilton's] great achievement was to portray, and to create, a vivid, fantastic world of comic horror, of rented accommodations and temporary refuges, lodging houses, pubs, cinemas and tea houses, where the lost, failed and forgotten meet and bore each other and seek some respite. It was also the world that, for much of his own life, he chose to inhabit. (French, Patrick Hamilton: A Life)

One of the most individual features of Patrick Hamilton's writing is its reliance on a generally under-represented stratum of socio-economic life, best described as lower-middle class. In fact, many of his characters are clinging to the bottom of the middle class, trying to keep from falling out of it altogether. Such a milieu¹ re-creates a quintessentially modern texture, and Hamilton's fictional world constitutes an ideally appropriate representation of early twentieth-century British culture. Doris Lessing attests to this when she reports that "when, in Southern Rhodesia, I had asked for books about London, they had sent me his."²

The culture Hamilton charts so precisely is infrequently represented in such depth in the writings of his contemporaries. Indeed, some elements of his fictional

milieu are completely shut out by other, less idiosyncratic novelists. Furthermore, his novels put an indelible stamp on what they describe. John Russell Taylor, describing his own experience reading Hamilton, remarks that after reading the novels, "there are places, and situations, and types of people that one can never encounter again without thinking of Hamilton and seeing them at least partially through his eyes. In particular there are some back-waters of middle-class English life which have never been explored so well as by Hamilton, and sometimes never at all otherwise."³

Furthermore, Hamilton's style is richly circumstantial, supplying details of contemporary life: transportation, leisure activities, fashion (much-trickled-down rather than cutting-edge), public social relations, drink fads, even currency and coinage. Such insight into contemporary life is further enriched by Hamilton's insistence on showing what such things mean to the characters who inhabit his fiction; further circumstantial material is adduced to show, for example, what a given expense means in the context of a barmaid's income, or how leisure must be chosen to fit in with the requirements of one's job. The significance of Hamilton's non-Modernist narrative style is that his chosen fictional world comes through comprehensively; it would be impossible to substitute another setting or social class. His choice of milieu would be less noteworthy if his fiction did not provide a full picture of that world and its occupants.

Hamilton's fictional output consistently represents his chosen milieu (his Marxist fantasy, Impromptu in Moribundia, is the sole exception, and even it shares many features with his more typical novels). His first novel was Monday Morning, published in 1925, when he was only twenty-one years old; his last published work, Unknown Assailant, appeared exactly thirty years later. From beginning to end, his novels exhibit characteristic subjects and narrative techniques. What cannot be overlooked by any reader of Hamilton's work is its marked individuality--at times approaching idiosyncrasy or even eccentricity--including "his merciless precision and unsentimentality in dealing with people and situations which seem bound to lead their creator into sentimentality or sensationalism or both."⁴ It is this precise and detached authorial attitude, in play with other relevant factors, including his narrative style and experience of what his novels describe, that makes his fictional milieu so compelling.

In his first novels, Hamilton stakes out boarding houses as promising literary territory, with side excursions into pubs and theatrical life; later, he concentrates more exclusively on the public face of lower-middle class transient life in the form of pubs, cinemas, and tea shops. His fiction registers impending war; it reveals life on the homefront once the war is fully underway. Later novels consider criminals of the most modern stripe: the schizophrenic Bone in Hangover Square and the sociopathic Gorse in

the Gorse trilogy. In many instances, Hamilton is alone in his choice of milieu; when there are fellow novelists exploring the same territory, the integrity with which the milieu is represented differs. For example, while there are other writers who portray pub life, often their perspective is from the outside.

Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith's valuable study of Cinema, Literature and Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain pinpoints the social level depicted in Hamilton's fiction as one occupying a painful position--either ignored or

savagely attacked by the popular novelist as much as by the intellectual elite. H.G. Wells laid into the lower-middle class cruelly; so too did Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, D.H. Lawrence and Walter Greenwood. In cinema, too, they played an indeterminate and sulky role between upper-middle-class glamour and working-class chirpiness. Only Alfred Hitchcock treated them in any sense seriously as a film subject, and then only for dramatic effect.⁵

It is suggestive that Miles and Smith mention Hitchcock as someone who looked seriously at the lower-middle class; Hitchcock, of course, made a film version of Hamilton's stage play Rope, and much of the darker Hamilton work--Gaslight (given the Hollywood treatment by MGM with George Cukor as director), the radio plays, the Gorse novels--would translate readily into a Hitchcock film. Why a serious

interest in Britain's lower-middle classes might produce such sinister effects is a question to be considered later, but the relationship between Hamilton's and Hitchcock's work is another connection between Hamilton and mainstream culture.

Although Miles and Smith cover much relevant background for a study of Hamilton's fiction, and in spite of their marked interest in Leftist and popular fiction, Hamilton does not appear in their book. They do not limit themselves to what John Lucas, Andy Croft and others would call the orthodox (i.e., elite) interwar artists, but manage to overlook Hamilton nonetheless.⁶ Perhaps the explanation for Hamilton's exclusion from their study lies in its polarized view of the intellectual background of writers of this period. Essentially, Miles and Smith posit two positions with an enormous gap between them, a space which Hamilton would occupy:

It is, of course, simply stating the obvious to point out that almost all of the 'recognized' artists and intellectuals of the interwar period had been to public schools. For most of the few who had not been through such an education, moreover, university had a similar programming effect. The auto-didactical tradition of the working class may or may not have produced thousands of 'village Newtons' but, with the exception of Walter Greenwood, none found their way into the canon of the elite. (58)

There would appear to be nothing between the privilege of university education and the efforts of the working class to educate themselves. By linking this limited and dichotomized state of affairs to " 'recognized' artists," Miles and Smith appear to distance their own study from a (possibly) inaccurate bifurcation, but in practice, they do not transcend it themselves. The literature they consider in greatest detail is by Orwell, Eliot, Spender, Aldous Huxley, and (again) Walter Greenwood. They do expand the "recognized" working-class writers with brief discussions of Bert Coombes and Lionel Britton, but they do not, however, offer candidates to occupy the enormous space between public-schoolboys and working-class writers. Not only would Hamilton's fiction fill out our picture of modern British literature and society, his very presence would serve to let in some fresh air to the rarefied atmosphere of public-schoolboys plus Walter Greenwood.

Someone else with indisputable ties to the Left had earlier identified this problematic dichotomy in similar terms. Raymond Williams is prompted by a slightly earlier context--a description of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence as "autodidacts"--but his conclusion is the same:

So the flat patronage of 'autodidact' can be related to only one fact: that none of the three was in the pattern of boarding school and Oxbridge which by the end of the century was being regarded not simply as a

kind of education but as education itself: to have missed that circuit was to have missed being 'educated' at all. In other words, a 'standard' education was that received by one or two per cent of the population; all the rest were seen as 'uneducated' or as 'autodidacts.'

Williams' solution to this difficulty is to re-position writers already enjoying common currency--Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence--by demonstrating that they by no means lacked formal education. But to go a step further requires bringing in additional writers who fill out the picture, whose existence and writings illustrate the greater complexity of the total situation. Hamilton and his work provide a significant counterbalance to such naive and excessively polarized formulations of class and education.

Miles and Smith devote considerable attention to Aldous Huxley, whose

writings reveal an acquaintance with the products of mass culture which is by no means remote. In his essays the Hollywood film, popular fiction, jazz, motor cars, the fashion industry and the design and decoration of hotels and places of entertainment are dealt with in the concrete detail registering with a consumer and a participant, and are not simply sketched with dismissive contempt from the battlements of ivory towers. (103)

Such comments make one wish Hamilton had been included; the

valuable comments made on Huxley's work suggest what the authors might have made of Hamilton's. What makes Hamilton a particularly compelling observer of such particularities of modern life is his lack of self-conscious superiority. Miles and Smith are persuasive on the subject of Huxley's simultaneous participation and derision of mass culture:

In "Notes on Liberty and the Boundaries of the Promised Land" [1931], he elaborates his concern with the topic [leisure] to provide an image of leisure in the future. . . . "Already mass production has made it possible for the relatively poor to enjoy elaborate entertainments in surroundings of more than regal splendour. The theatres in which the egalitarians will enjoy the talkies, tasties, smellies, and feelies, the Corner Houses where they will eat their synthetic poached eggs on toast and drink their surrogate of coffee, will be prodigiously much vaster and more splendid than anything we know today." The passage is particularly interesting for its relative lack of distancing from Huxley's contemporary world. Contempt for the 'future' he sketches is fuelled by a scorn for Lyons' Corner Houses or the ABC chains which are already in place and, indeed, multiplying. The synthetic poached eggs Huxley has in mind need no future for their existence; they are his value-judgement on the fast food of the interwar period. (112-13)

Hamilton here again provides a valuable complement to more-

canonized, elite literature; his participation has been documented by his biographers, and his attitude is more detached than that of many of his fellow writers. He sees the appeal of such places, not simply in the abstract, to London's lower-middle and working class residents, but he feels it himself. The fictional scenes in *Corner Houses* and *ABCs* carry an ambiance not found elsewhere in literature, at least partly because Hamilton himself participated sincerely in the life of such places. Ella Dawson, the barmaid in *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* is good--sensible, intelligent, well-meaning, agreeable, possessing a "healthy character"--so her judgment of such places ought to be credible, as it is not presented in a spirit of mockery or condescension. When Mr. Eccles takes Ella out to dinner for the first time (not only the first time Mr. Eccles takes her out to dinner, but the first time she has ever been taken out to dinner) she is initially disappointed by his unexotic choice of a Lyons' Corner House, but once the scene is fully set, Hamilton has shown his readers the attractions of such places. The scene deserves to be quoted in full:

They were seated opposite each other at a table for two on the basement floor of Lyons' Coventry Street Corner House. The time was about half-past nine. The orchestra was playing, drowning Mr. Eccles' voice; and nearly every table in the vast, marble subterranean Versailles for London's hungry and teeming non-descripts, was engaged. Ella had at first been a

little disappointed that he should have brought her to the Corner House; for she had been here before of an evening, and after the terrific splash he had made at the theatre, and what with Army people and one thing and another, she had somehow got it into her head that when he spoke of Dinner he had in mind somewhere a little more intimate, original and exciting--one of those little restaurants in Soho, say, which she had so often wondered about. But she at once reproved herself for greed in pleasure, and was in a way relieved to be on her own ground, where she knew how to behave and where she was suitably dressed. Besides, she was intensely fond of Lyons' Corner House--with the fondness of all healthy-minded beings for palaces--and Mr. Eccles took a broad-minded view of the menu which made her gasp. He ordered two cocktails at once, and burst into the dizziest soups and lobster extravagances without turning a hair. He also ordered wine for himself, and persuaded Ella, much against her will, to take a little. Ella reckoned that what with the theatre and all the rest he had spent little less than thirty shillings on this jaunt already; and as one who seldom spent more than thirty pence on an outing altogether, she had a peculiar sense of being wasteful, and wanted to stop him. At the same time she had a peculiar sense of enjoying herself, of merely physically revelling, for the first time in her life,

little disappointed that he should have brought her to the Corner House; for she had been here before of an evening, and after the terrific splash he had made at the theatre, and what with Army people and one thing and another, she had somehow got it into her head that when he spoke of Dinner he had in mind somewhere a little more intimate, original and exciting--one of those little restaurants in Soho, say, which she had so often wondered about. But she at once reproved herself for greed in pleasure, and was in a way relieved to be on her own ground, where she knew how to behave and where she was suitably dressed. Besides, she was intensely fond of Lyons' Corner House--with the fondness of all healthy-minded beings for palaces--and Mr. Eccles took a broad-minded view of the menu which made her gasp. He ordered two cocktails at once, and burst into the dizziest soups and lobster extravagances without turning a hair. He also ordered wine for himself, and persuaded Ella, much against her will, to take a little. Ella reckoned that what with the theatre and all the rest he had spent little less than thirty shillings on this jaunt already; and as one who seldom spent more than thirty pence on an outing altogether, she had a peculiar sense of being wasteful, and wanted to stop him. At the same time she had a peculiar sense of enjoying herself, of merely physically revelling, for the first time in her life,

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in the brilliant sunshine of his financial plane, and she wanted to do anything but stop him.⁸

This passage provides a whole range of responses to the Lyons' Corner House, not simply one or two notes. First, it is explicitly identified as a place for London's "nondescripts" so, appropriately, the barmaid feels in control of its social conventions and self-assured about her appearance.⁹ Further, it does strike Ella as a prosaic choice, in contrast to "little restaurants in Soho" which are presumably "more intimate, original and exciting" than somewhere she feels comfortable could possibly be. On the other hand, Ella does like the Corner House, not holding it in the contempt of familiarity. (In view of the trilogy's wholly positive characterization of Ella, it would be a mistake to read the remark about "healthy-minded beings" as derogatory.) Finally, the passage suggests what possibilities for pleasure the Corner House contains: the orchestra, the crowd, the potential for extravagance which Ella had never before experienced. If Mr. Eccles failed to impress her when he chose the restaurant, he certainly makes up for it with his "broad-minded view of the menu," until finally Lyons' Corner House becomes consonant with the other luxuries of the day.

So here is a marked contrast between Hamilton and his fellow-consumer, Huxley. When Huxley creates dark effects in his Lyons', these are cultural: "Yet the horrors the artefacts of the present supposedly portend rebound back

upon those artefacts in the present, and the interwar Corner House and Gaumont are filled with a new menace" (Miles and Smith 113). Hamilton is capable of revealing positive attributes of Lyons' and ABCs, and when he does choose to create dark effects, these are not crimes against cultural refinement but actively criminal, as in the Gorse novels.

When a more deliberately elite, upper-class writer such as Elizabeth Bowen is added to consideration, Hamilton's presentation of Corner Houses, pubs, railway buffets and the like appears even more valuable. One of the most compelling tensions in The Heat of the Day (1949), Bowen's London novel of wartime, springs from the fact that Stella's lover, a traitor to England who sells secrets to the Nazis, is upper-class and refined, while the ineffable lower-middle-class and vulgar Harrison is patriotically serving his country. This irony is used to render even more shocking the disclosure of their true affiliations at novel's end.

The details of Stella's meals out with Robert and Harrison comprise Bowen's most circumstantial method of illustrating the social divide between the two men. At one of the climactic moments of the novel, just after Stella has asked him if he is a traitor to his country, Robert takes her to their 'special' restaurant. There, "they had a sensation of custom, sedateness, of being inside small walls, as though dining at home again after her journey" and she pours out coffee into "gold-rimmed cups."¹⁰ The lighting is dim and romantic, the tables are covered in

damask-patterned cloths.

During a parallel climactic scene, Harrison takes Stella to a snack bar, and the contrasts are emphasized at every turn:

he pushed against a door showing a dimmed sign, OPEN. Inside, light came up stone stairs which he took her down; at the foot he held open another door and she walked ahead of him into a bar or grill which had no air of having existence before tonight. She stared first at a row of backviews of eaters perched, packed elbow-to-elbow, along a counter. . . . Not a person did not betray, by one or another glaring peculiarity, the fact of being human. . . . When Harrison had put his hat on a rack he came back for Stella and put her at a small table--of these there were several along a wall, their tops imitating malachite. He remarked that this place never seemed to him too bad, and was at any rate quiet. (216-17)

Now we are in Hamilton country, but with a radically different guide. The pathetic Louie, who could herself be one of Hamilton's people, who "all over herself . . . gave the impression of twisted stockings," is impressed by the place "because they have ever such a variety of snacks," but Stella views it as a disaster, symptomatic of all that is wrong with Harrison (227, 228).

Indeed, at this point, Harrison seems less than fully human to Stella: " 'What do you eat?' said Stella, looking

at Harrison with one of those renewals of curiosity" (217). Obviously this café, one of his regular places, strikes her as bizarre, and she is unable to fathom what one would eat there. And, of course, the menu and the food turn out to be grossly inadequate by Stella's standards. In the place of Ella's giddy perception of Corner House "lobster extravagances," we find in this novel a truly nauseating lobster dish, offered up with the added insult of being specially ordered as a treat:

In relays everything necessary arrived, including what Harrison, after a sotto voce aside talk, must have decided would be most special--lobster mayonnaise on a bed of greenstuff knifed into dripping ribbons. The dish, in a glaze of synthetic yellow, was put down in a space between knives, forks and glasses to cook in light. (218)

So far from being a welcome luxury, this lobster is revolting in every regard: appearance, accompanying "greenstuff," and presentation. Not surprisingly, Stella does not care to eat it: " 'You don't much like this lobster?' [Harrison asked.] 'Oh yes,' she with compunction said, 'I do.' She twisted ribbons of lettuce round her fork, ate, then went on [talking]" (220). Stella's compunction is due to her knowledge that Harrison had specially ordered this dish, and on an assumption, based on his status as a regular in this café, that he finds it satisfactory. She declines to state her true response

because she assumes it would hurt Harrison's feelings; if Robert were her companion, the dish would go untouched by both. That Bowen's narrative sides with Stella is apparent in the revolting description of the meal, coupled with Stella's necessary compunction and its results ("she twisted ribbons of lettuce round her fork"). The reader is unable to view this milieu from any other perspective than Stella's/Bowen's, which is nearly the opposite of Hamilton's.

Bowen's perspective reduces the Hamilton milieu to mere sordidness, but it is equally possible, reading Hamilton in the late twentieth century, to romanticize his fictional milieu; any restaurant with an orchestra is bound to seem "posh" in the McDonald's age. Further, social and moral codes have become more flexible over the intervening decades, allowing 1990s readers to minimize details that would have had significance for Hamilton's first readers. In The Magic of My Youth (1951), Arthur Calder-Marshall reminds us of the contemporary resonance of Hamilton's London:

It was distance that lent enchantment to Tottenham Court Road at night, allowing me [at age 15] to make it an image of adult delight. When I came closer to the reality, I liked it less. Today the Horseshoe is a model of respectability, a very proper pub for Masons to banquet in. But even in the thirties, when it was made over and the saloon bar laid open to the street

with great plate-glass windows which could be raised in hot weather, there was an element of doubt about its reputation. . . . But in 1923 there was no doubt. It was Low.¹¹

Hamilton's first pub novel, The Midnight Bell, set in the Horseshoe's neighborhood, was published in 1930, early enough to carry the "Low" overtones to which Calder-Marshall refers. For Hamilton, a serious novelist, to embrace such a milieu suggests simultaneously how compelling Hamilton found it and the opportunity his fiction provides its readers; no other serious novelist has done as much to portray a realistically "Low" London between the wars.

Hamilton's own participation in the culture he describes in such detail merits attention only insofar as it validates his accuracy. Biography has been a dead-end for Hamilton studies, leading critics ever away from Hamilton's work in search of titillating details of a sometimes-bizarre personal life or trying to "explain" his fiction by means of biographical parallels. To say that, however, is not to ignore the implications of Hamilton's life for his writing. Hamilton's portrayal of his chosen milieu can be detailed and accurate precisely because he lived in it himself. Biographical verisimilitude is part of what Doris Lessing sees as setting Hamilton's work above other fiction concerned with similar subjects. Her reading of Hamilton uses biography to endorse his work; she gives the writing

priority while attesting to its validity. Of the pub trilogy, Lessing writes

I was reminded of Orwell, too: but though they both depict the grim, grey, grimy threadbare poverty, the gracelessness of Britain at its worst, there is an important difference. That which so repelled Orwell, and which he described from the outside, Hamilton views from the inside. Hamilton allowed himself to become part of the poor streets, of bedsitting rooms whose amenities depend on the natures or whims of powerful landladies, of gas-fires always hungry for coins, above all of pubs, the warm and well-lit refuges for people who have no other. . . . [T]his is what Hamilton chose in preference to the pathetic middle-class 'refinement' of his upbringing, itself precarious and full of fear and snobbery. (23)

Lessing is right to emphasize Hamilton's inside point of view, and correct in seeing his immersion in that culture as a deliberate choice. Being inside, and deliberately giving the view of the inside, sets Hamilton apart from his peers.

In fact, it is being on the inside, living there as an intelligent observer, that allows Hamilton to be so accurate in what he depicts. Commentators who occupy radically different positions on Hamilton's work generally agree about the accurate representational nature of his work. Michael Holroyd describes Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky as a "social map of [London] as it was in the harsh commercial

era of the 1920s and the early 1930s" which provides "the authentic atmosphere of what it was like to live in England between the two world wars."¹² Reviews of the Gorse books sometimes describe them as "sociology," while Clifton Fadiman's hostile review of Hangover Square complains of "almost academic obedience to the dicta of psychiatry."¹³ The attitude taken toward the accurate cultural record of Hamilton's work ranges from wholly negative ("mere documentary . . . a figure out of a sociologist's casebook") through matter of fact ("For sheer sociological observation the book could hardly be bettered [and] it provides obviously reliable source-material") to laudatory ("it is to Mr. Hamilton, rather than to Mr. Graham Greene, that the social historian will go for authentic atmosphere").¹⁴ Hamilton is credited with considerable reliability on such matters by many critics.

The following pair of examples strike a balance between over-documenting and ignoring such endorsements of Hamilton's value. The first is Hugh David's fascinating study of London's literary bohemia, The Fitzrovians.¹⁵ Hamilton's fiction functions in David's book as background, and while his pub novels are quoted as literary scene-setting, Hamilton never appears directly under discussion. Rather than describe the Wheatsheaf, for example, David quotes Hamilton's description of the fictional Midnight Bell, since, "had it really existed, the Midnight Bell . . . would have been its near neighbour and rival. Not only was

it supposedly located just off the Tottenham Court Road, its clientele and even its décor were strikingly similar to those of the Wheatsheaf" (159). Further, David uses as shorthand for Dylan Thomas's London the "grey and shabby metropolis" of Hamilton's pub trilogy and Hangover Square (144). The implications of David's attitude toward Hamilton are numerous; most relevant here is how confidently David can use Hamilton's fiction as illustration. Hamilton's depiction possesses both literary merit and accuracy; David relies on its ability to evoke Fitzrovia and, more generally, London, and he clearly expects his reader to be familiar with Hamilton's work.

A second key example is provided by Frank Kermode who, establishing context for thirties economics, writes that if you had £5 a week, poverty and privation were remote considerations. If you were a 'rentier poet' with £500 a year you thought about them only because of a deliberate and educated act of conscience. And once committed to this course you might feel compassion, beyond necessity no doubt, for almost the whole population; manual workers earned about £3 a week, and 88 per cent of the population had less than £250 a year. It is true that a family like my own managed fairly well on £3, and people lived with enviable style on £5. But the bourgeois poets could hardly be expected to know that.¹⁶

The relevance of this to Hamilton's achievement is clear.

However "educated" his communist conscience may have been, his on-the-ground knowledge of the economics and lifestyle of the milieu he built his fiction around was the result of his own permanent residence there. Interestingly, Kermode cites Hamilton in his footnote to the passage just quoted: "I take these figures from J. Stevenson, British Society, 1914-1945, (1984). In P. Hamilton, Hangover Square, (1941)--a novel which scrupulously registers the conditions of life immediately before the war--a meal for two at a very expensive London restaurant, together with a great deal to drink, costs £2. 13s. 7d." (47, n. 11). So Hamilton's fictional representation is considered sufficiently accurate to be cited alongside an historical study, and it underscores the chasm between Hamilton's knowledge and what "the bourgeois poets could hardly be expected to know."

In an era of politically-committed literature, many writers were driven to examine socio-economic levels they were not born into. This was no less than "the task imposed upon them by the times--to cross no-man's-land, to fraternize in the proletarian trenches" (Kermode 25). Part of Hamilton's contribution to our understanding of the thirties and forties in Britain results directly from his immersion (by choice) in this world of "temporary refuges" more often inhabited out of pure necessity. Hamilton's more thorough transgression creates the opportunity for achievements not attained by most of his fellow travellers. Kermode's discussion of Edmund Wilson's story "The Princess

with the Golden Hair" and Edward Upward's trilogy, The Spiral Ascent, illuminates the enormity of the task facing Leftist writers of the thirties, and in the end Kermode is forced to make allowances based on their good intentions; he provides a sort of literary handicap for their fiction.¹⁷ Julian Symons is surely right when, in The Thirties and the Nineties, he observes that "Kermode sees the absurdity of [Upward's protagonist] Alan's attitude, but seems to feel that the merit of the attempt to cross the class barrier outweighs the sanctimoniousness of Wilson's narrator and the self-conscious superiority of Alan Sebrill."¹⁸ Hamilton's fiction offers a view into the other side of the frontier with mercifully little sanctimoniousness and self-conscious superiority.

If the writers of his generation were interested in frontiers, in crossing borders, Hamilton's chosen mode of existence represents a real crossing of boundaries. Affiliation with the kinds of people represented in his novels was not an intellectual exercise for him, but a way of life. Kermode's book focuses on transgression as a key theme of thirties writing; Hamilton, in his life, chose to transgress the expectations and training of his (nominal) class.

The concept of literature as "document" was examined quite earnestly during the thirties, and the implications of Hamilton's class transgression are particularly important in the context of his (Leftist) literary generation's high

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valuation of documentary of all kinds. In 1937, Storm Jameson called upon Leftist writers to produce "documents," which were to be

offered to us without the unnecessary and distorting gloss of the writer's emotions and self-questionings. Writers should be willing to go and live for a long enough time at one of the points of departure of the new society. To go, if you like, into exile. Without feeling heroic, or even adventurous, or curious about their own spiritual reactions. Willing to sink themselves for the time, so that they become conduits for a feeling which is not personal, nor static.¹⁹

Hamilton's significance for such a regime is apparent; consider, for example, Jameson's prescription that the writer live there "for a long enough time." What time period might be represented by this is vague, and doubtless it might vary from one writer to the next, but clearly Jameson intends to condemn touristy visits and "upper-class larks."²⁰ Presumably the duration of the visit is necessary to achieve the feeling of normalcy Jameson describes as being neither heroic nor adventurous. Taking this as the standard of duration, Hamilton was eminently successful; he made the real-life world of pubs and boarding houses so much a part of his own life, that it ceased to be "exile," making other, more respectable modes of life take on that role.

Jameson's ideas have special status as 1930s notions of

documentary.²¹ Stuart Laing includes Jameson's article in his essay on "Presenting 'Things as They Are': John Sommerfield's May Day and Mass Observation."²² He sketches out the sometimes-conflicting aims of Leftist fiction in the thirties, making use of contemporary criticism and theories of documentary writing. Laing's picture indicates both the difficulty of the task and the value of successful efforts:

For novelists working within the milieu of the Left in the 1930s (whether Communist Party, ILP, Left Review or other), these problems seems to have resolved themselves into the effort to reconcile three competing influences--influences which at times pulled in different directions. These were the need for reportage (describing 'things as they are'), the desire for a certain aesthetic or fictional structure (at its crudest 'making up a story'), and the pull towards a literature of political commitment and political persuasion.²³

Hamilton's fiction is amenable to such a project, and if not allowed to dominate the discussion, the politics of his novels can be fruitfully considered. His novels achieve success in each of the areas Laing outlines: their accurate reportage is widely accepted by critics, as is the strong professional craftsmanship behind them, while their political tendencies (both before and after Hamilton's conversion to Marxism) create a strong indictment of contemporary society.

While it may be true that Jameson's idea of a point of departure is more likely to be Nottingham, Hamilton's milieu is an appropriate "point of departure," and it is one he became a real part of. The problem with earlier Leftist writers limiting themselves to factory workers is the impossibility of becoming one--Jameson remarks that "a writer living in a Nottinghamshire mining village could not possibly do his job properly without the help of confidential reports from the workers themselves, which he would have to wait for and deserve by his behaviour."²⁴ That a writer might actually become a manual laborer does not present itself as a possibility; certainly in this instance Jameson assumes that living "at one of the points of departure" does not mean full immersion. Partly, of course, this is nothing more than another testament to the rigidity of Britain's class system, which made class differences too visible for full immersion in another class, and it explains Jameson's starting point.

Jameson's article begins by offering a definition of socialist literature so general as to be nearly useless, but part of the purpose of the definition is to overcome the impossibilities of a middle-class writer being (for however long) a factory worker or miner: "I believe we should do well to give up talking about proletarian literature and talk about socialist literature instead--and mean by it writing concerned with the lives of men and women in a world which is changing and being changed."²⁵ While one could

argue that such a definition could be applied to virtually all literature, it is noteworthy that she points away from exclusively factory-worker books. The Left's conception of political literature matured during the thirties, and Jameson reflects its increased interest in what Andy Croft characterizes as "fiction that had the reliable feel of a political documentary [as opposed to] political documents that tried to pass themselves off as fiction."²⁶ Jameson broadens the range of possible subjects to include novels featuring any level of society: "The use of the term 'proletarian novel' suggests, quite falsely, that socialist literature ought to concern itself only or mainly with working-class life. . . . The process of change, of decay, of growth, is taking place everywhere all the time: it does not matter where you open up the social body if you know what you are looking for."²⁷ Hamilton's choice, the lower reaches of the middle class (where it verges on the working class), seems a very honourable part of the scheme Jameson prescribes.

The perceived need for documentary was one of the driving forces behind Mass-Observation, the sociological enterprise founded by Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge, and Humphrey Jennings in 1937. Mass-Observation employed full-time researchers to "observe" everyday Britain, and accumulated material (diaries, monthly questionnaires on set topics) from volunteers. Harrisson had studied cannibals in the Pacific, and regretted the lack of similar fact-finding

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and analysis done in England. For democracy to remain viable, Harrisson believed, it required an anthropology of ordinary English people and culture. In an early published work, Britain by Mass-Observation (1939), Harrisson and Madge made this point emphatically:

If there is any moral responsibility of the scientist at all, it is that he should spend a part of his time, or see to it that more than sufficient scientists should spend more of their time, in studying normal and everyday behaviour problems of our own lives, as actually lived in the houses and factories, pubs and chapels and shops in this sort of civilisation.²⁸

The interest of thirties' middle and upper-middle class intellectuals in other socio-economic levels often included only those who were very "other"--northern coal miners and factory workers. In calling for serious, sustained attention to be directed to the "normal and everyday," Mass-Observation's interests parallel Hamilton's.

Among other topics, Britain by Mass-Observation addresses several "mass movements," including the football pools, All-In Wrestling, and the Lambeth Walk. The last provides an opportunity to explain their mission:

"Lambeth you've never seen" say the words of the song, and thus emphasise the basic argument of this book--the ignorance of one section of society about how other sections live and what they say and think. "Why don't you make your way there?" asks the song, and this is

just the question which this book sets out to ask. Why not? (142)

What Mass-Observation believed to be essential was not simply the gathering up of information about these other sections of society, but also, that the knowledge gained by crossing the social frontier must be widely available in an accessible form. In his introduction to the 1986 edition of Britain by Mass-Observation--which was originally a Penguin Special--Angus Calder writes of Harrisson and Madge that

both seem to have been relieved to retreat from the dilemma of their generation into the supposedly neutral position of the "scientist," where consciousness could be neither "collective" nor "individual" but "objective." The social scientist, Madge and Harrisson argue, must find out "what people do want, do get, don't get and could get to want," and must publish his findings in such place and form that the masses themselves will be able to read and check them. Mass-Observation's role is to describe rather than prescribe--not to agitate, but to mediate. (xv)

Such a role may explain why the material they gathered and produced retains its interest. In its unprocessed form, the information remains concrete and specific, available for application and interpretation under the changing fashions of politics and theory, unlike some of the more politically-charged writings of the period which were intended to "prescribe" and "agitate."

In the "Special Tom Harrisson Number" of Light and Dark (1938), Harrisson assesses some of the "documents" produced by thirties imaginative writers and finds them sorely lacking.²⁹ What these writers are not providing, however, he believes Mass-Observation's work will supply. One of Jameson's fellow contributors in that special "Documentary" issue of Fact was Arthur Calder-Marshall. Harrisson does not find Calder-Marshall's fiction remotely "documentary," and he complains of the poets' false claims as well:

Any investigation of modern life will at once reveal the wide divergence between the English "proletarian novel" and proletarian life, between the conversations in Calder-Marshall's books and in actuality. Our forthcoming publications may show the difference. Good. But not so good when the novelist has foolishly claimed to be "actual," a mistake the painter has seldom made. The poets have made it up to the hilt. Thus Isherwood, Auden's right hand, who should know, starts off the extraordinary collection of fulsome eulogies in the Auden New Verse with: "First, Auden is essentially a scientist." A scientist. He is also practically everything else, from the Pope to Popeye, if we are to believe these New Versions.³⁰

Harrisson is clearly enjoying his polemic, but he has put his finger on some of the key problems of the documentary agenda, as well as the Auden's group self-serving interrelations.

Mass-Observation looked into everyday matters; Madge and Harrison, like Hamilton, understood that most people's lives find a center in apparently trivial and mundane details. For example, while political posturing and journalistic reports left people irritated and confused, rather than frightened, concerning the impending war, "gas masks brought the war danger home to everybody and to every home" (Britain 88). Mass-Observation's interviews and observations showed them how people's perceptions and feelings changed dramatically when gas masks were issued; the impending war took on a new reality.

In his April, 1940 report on conversation, Harrison reveals both a style and a substance similar to Hamilton's.³¹ His report is based on what Mass Observation called "overheards"; which were produced, essentially, by eavesdropping on conversations in public places. The conversations that he quotes in the report were overheard in Oxford Street, "a big store," a cafe, and a Lyons Corner House. All of these locales figure in Hamilton's novels, and some are central to Hamilton's milieu. Notable, too, is that the people overheard were not discussing the progress of the war or significant political developments, but the mundane and everyday, as impacted by the war: the most common topics Harrison identified were money and prices (14%), cookery and food (8%), and household budgets and problems (7%).

Mass-Observation's legacy is several published works,

later editions or anthologies of significant holdings, many studies which rely partly on their material, and the Mass-Observation Archive which contains a great deal of their original material--not all of it, however, as some, due to its unprotected existence before becoming the Archive at the University of Sussex in 1970, has been lost. I will have occasion to draw on each type of work, as the interests of Mass-Observation provide an important non-fictional counterpart to Hamilton's novelistic research, and each type of Mass Observation material offers its own advantages.

The imperative acted upon by Britain's intellectuals in the thirties, and afterwards, produced a wide variety of results. On a continuum, with the abstract ideals of the Auden group (which meant little in practice, as Valentine Cunningham all-too thoroughly demonstrates) at one end, and Mass-Observation's gathering of sociological data at the other, Hamilton would be near midpoint. What does his work contribute from its place in the middle? The rest of this study will serve as the beginnings of an answer.

Hamilton's milieu allows his fiction to make a real contribution to Leftist literature while avoiding many of the weaknesses found in other middle-class Leftist writing. He did not write of things he knew little or nothing of, and he maintained sufficient disinterestedness to produce successful "documents" while simultaneously being engaged with the lives he portrays in his fiction. He found his own way to solve the problems faced by all middle-class Leftist

writers. In Literary Englands, David Gervais writes of Orwell that "his England was as if refracted through his anthropologist's curiosity, a commitment that did not preclude neutrality when necessary. This was part of his strength since it enabled him to avoid the more facile and sentimental kinds of identification with the working class that many of his contemporaries went in for."³²

Hamilton solved this last problem--one of the most vexing and embarrassing for 1990s readers of Leftist fiction--in a way different from Orwell's. He did so by concentrating on the slice of lower-middle and working-class existence that he knew, and created such characters as the barmaid Ella rather than write about factory workers or coal miners. His characters are what Lessing calls "the working poor," and their most heartbreaking quality is the precariousness of their status: "in Hamilton's world everyone struggles to find a foothold, or to keep one, but they easily get swept away" (23). Hamilton's fiction does not allow readers the easy, patronizing sentimentality of "visiting" the working class; instead, he gets to the heart of middle-class anxieties by portraying characters who are struggling, with varying degrees of success, to hang onto their middle-class status.

NOTES

1. While "milieu" is undeniably old-fashioned, I know of no better term to indicate a whole way of living, a structure of feeling in its material and historical circumstances. It is also the word chosen by Peter Widdowson to suggest similar essential elements of Hamilton's achievement: "Hamilton is concerned with a particular milieu, which begins to take on a mythic status all its own. . . . [Generally] it is floated in a realistic medium of sharply-observed gesture and scene, reinforced by a brilliant ear for dialogue. One is persuaded that the scenes and characters have solid and credible existence, are not merely hackneyed type-images or caricatures. Indeed, at its best, the depressed world of Hamilton's books bears down on one with a force and actuality that is hard to evade" ("The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s," in John Lucas, ed., The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy [Sussex: Harvester, 1978], 118-19).
2. Doris Lessing, "A Blank Look?" review of Hogarth edition of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, Listener, 17 September 1987, 23. Subsequent references cited in text.
3. John Russell Taylor, "Patrick Hamilton," London Magazine 6.2 (1966), 59.

4. Taylor, 53.
5. (London and New York: Methuen/Croom Helm, 1987), 47.
Subsequent references cited in text.
6. John Lucas, ed., The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy (London and New York: Harvester/Barnes & Noble, 1978); and Andy Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990).
7. Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (St. Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1975 [f.p. 1973]), 209.
8. Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky (London: Hogarth, 1987), 375-76. The trilogy was first published as a one-volume trilogy in 1935 by Constable; it is comprised of The Midnight Bell (Constable, 1929), The Siege of Pleasure (Constable, 1932), and The Plains of Cement (Constable, 1934).
9. Earlier in the trilogy, the beautiful prostitute-elect, Jenny, who also likes Lyons', is described as "something of a Langtry in these places."
10. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949), 186. Subsequent references to this edition cited in text.
11. (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951), 95-96.
12. Introduction to Hogarth edition of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, 10.
13. New Yorker, 14 February 1942, 67.
14. M. Laski, review of The West Pier, The Spectator, 31 August 1951, 280; I. Quigly, review of Unknown Assailant,

The Spectator, 18 November 1955, 694; and review of The West Pier, TLS, 7 September 1951, 564.

15. (London: Michael Joseph, 1988). Subsequent references cited in text.

16. History and Value (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 46-47. Subsequent references cited in text.

17. See 28-30 for the introductory discussion of both works, and 53-57 for further discussion of Upward's trilogy.

18. Revised edition, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1990), 175.

19. "Storm Jameson on Documents," Fact no. 4 (1937), 13.

20. This last phrase is used of Hamilton by Brian McKenna in "Confessions of a Heavy-Drinking Marxist: Addiction in the Work of Patrick Hamilton," in Beyond the Pleasure Dome, ed. by Sue Vice, Matthew Campbell and Tim Armstrong (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 231-44.

21. Andy Croft devotes a chapter of Red Letter Days to "A Long and Draughty Sermon: Documentary Novels," which includes an interesting analysis of the Left's changing ideas about the relationship between politics, fiction and documentary. He highlights Jameson's article: "One of the few attempts to provide a theory of documentary writing was made in a symposium in Fact in 1937. Among the contributors, the novelist Storm Jameson argued for the importance of documentary" (254). (Other contributors to that issue of Fact include Arthur Calder-Marshall, Stephen

Spender and John Allen.) Asa Briggs refers to the piece as "Storm Jameson's perceptive article on 'Documentary,' " and pronounces it "a key document for a key decade" (foreword to Class, Culture and Social Change, ed. by Frank Gloversmith [Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980], 12).

22. In Frank Gloversmith, ed., Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s (Sussex: Harvester, 1980), 142-60.

23. 145.

24. 14-15.

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26. Red Letter Days, 249.

27. "Documents," 10.

28. Arranged and written by Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge, (London: Cresset, 1986 [f.p. 1939]), 231. Subsequent references cited in text.

29. "Mass-Opposition and Tom Harrisson," February 1938 (vol 2.3): 8-15. Mass-Observation Archive File Report A6. This article is interesting for several reasons. A review of The Year's Poetry (1937), Letters from Iceland, New Writing IV, and New Verse, it is also Harrisson's statement of contempt for many of his contemporaries and the importance of his own goals in co-founding Mass Observation. The special issue begins with a poem by Nevill Coghill entitled "Observations on Mass-Observation," and Harrisson uses that negative poem as his own jumping-off point.

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Valentine Cunningham describes Harrisson's article as "one of the period's best pieces of literary criticism" (334), and among its revelations is the genesis for Cunningham's method. Cunningham's British Writers of the Thirties (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) is in many ways a distended and bulging version of what Harrisson does here to a real point, accumulating images from the poets' own work in order to turn those images against them.

- 30. "Mass-Opposition and Tom Harrisson," 11.
- 31. M-O A File Report 83, "Conversation," 26 April 1940.
- 32. Literary Englands: Versions of "Englishness" in Modern Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170.

Chapter 2

"THE TASTE OF THE DON AND THE WHIM OF THE FILM-MAKER": HAMILTON, HIS CRITICS, AND CLASS

Contemporary reception does not guarantee later critical attention, as witnessed by the fact that Hamilton, described by John Betjeman in 1956 as "one of the best English novelists,"¹ has received little critical attention from academics. Michael Holroyd identifies the title images--"the taste of the don and the whim of the film-maker"--as "the two ill-matched steeds to which a publisher's list of reprints is harnessed--and they draw it into some strangely paradoxical country," continuing that "there can be no more striking example of this state of affairs than the plight of Patrick Hamilton."² Hamilton is known as a thriller writer, Holroyd observes, because of the film versions of Rope and Gaslight, but "his finest work . . . is unknown because it does not appear on any English literature syllabus and has not attracted Alfred Hitchcock" (103-04).

Nonetheless, it must be noted, Hamilton's work has never completely disappeared from view. In The Concept of Modernism, Astradur Eysteinsson persuasively argues that to discuss a literary work is, in effect, to canonize it:

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Any mention of a work rests on the assumption that it is exemplary in one way or another, and thus in a sense involves its canonization. If we think of canonization in this broad sense (which is a necessary criterion for the narrower sense), we realize that the only act of 'noncanonization' is complete silence. (83)

Hamilton's work has been granted a minor role in most literary histories covering the first half of the twentieth century, thus establishing a series of contact points with pre-existing areas of study. There has been some work on Hamilton's relevance to crime fiction, for example, and to the study of literature and addiction, and there has been assessment of his place as a novelist of World War II. Leftist criticism has been most frequently brought to bear on Hamilton's work, particularly through studies of the 1930s.

HAMILTON'S CRITICS

Any summary of Hamilton's critical fate must begin by recording the problematic nature of his position. Like that of other minor literary figures, Hamilton's work has been vulnerable to wholesale appropriation and misrepresentation by critics with causes, but it has also been championed by many writers and reviewers. Biographically-(mis)informed criticism has dominated, compounding the problem of Hamilton's work being viewed from a predetermined point of view. The task to be faced in the present study is not

rescuing Hamilton's work from oblivion; instead, it is a matter of addressing some tenacious misconceptions and clearing a space to let interpretative issues arise more naturally from the work itself, rather than forcing it to illustrate some predetermined principle.

Book-length studies on Hamilton consist of three biographies and one unpublished doctoral dissertation.³ There have been a few critical articles, and Hamilton is sometimes included in literary histories (or is conspicuously absent), but most critical comment appears in the form of book reviews or introductions. Bruce Hamilton's 1972 memoir of his brother is the first and most significant of the three biographies, not so much for its merits, which are limited, but for the influence it has wielded over all subsequent work. His book set the Hamilton agenda: which incidents are important, what tone is to be taken. Nigel Jones is absorbed completely by Bruce Hamilton's book; he wrote his own biography of Hamilton in such a way that one reviewer, quite accurately, found Bruce Hamilton to be its "real hero."⁴ Sean French is more skeptical, recognizing that The Light Went Out is "a work of piety that is also an act of belated revenge" (5), but could not altogether avoid its influence. There is a notable shortage of primary material, and what little there is has passed first through the hands of Bruce Hamilton and then to his widow Aileen, who openly hated Patrick Hamilton.

Bruce Hamilton's method for exacting revenge on his

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more accomplished younger brother is simple. Throughout his biography, under cover of "painful honesty" and "forgiveness," he draws attention to faults, ascribes blame, and surreptitiously seals negative judgments, all the while offering himself to his reader as humble victim. Nigel Jones, who is very sympathetic to Bruce Hamilton, reports that Patrick Hamilton never liked his brother very much (315). Furthermore, Jones discovered a manuscript version of an autobiographical novel, written by Bruce Hamilton, which ends with its narrator murdering his much-resented brother (vii-viii). In spite of such evidence of Bruce Hamilton's problematic status as the first and last word on Hamilton, Jones never questions the former's judgment.

The Light Went Out originated the now widely-accepted view of Hamilton as a tragic failure and famous drunk, a fact rarely noted by those who perpetuate it.⁵ John Betjeman's remarks in the Spectator demonstrate that as late as 1956, when Hamilton had published everything he ever would, he was not a notorious failure and drunk, but notably invisible as a literary "personality." The image of drunken failure comes later, and is directly attributable to Bruce Hamilton's memoir.

By concentrating so much on what Hamilton did not accomplish, The Light Went Out presents an account of the published works that undervalues them. Bruce Hamilton often seems not to understand the merits of his brother's work and, in spite of his oft-repeated claim to be the critic

most valued by Hamilton, he has surprisingly little to say about it. While his preface claims that the "biography originated in my conviction that he was one of the major novelists and most considerable playwrights of his time" (xi), Bruce Hamilton's comments on his brother's texts seem intent on exposing what the former sees as their weaknesses.

Jones' biography is not much better at handling Hamilton's novels. He treats literary text as if it were straightforward (auto)biographical material. His discussion of Hamilton's romance with Lily Connolly, for example, relies heavily on excerpts from Hamilton's trilogy of pub novels. Jones seems unaware of any reason not to substitute fiction for life, and does so unabashedly, as in this passage:

We do not know exactly in what circumstances Patrick first met Lily, but given his inveterate habit of transcribing his real life experiences in his fiction, it can be deduced that the encounter resembled the meeting in Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky of the barman Bob and the street-walker Jenny in the pub, The Midnight Bell. (134)

This is followed immediately by a lengthy quote from the novel, which functions as a substitute for biographical information. Equally disturbing in a professional journalist is Jones's sense of who constitutes a credible, reliable source. In his introduction, he labels Hamilton's drinking buddies "objective outsiders" (6), an idea most

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professional biographers would scoff at. Further, much of his most damaging material is either unattributed or founded on dubious sources. Jones' book is not good journalism, responsible biography, or worthwhile literary criticism.

Perhaps most damaging to Hamilton's literary reputation is that, like Bruce Hamilton before him, Jones seems unable or unwilling to make a case for reading Hamilton. In his introduction, he cites a desire to "[bring] a wider audience for [Hamilton's] work" as one of two "main aims" (7), but almost four hundred pages later, he has not suggested any reasons for reading Hamilton's fiction. Its main attraction for him seems to be the scandalous inferences readers can gather therein about Hamilton's life. He goes through the motions of generating interest in the literature--suggesting comparisons with other writers, making connections among Hamilton's writings--but in the end fails to do so with any success.

Sean French's biography represents a significant departure in terms of its attitude toward Hamilton and his work. French rejects the model of Hamilton as failure and, as a necessary preliminary to considering Hamilton's literary achievements, takes a skeptical stance toward Bruce Hamilton's memoir. French's other significant contribution is using the rough typescript of an early draft of The Light Went Out (the original title of which--"Patrick: A Tragedy"--indicates Bruce Hamilton's attitude toward his subject) to point up weaknesses in the published version. For example,

that draft included a story of Bruce Hamilton not being taken backstage after the final performance of The Governess; in a footnote, French explains that "this passage is typical of what was lost when Bruce's memoir was cut and reworked for publication. Gone are the specific incident and the personal resentment that may have influenced Bruce's judgment. All that remains is the general statement that Hamilton abased himself before his friends" (308).

Brian McKenna's Oxford dissertation, "Gender Representation, Sexuality and Politics in the Writings of Patrick Hamilton," belongs to both principal camps of Hamilton studies, the biographical and the political. Indeed, he has found a singular way to tie the two together, with his categorical claim that "primarily, like many other revolutionaries, [Hamilton] drank to get rid, temporarily, of capitalism." Further, McKenna identifies the audience for his dissertation as being specifically and exclusively radical and, presumably as part of this radical agenda, he eschews the whole notion of a canon:

It is part of the function of this thesis to help restore Hamilton's reputation as a writer of significance--but without resorting to hagiography, or underwriting the notion of a 'canon' to which Hamilton could be said to deserve promotion. The present work is more concerned with how his oeuvre can be read than with why (although it is concerned with that also): with the ways in which, despite its problems and

limitations, this body of work can be rendered valuable to a radical audience of the 1990s and beyond.

The dissertation follows the pattern of the biographies, for far from resorting to hagiography, McKenna, like Bruce Hamilton, Jones and French, relies heavily on what Joyce Carol Oates has aptly called "pathography."⁶

McKenna, like other Leftist critics, seems strangely reluctant to claim much for Hamilton's work, summing up in his abstract, "it is concluded that, despite its demonstrable limitations and inherent problems, much of Hamilton's work can be rendered valuable to a contemporary radical audience, interestingly implicated as it is in the social and psychological crises that afflicted the British ruling order in the inter-war period of the Cold War." Hamilton's fiction offers insights that are necessarily ignored by such a position, which limits Hamilton's work in two significant ways. First, it emphasizes supposed weaknesses in the literature--"demonstrable limitations and inherent problems"--when in fact Hamilton's books are accomplished and interesting. They do not need to be "rendered valuable" by trendy theories; they assert their own value. Further, McKenna's position suggests that the only conceivable audience for Hamilton's fiction is a radical one, which is simply untrue. The adaptation of the Gorse books was shown on British television and then offered to the American Public via Masterpiece Theatre, indicating a much larger audience than the minority segment of the

population composed of self-identified radicals. The comments of many readers and reviewers indicate the value of Hamilton's work for those who do not consider themselves radical, and for those who are radical but do not limit their reading to politically-motivated literature.

Biographical criticism is far from being the latest rage, and may seem outright passé in our era of self-consciously sophisticated literary theory, but its persistence in Hamilton studies requires that it be addressed. Indeed, its persistence has done Hamilton's work more harm than good by minimizing approaches better calculated to place Hamilton's work in academic circles. This effect is evident in the most cursory glance at the results of such criticism, for the biographical approach means that nothing else need be sought but biographical models or parallels for the literature, obscuring the need for literary history, for a search for literary and cultural contexts, and for consideration of literary predecessors or followers. Rather than placing the subject's work in a larger literary and cultural context, biographical criticism concentrates on marking out parallels which are all too often specious. When Nigel Jones takes the shortcut of "deducing" that Hamilton and Lily Connolly's first meeting must have "resembled" that of Bob and Jenny in The Midnight Bell, he makes no allowance for the fact that Bob only speaks to Jenny because his duties as waiter require him to do so. When the prostitutes enter the saloon lounge and

seat themselves at a table, they are isolated from the others already there, and when they finally make their separate departures, the only person they have spoken with is Bob. His initial exchange with them is dictated by duty, and all subsequent conversation is built around the mechanism of waiter and paying customer. It is not clear what might be "deduced" of Hamilton's initial contact with Lily Connolly, since the circumstances must have been substantially different--Hamilton would have been under no job-obligation to interact with her.

Biographical predominance also results in an insistence on fiction being transcribed autobiography while, paradoxically, slighting the verisimilitude conferred by experience (in Hamilton's case, at least). Brian McKenna, for example, complains that Michael Holroyd's introduction to the Hogarth edition of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky "exaggerates the touchstone value of [Hamilton's] personal experience" and that to agree with this "Holroydian myth" about Hamilton's writing would "make his work vulnerable to a debunking consonant with a banal literary ideology which insists on feeling for the authorial pulse of a text."⁷ McKenna himself, however, denigrates Hamilton's most important fiction as mere autobiography, denying its author the credit for talent, originality, and skill that he deserves. First, McKenna asserts that "The Midnight Bell confessionalizes the author's own involvement in the late 1920s with a prostitute called Lily Connolly" (235); and

then that "Hangover Square constitutes a fictionalization of Hamilton's infatuation with an Irish actress called Geraldine Fitzgerald, whom he pestered for a time in 1936" (236). McKenna's procedure reveals his inconsistency in complaining of Holroyd's interest in Hamilton's experience but, more importantly, it also trivializes what Hamilton learned by way of that experience. Holroyd recognizes the value of Hamilton's immersion in a culture not his by birth, but for McKenna, biography is simply about sex and its transference into the pages of a novel.

Biography overwhelms the book-length work on Hamilton, but it also makes itself felt in the reviews, most of the introductions to editions of Hamilton's novels, and some critical articles. Hostile reviewers, like Brigid Brophy, use Bruce Hamilton's biographical information to discredit Hamilton's work, while sympathetic critics like Donald Thomas rely on biography as an introduction to Hamilton's fiction.⁸ The title of Brian McKenna's essay on Hamilton in Beyond the Pleasure Dome, "Confessions of a Heavy-Drinking Marxist," indicates the priority McKenna gives to biography in that essay, as well as in his dissertation. It seems no one can write about Hamilton's work without throwing in some biographical tid bits. Angus Hall wrote the most interesting biographical article on Hamilton. Hall visited Hamilton, in the rôle of disciple, shortly before Hamilton's death. His article describes their meeting, providing first-hand biographical reportage, and offers

insightful literary judgments on Hamilton's work.

Hamilton's indeterminate situation--never completely lost from view, but never fully assimilated into the stabilizing mechanism of the academic canon, either--has meant a long series of rediscoveries. Reading through the reviews of Hamilton reprints during the last twenty-five years produces a cumulative testimonial to the power of his fiction. New readers find a reprint, are compelled to find other Hamilton novels, and write reviews exhorting their readers to do likewise. Only Hamilton's fuller admission into the canon will prevent repetitions of this cycle, for the organized and sustaining attention of the academic canon functions as a sort of literary memory, allowing critics to build on previous work rather than having to start anew each time.

Leftist critics--trying to rehabilitate thirties' Marxism by disputing the widely-accepted notion that thirties politics have been exploded by (among other things) the renunciations of Auden and Isherwood--have paid considerable attention to Hamilton. Indeed, the nearest Hamilton comes to having an academic presence is through the work of such Leftist critics as Peter Widdowson, John Lucas, and Andy Croft. There is a price to be paid for this kind of attention, however, for these critics place the highest value on the most overtly political of Hamilton's work even though that segment of his work is the least successful. Impromptu in Moribundia, his Marxist fantasy, is by far the

weakest of his novels (and the only one never to be reprinted after its original publication), but it is singled out for praise by Arnold Rattenbury and Peter Widdowson.⁹ This is not very far removed from what Raymond Williams has characterized as "the kind of literary criticism which has made Marxism notorious: 'Is the work socialist or not in tendency? is it helping forward the most creative movement in society?' where literature is defined solely in terms of its political affiliations."¹⁰

Political interest often drives one of the areas where Hamilton's work is most frequently mentioned, studies of the 1930s. While there have been some very interesting studies aimed at broadening the context of English literature between the wars (which in practice usually means 'reassessing' the thirties), most of these studies pose obstacles for students of Hamilton's work. These obstacles generally arise from the political agenda of these studies, which emphasize the political content and motivation of the literature they discuss. The political aspect of literature between the wars is not uninteresting, but pursuing that element exclusively obscures other aspects and problematizes issues which are insignificant under other critical rubrics. Nonetheless, Hamilton's inclusion is certainly welcome and, in fact, such works provide the most promising point of entry for Hamilton's advance from the margins of literary history to the relative safety of the syllabus. Frank Kermode, John Lucas, Andy Croft, Frank Gloversmith and

Robert Hewison all include Hamilton as part of their thirties restoration projects, and Hugh David's study of Fitzrovia considers Hamilton a spokesman for the decade.¹¹

Andy Croft's Red Letter Days (1990) is the "study of a small but significant success story, the intervention in the life of the novel by the British Left" (25), and is comprehensively researched and often insightful. Croft's book brings to the reader's attention new names, or new works by familiar names, and simultaneously provides contemporary context through reviews and similar commentary. Croft's goal of "restoration" can only succeed with those already converted, however, because he makes virtually no literary distinctions. Politics are his primary interest. Thus, in Croft's study, Bruce Hamilton's political activism is contrasted favorably with Patrick Hamilton's lack of "interest in political activity" (129). While Croft offers some interesting comments on Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, his praise of Bruce Hamilton's novels is consistently stronger, and it is clear that Croft values the latter's overt Marxism more than he does Hamilton's finely-tuned presentations of characters on the fringe of society.

In The Fitzrovians (1988), Hugh David asserts that as "the writings of Julian Maclaren-Ross uniquely preserve the texture of life in the London of the 1940s, as to a lesser extent those of Michael Arlen and the early novels of Patrick Hamilton do for the twenties and thirties respectively" (245). Here, then, is Patrick Hamilton

presented as a specifically "thirties" writer; how is it then that Valentine Cunningham's monumental British Writers of the Thirties (1988) contains not one reference to his work? He is not even included in Cunningham's voluminous bibliography of literary texts. One possible explanation can be gleaned from Brian McKenna's remarks on the book. McKenna has no reservations about biography's intrusion into literary criticism, and he assesses Cunningham's book like this:

The fundamental achievement of British Writers of the Thirties ought not to be scanted. Its imaginative recreation of a multi-layered discursive structure of feeling imbricated in an entire literary generation yields many telling connections. For example, Cunningham's concatenation of male homosexuality, the legacy of the Great War ('the absent soldier father'), and a particular strain of upper-middle-class Thirties English radicalism is convincing and vindicates the welcome historicity of his semiological enterprise.

Perhaps the absence of Hamilton's fiction from Cunningham's book has less to do with literary interest than with an unsuitability for the kind of biographical analysis McKenna describes, in which the "legacy of the Great War" is reduced to little more than a tendency to homosexuality and affection/affectation for working-class conquests. Nonetheless, Hamilton's absence from Cunningham's work is conspicuous in view of his inclusion in most studies of the

thirties. If British Writers of the Thirties is comprehensive, how could Hamilton be omitted? Hamilton's fiction is an important part of that decade, and his work ought to be in Cunningham's book.

CLASS ISSUES

The predominantly biographical and political analyses of Hamilton's work intersect at the essential crossroads of class. A Leftist political approach makes the socio-economic class of the writer a pressing issue, while biography must address the question of the biographical subject's class. George Orwell recognized that to write about "the terribly difficult issue of class" required identifying one's own class. He begins the second part of The Road to Wigan Pier with "a certain amount of autobiography, and I would not [write] it if I did not think that I am sufficiently typical of my class, or rather sub-caste, to have a certain symptomatic importance. I was born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class."¹² The cumbersome nomenclature indicates once again how difficult it is to define classes, let alone decide to which class individuals belong. In discussing his own class, however, Orwell isolates some of the key issues surrounding Hamilton's own class, and the one Hamilton wrote about in his first two novels. It is worth looking at Orwell's analysis.

The first key point concerning "the English class-

system is that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money" (154). Those with less money but more social pretensions (or self-imposed obligations) are in serious trouble by the 1930s; the remains of that class, like driftwood, have washed up in the geographical territory of Hamilton's novels:

Of course it is obvious now that the upper-middle class is done for. In every country town in Southern England, not to mention to dreary wastes of Kensington and Earl's Court, those who knew it in the days of its glory, are dying, vaguely embittered by a world which has not behaved as it ought. (154)

The foundation of life for such people is its duality; as Orwell explains it,

theoretically you knew all about servants and how to tip them, although in practice you had one or, at most, two resident servants. Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over. (155)

In Craven House, Hamilton explores the nuances of life for such people, its terrible boredom and their painful awareness of how they have come down in life; Hamilton based that book on his experiences in a Kew boarding house, one of

several he and various family members lived in. Hamilton's own class, then, is this dying class described by Orwell, and Hamilton's family was slipping quickly.

"But the real importance of this class," Orwell argues, is that they are the shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie. The real bourgeoisie, those in the £2,000 a year class and over, have their money as a thick layer of padding between themselves and the class they plunder; in so far as they are aware of the Lower Orders at all they are aware of them as employees, servants and tradesmen. But it is quite different for the poor devils lower down who are struggling to live genteel lives on what are virtually working-class incomes. These last are forced into close and, in a sense, intimate contact with the working class, and I suspect it is from them that the traditional upper-class attitude towards "common" people is derived.

(156)

Such a description implies a great deal for Hamilton's position, and looking at what he might have been expected to do shows how he used his own class position as an opportunity for illumination. Hamilton uses his knowledge of this borderland, not to perpetuate the usual "attitude of sniggering superiority" (156), but to examine its residents and the pressures under which they live. Because this class functions as the "shock-absorber," its members are all too aware of the pressures exerted on them. On the front line,

as it were, they must interact daily with people of other (lower) classes, contact which must reveal the lack of disparity in financial resources. What separates this shock-absorber class from those beneath them is more "socio" than it is "economic"; they maintain their tenuous status through careful husbandry of limited financial resources and will power. Their close contact with the lower classes, and the inescapable awareness of how tenuous their position is, combine to create a terrible fear: without constant vigilance, they could lose the small bit of prestige they retain, a prestige which must be all-important to them because in it lies the only advantage they possess in a class-oriented social system.

Orwell's model for class-interrelations corroborates the wisdom of Hamilton's novelistic choices, just as Orwell's life matches up with Hamilton's in several key aspects. "As for the terribly difficult issue of class-distinctions," Orwell advises at the end of Wigan Pier,

the only possible policy for the moment is to go easy and not frighten more people than can be helped. . . . If you belong to the bourgeoisie, don't be too eager to bound forward and embrace your proletarian brother; they may not like it, and if they show that they don't like it you will probably find that your class-prejudices are not so dead as you imagined. (263)

Hamilton never went in for the sort of intervention Orwell warns against, the kind that was all too common among

middle-class intellectuals of the thirties. When Hamilton's brother faults him for never having had any real contact with the working class, he misses the point.

Orwell has been for some years a whipping-boy of the Left; for example, Andy Croft's openly Leftist study complains often and bitterly about Orwell's sell-out. It must be said that his task, like Hamilton's, is a particularly difficult one: important, but often-neglected and liable to carping criticism (such as that from Bruce Hamilton mentioned above). Victor Gollancz, in his foreword to the Left Book Club edition of Wigan Pier admits on the one hand that "the whole of this chapter [eight] throws a most interesting light on the reality of class distinctions. I know, in fact, of no other book in which a member of the middle class exposes with such complete frankness the shameful way in which he was brought up to think of large numbers of his fellow men" (xv), but condescends to Orwell by claiming that "the fact is that . . . Mr. Orwell is still a victim of that early atmosphere, in his home and public school, which he himself has so eloquently exposed" (xvii).¹³ Orwell's matter-of-fact thoroughness is thus to be used against him. While Gollancz ostensibly appreciates Orwell's honesty, he turns it against Orwell to claim that he has not risen above the very thing he has so fully laid out for our instruction; had Orwell not provided the frank exposé, he could not be so handily accused of self-deception.

The implications of Hamilton's class transgression are particularly important in the context of his literary generation. While all commentators acknowledge that Hamilton crossed class divides during his life, the particularly vexed question of class in England denies simple readings (as Orwell shows), and some would have it that Hamilton's behavior was no more than "clearly an upper-class lark" (McKenna, "Confessions" 232). In a curious paradox, many of the Leftist critics who write about Hamilton seem intent on elevating his socio-economic status, minimizing his participation in the milieu of his fiction (and thereby minimizing the value of that participation) in order to create a standard of the upper-class intellectual that simply will not withstand scrutiny in light of Hamilton's life. McKenna's passing characterizations of Hamilton strike this note, describing him as "the upper-middle-class Communist writer Patrick Hamilton" and "Westminster Old Boy and Savile Club Member."¹⁴ Many objections can be made to such descriptions, including the facts that Hamilton never joined the Communist Party, and that he left Westminster after two terms, aged fifteen, never to resume his formal education. His financial situation is of particular importance, however, and his financial support, before he began making money from his writing, came from his sister, Lalla, and her married boyfriend, Sutton Vane, who had made enormous profits from Vane's play, Outward Bound. Hamilton's financial support

originated in an illicit liaison connected with the stage, rather than from respectable, and respectably-aged, family coffers.

McKenna's characterizations of Hamilton are no more misleading than Andy Croft's presentation of Bruce Hamilton's personal history and literary accomplishments. While the information Croft outlines is literally true, it suggests an altogether different mode of life than that lived by Bruce Hamilton, and one in marked contrast to the generalizations offered by Nigel Jones (185) and Bruce Hamilton himself (80), that of Bruce Hamilton as a young man rather at a loss for what to do with his life. Croft's characterization of Bruce Hamilton is illuminating, however, because it suggests a possible explanation for the Left's emphasis on upper-middle-class writers. The context for Croft's introduction of Bruce Hamilton (and his brother) is an argument that in the 1930s it was already-established intellectuals and writers who turned Left rather than Left-thinking people who took up literature (122). This combination establishes both quality (successful writers and recognized thinkers) and disinterestedness (people who did not stand to gain economically from Leftist principles). Such a position can lead not only to over-estimating initial status (as thinker, writer, socio-economic elite) but can obscure subsequent developments. Both problems occur in Leftist discussions of Hamilton's class.

What is provocative and unusual about Hamilton's life

is not that he drank heavily, nor that he took an interest in Marxism, least of all that his sex life was unsatisfactory, but that he became something other than what Westminster was intended to train him for; he crossed some real frontiers. His example forces reconsideration of class issues; the Leftist critics appear to be projecting from what he might have been but chose not to be, rather than examining what his life created. Many features of Hamilton's life suggest that the label "upper-middle class" is inaccurate; these include his lack of education, his peripatetic existence both before and after reaching adulthood, the general seediness of his life and apparent preference for such modes of living, the fact that his second wife, Ursula Stewart, considered marriage to him her own "upper-class lark," and a reliance on income produced by his writing (in later years, this meant royalties from earlier work).

All critics would do well to bear in mind Raymond Williams' warning that "a man cannot be interpreted in terms of some original sin of class" (C&S 292). Furthermore, the Hamilton family fortunes began to decline when Hamilton was still a young man. Nigel Jones reports that Hamilton's introduction to boarding-house life occurred in 1916, when he was twelve:

in reduced circumstances, Nellie [Hamilton's mother] was forced to dismiss her last two servants and move into a genteel boarding-house. . . . From 1916 until he

was able to afford a comfortable flat of his own in the late 1920s after his first success as a writer, Patrick spent a considerable portion of his life as a guest in a series of boarding-houses, rented rooms and small private hotels in London, Hove and Brighton. (49-50)

What Jones describes is not an upper-middle class existence, and it required the income from his writing to allow Hamilton his flat in London and membership in the Savile Club.

Hamilton's example raises some interesting questions about class. Jones offers a useful summary when he writes that "most of [Hamilton's] male literary contemporaries--people like Greene, Waugh, Lowry, Auden and Isherwood--went from the security of wealthy homes, public schools and Oxbridge straight into jobs as teachers or tutors and thence to literary and financial success" (50). Hamilton matches up with this picture at only one stage: the final one. It is debateable whether Hamilton ever belonged to the upper-middle class. His mother was the previously-divorced youngest daughter of a dentist. His father, although the inheritor of a large fortune and educated at Cambridge, was forty at the time of Hamilton's birth, with the fortune rapidly disappearing and no profession to fall back on other than his rather dubious literary productions. If Hamilton was upper-middle class as a child, at some point he ceased to belong to that class, although it would be a challenging task to label the rather ambiguous status he achieved.

David Gervais, in Literary England: Versions of "Englishness" in Modern Writing, discusses George Orwell's shifting class allegiances in terms which shed some light on Hamilton's situation. Orwell, Gervais argues,

needed to detach himself from his background as a matter of conscience. A book like The Road to Wigan Pier is about losing a class as well as discovering another. Its solidarity had to be based on a voluntary alienation (though in Wigan Orwell always had the accent of a gentleman).¹⁵

Orwell's example makes Hamilton's shift seem less deliberate, more a matter of finding his true place rather than exercising his conscience. The difference between Hamilton's class shift and Orwell's can be seen in Orwell's greater distance from his subject matter. Distance from both his own background and his new interests is one result of Orwell's program of voluntary alienation. In Gervais's terms, this is "prefer[ring] to study society at one remove. . . . Underlying . . . Orwell's dourness is the same detached stance of the anthropologist and the traveller" (158). Hamilton's point of view, while detached enough to be credible, is more engaged than Orwell's; he became part of what his fiction describes.

One essential feature of class shifts is that while writers endeavoring to find a new place for themselves may never fully become part of the new group, they will definitely cease to be welcomed by their original class.

Gervais points out that

As an old Etonian and former colonial civil servant, Orwell knew that any feeling of solidarity with 'ordinary' English life that he won through to was likely to come at the cost of a sense of dislocation from the class into which he had been born. To belong to one England meant exile from another. (171)

Only latter-day Leftist critics could consider Hamilton part of the upper-middle class.

Hamilton's situation can also usefully be compared to Arthur Calder-Marshall's. Calder-Marshall provides an even better basis for comparison with Hamilton than does Orwell because, like Hamilton, he lived a surprisingly transient existence for a member of the socio-economic class into which he was born. As Calder-Marshall describes in his memoir, Magic of My Youth,

My father was possessed of a restless spirit which took him abroad for years at a time and sent his family posting from one furnished house to another. He was, he was fond of saying, a modern Ishmael; and in the fifteen years of my life before he bought my grandfather's house at Steyning, we had lived in eleven different houses. It was an interesting experience, because the home life of our landlords, revealed by diaries, letters and even account-books, provided us with vicarious enjoyments denied to children in more settled homes.¹⁶

In spite of this existence, however, Calder-Marshall received a public school education which culminated in an Oxford degree, in sharp contrast to the irregularity and paucity of Hamilton's formal education, which ended at age fifteen when he left Westminster after two terms (although he later took a short course in shorthand and typing-- definitely not in the best Oxbridge tradition).

Calder-Marshall was deliberately slumming in the cause of Leftist politics and, in fact, Julian Maclaren-Ross offers some amusing anecdotes about Calder-Marshall's earnest communism.¹⁷ Calder-Marshall's slumming and Hamilton's regular mode of existence share telling points of intersection. For instance, when, at the end of Magic of My Youth, Calder-Marshall writes that "the house where Vickybird was staying was in a pleasant, shady street, a lot posher than the place where I was rooming in Hampstead" (221), he is consciously placing himself in a non-posh (anti-posh) location. Comparing the time frame of Calder-Marshall's revelation with the Hamilton biographies reveals that Calder-Marshall is referring to the Hampstead pub where he and Hamilton first met (while both were lodging there). While Calder-Marshall was in the pub as an exercise in gathering material, Hamilton was there unselfconsciously, by preference.

Indeed, this period in Calder-Marshall's literary career follows shortly after his attempt, under the same motivation, to "go native" as a schoolteacher. He describes

his decision in terms which suggest his earnest desire to go into the trenches of non-privileged existence, all to serve the cause of gathering material for a Leftist novel:

University standards might appear absolute in the academic world, but they were incredibly remote from the hurly-burly of the novelist's world. Fitzrovia which I had considered in some way a counterbalance was really just as parochial and far more depressing.

Contact with life in the raw was what I needed; and was life ever rawer than in a school? (206-07)

So Calder-Marshall went to an employment agency and announced that " 'I've come to the conclusion that I have been over-educated. I want to declass myself. I should like a job in the worst school you have on your books' " (207). Such a spirit is far removed from Hamilton's matter-of-fact immersion in the world of second-hand car salesmen, would-be actresses, boarding houses and pubs.

Calder-Marshall's novels are identified by Frank Kermode as instances of thirties fiction much esteemed at the time but now largely ignored, another connection to Hamilton's position. Commencing to discuss the public schools of the period, Kermode deliberately "begin[s] by saying something concerning a now-forgotten public-school novel for which, as I remember, my contemporaries had in those days considerable respect. Arthur Calder-Marshall's Dead Centre, published in 1935, describes, with a certain originality of form, the vicissitudes of a school year"

(22). Julian Symons finds "some of Arthur Calder-Marshall's novels, including Dead Centre and About Levy, . . . more successful [than much proletarian fiction of the thirties] because of a less obvious emphasis on social concern and a more limited scope" (167). Curiously, the novel that Calder-Marshall was researching when he met Hamilton turns out to be what Kermode describes as "a more ambitious novel, also much admired in its time, called Pie in the Sky (1937); it contains many instances of social injustice" (24). Such a summary suggests both its values (ambition, contemporary admiration) and its limits (its "many instances of social injustice" are in a tediously raw form). Hamilton's work has aged much better.

In fact, Calder-Marshall functions in History and Value as an accurate indicator of the thirties; well-respected during the period, with 'typical' attitudes, behaviors, and writings. Trying to convey something of the complex interrelations between the Communist Party and the middle-class Left, Kermode asserts that "Arthur Calder-Marshall can once again give us an idea of the mood of the bourgeois convertites [in his] book called The Changing Scene" (37). Calder-Marshall is a noteworthy counterpart to Hamilton in terms of political ideology and what might be called "thirties experience;" the differences serve to illuminate Hamilton's position and the merit of his writing.

Class and experience come together in the specific incident that McKenna has in mind as "clearly an upper-class

lark" complete with "fetchingly camp description" ("Confessions" 232): Hamilton's night in the doss house. McKenna's position seems to be that since Hamilton spent only one night in the doss-house, that experience has no value. Certainly Hamilton's own earning power kept him from needing doss-houses, but, unremarked by McKenna is the fact that Bob, the character who experiences the doss house in The Midnight Bell, is also just passing through, temporarily brought low by his own bad judgment, problem drinking, and obsession with Jenny. It is too limiting, regardless, to isolate the single night in the doss house; that experience was part of Hamilton's sustained contact with the lower reaches of pub culture. Notably, McKenna does not take issue with the credibility of The Midnight Bell's doss-house episode; instead, he is addressing the issue of Hamilton's attitude toward his own experience. Certainly to have been there at all, for a sharply observant writer like Hamilton, puts him in a position to re-create the experience fictionally. "At least we feel," David Gervais writes of John Betjeman and his famous poem, "that he has actually been to Slough" (187).¹⁸ So too has Hamilton "been there," and stayed for a long time; his observations and experiences were used in constructing the distinctive fictional milieu of Britain at its worst.

NOTES

1. "City and Suburban: Moustache or Clean-Shaven?" Spectator, 28 December 1956, 930.
2. Michael Holroyd, Unreceived Opinions (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), 103.
3. Bruce Hamilton, The Light Went Out: A Biography of Patrick Hamilton (London: Constable, 1972); Nigel Jones, Through a Glass Darkly: The Life of Patrick Hamilton (London: Scribners, 1991); Sean French, Patrick Hamilton: A Life (London: Faber & Faber, 1993); and Brian M. McKenna, "Gender Representation, Sexuality and Politics in the Writings of Patrick Hamilton" (Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1991). Subsequent references cited in text.
4. D. J. Taylor, "Dangerous Liaisons," review of Jones, The Sunday Times (London) 8 December 1991, 10.
5. Nigel Jones goes even farther than not noting who provided this picture of Hamilton, he claims that "there is something noble in Bruce's selfless devotion to his brother; without his love and effort, Patrick might be just one more forgotten literary sot" (380). The lasting record of the fiction and printed plays stands apart from Hamilton's life, so "forgetting" would require an act of will. Furthermore, far from saving Hamilton from a fate as "just one more

forgotten literary sot," it was Bruce himself who wrote that image into the record.

6. Joyce Carol Oates, "Adventures in Abandonment," rev. of Jean Stafford, by David Roberts, New York Times Book Review 28 August 1988, 3.

7. "Confessions of a Heavy-Drinking Marxist," Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics, ed. Sue Vice, et al (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 232. Subsequent references to this article cited in text.

8. Brigid Brophy, "Biberon," rev. of The Light Went Out and the 1972 Constable reprints of The Slaves of Solitude and Hangover Square, The Listener 13 July 1972: 54-55; Donald Thomas, "The Dangerous Edge of Things: The Novels of Patrick Hamilton," Encounter 69.2 (1987): 32-40.

9. Arnold Rattenbury, "Total Attainder and the Helots," Renaissance and Modern Studies 20 (1976): 103-119, rept. in Lucas, Challenge to Orthodoxy (1978): 138-60; and Peter J. Widdowson, "The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s," Renaissance and Modern Studies 20 (1976): 81-101, rept. in Lucas, Challenge to Orthodoxy (1978): 117-137.

10. Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (New York: Columbia U Press, 1983 [f.p. 1958]), 276.

11. Frank Kermode, History and Value; John Lucas, ed., The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy (London and New York: Harvester/Barnes and Noble, 1978); Andy Croft, Red Letter

Days: British Fiction in the 1930s (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990); Frank Gloversmith, ed., Class, Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s (Sussex: Harvester, 1980); Robert Hewison, Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45 (New York: Oxford U Press, 1977); and Hugh David, The Fitzrovians (London: Michael Joseph, 1988).

12. (London: Gollancz, 1937), 153. Subsequent references to this edition cited in text.

13. Gollancz himself is, of course, free of all class prejudice for, as he is careful to explain in a parenthesis, "I am a Jew, and passed the years of my early boyhood in a fairly close Jewish community; and, among Jews of this type, class distinctions do not exist" (xv).

14. Dissertation abstract; "Confessions" 234.

15. David Gervais, Literary Englands: Versions of "Englishness" in Modern Writing (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 158.

16. Arthur Calder-Marshall, The Magic of My Youth (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951), 93. Subsequent references cited in text.

17. Memoirs of the Forties (London: Cresset, 1988 [first published 1965]).

18. "Slough," from Continual Dew (1937), which opens with this stanza:

Come, friendly bombs, and fall on Slough
It isn't fit for humans now,
There isn't grass to graze a cow
Swarm over, Death!

Chapter 3

"CONVERSATIONAL CENTRES" AT THE FAUCONBERG HOTEL

Monday Morning (1925) is Hamilton's first novel, written when he was twenty; he signed his Constable contract on the novel three days after his twenty-first birthday (French 55). The novel's protagonist, Anthony Forster, has much in common with his creator. They have similar backgrounds and interests, they make a start on undistinguished careers in the theater, and both aspire to be writers. Monday Morning leads naturally into the graphic features of the narrative style favored by Hamilton, in which emphasis is given through capital letters, italics, and quotation marks. The novel also inaugurates Hamilton's habit of requiring some unusual typesetting. In almost every Hamilton novel, there is some feature requiring extraordinary typography; here, it is Anthony's drafts, complete with linings-out.

Anthony's chosen vocation as a writer mirrors Hamilton's own, but with a difference that marks Hamilton's control of his craft even at age twenty, writing his first novel. Hamilton actually wrote his novel, making humorous capital out of Anthony's inability to do more than fantasize about his own novel. Hamilton's title refers to Anthony's

oft-repeated resolutions to begin life--or at least his novel--on the following Monday morning.

Anthony's novel, as it appears in Monday Morning, never amounts to very much. At times, Anthony's unwritten novel appears to merge with the novel Hamilton has written. While sitting in the train en route to London after the death of his aunt, for instance,

For no reason the name "Fuller Maitland" leapt into his brain. . . . He wondered who Fuller Maitland was. He had seen his name somewhere. It would be rather a good thing to put into a novel. A man who suddenly thought, for no reason, of the name "Fuller Maitland." At a critical moment. . . . He found another comfortable position and began to doze. . . .¹

Might this be Monday Morning? Speculation is cut off by Anthony's doze, and Anthony's notion of "a critical moment" falls to one side, obscured by the mundane realities of a journey by train. Hamilton's preference for the everyday and material over the drama of the "critical moment" signals his choice of subject matter. It is the details of his chosen milieu that receive priority; sociology supplants drama.

Anthony's vague ideas concerning the subject matter and objectives for this novel remain unchanged throughout Monday Morning:

An unhappy but vivid ending would be desirable, so as to make it true to life. Also there would be the

frequent use of a word often represented in these days by its coy synonym "sanguinary." Frequent use. This, too, would serve to make his novel true to life. (26)

Such ideas signal one of the most significant differences between Anthony's novel and Hamilton's. The "true to life" novel Anthony imagines is not true to everyday life at all; it is melodramatic, the never-plotted events intended to illustrate clichéd and abstract themes. Hamilton's novel, in marked contrast, is realistic and rooted in the domestic round of the marginal people he concentrated on throughout his career as a writer. Monday Morning illuminates life in a residential hotel which is populated by transient and financially insecure, yet respectable, people.

Thinking of the novel as primarily about hotel life explains why Anthony and Diane's romance is, as most critics have noted, only realized intermittently. Sean French observes that while "the narrator wants to despise Diane" and presents her as shallow and conceited, "he also wants the reader to forget about these criticisms and consider her an ideal heroine as the book reaches its climax" (57). Monday Morning is not principally about the romance--or Anthony's novel-writing or theatrical career--but about the codes which govern life at the Fauconberg and in rented rooms on the road. The romance is mere window dressing in a shop devoted to recording a brand of everyday existence often overlooked in literature.

Another novelist who chose hotel life to be the subject

of her first novel is Elizabeth Bowen, whose Heat of the Day provided a contrasting take on the characteristic Hamilton milieu in the first chapter of this study. Bowen, six years older than Hamilton, had published collections of short stories before The Hotel (1927), but it was her first novel. That both Hamilton and Bowen chose a hotel as the setting for their first novels is intriguing, particularly since the two novels came out within two years of each other. Bowen's treatment of the subject provides an illuminating foil to Hamilton's, but there are more points of agreement here than are to be found in their later work.

Bowen's hotel is "away," on the Italian Riviera, and its residents are higher on the socio-economic scale than the inhabitants of Hamilton's Fauconberg. Bowen's characters are not, however, wealthy (they are not James or Wharton characters); they must watch their spending. The men are university-educated--Victor Ammering, for instance, although a drab and aimless young man, has a "Public School and University education"--and all are mostly idle. They live a leisured existence. These are people who would not go to Brighton; Mrs Pinkerton dismisses Nice as "a kind of French Brighton."²

Hamilton's novel gives a feeling of closeness, while Bowen's perspective is more that of an outside observer. The details of hotel life that interest both novelists, however, lead them into unexpected similarities. Bowen's description of dining-room protocol, for example, reads like

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Hamilton. Behind the double doors into the dining room, Bowen writes,

one could see visitors take form with blank faces, then compose and poise themselves for an entrance. Some who thought punctuality rather suburban would gaze into the unfilled immensity of the room for a moment, then vanish repelled. Others would advance swimmingly and talk from table to table across the emptiness, familiarly, like a party of pioneers. Men came in without their wives and did not always look up when these entered. (18)

Bowen also uses some of the same theatrical images Hamilton tends to favor. In these hotel novels, routine events become productions: "Tessa and Sydney had been sitting on interminably; they had watched from rise to fall of the curtain the whole drama of lunch" (21).

The fundamental attitude presented by the two novelists, however, remains quite different. Imagining the Saracens attacking the hotel, Sydney asks Milton " 'how many of us they would really care to take away?' " (35). Her conclusion is " 'not many,' " for she "sees" the other hotel guests "as they were to remain--undesired, secure and null" (35). Such a tone suggests the importance of what Hamilton records in his hotel and boarding house novels--he examines those "undesired, secure and null" people in order to show that they are more than Sydney believes them to be. In The Hotel, Bowen attends to Hamilton-type residents of the

hotel, and does so sympathetically, but they are the character actors who frame the Bowenesque stars. Hamilton makes them the principal actors and draws our attention to them.

LIFE IN A RESIDENTIAL HOTEL

That hotel life will be a principal focus in Monday Morning is evident from the beginning of the novel. The set piece which opens the novel shows readers Anthony's room in Hove. The description of the Hove room is calculated to establish Anthony as a typical young man through the art he chooses for his walls, and the presence of such objects as a cricket bat, a thrice-smoked pipe and a chess board. Direct presentation of Anthony comes when he is standing on the steps of the Fauconberg on a January day; one of his first Monday mornings in the novel.

His first encounter with the Fauconberg is when its "proprietress" shows him over the hotel. She

came and brightly welcomed Anthony. She took him to his room. She showed him the billiard-room, the ball-room, and the dining room. She told him the time of the meals, and she said "Nowadays they don't dress for dinner unless they want to." Then, after laughing instructions for finding his room again, she left him.

(6)

The Fauconberg's topography and rituals are thereby established immediately, although, as it transpires, most of

the residents do wear "evening dress" (9) for dinner, thus refuting her report.

Anthony's relation to his various on-the-road landladies is clearly difficult, marked by deference on his part. Confronted with his first landlady on the theatrical tour, in Sheffield, he is in agonies of indecision about what is expected of him. He considers going in to town, but frets about how to notify his landlady:

if he went downstairs he might meet the girl, and he couldn't very well say, "Will you tell your mother I'm going out, but I'll be back in time for supper?"

Perhaps she wasn't the landlady's daughter, and perhaps the landlady didn't mean to give him supper.

On the whole it was best to wait, and if the landlady didn't come up to him, he would wait till ten, and then go to bed. (185-86)

His actions are circumscribed by fear of offending the all-powerful landlady, and he is prepared to go without his trip to town and his supper rather than risk affronting her dignity. On a subsequent tour, now wiser and more experienced, Anthony seizes on Mr. Brayne as

the best person to lodge with. There was no quaking before the landlady with Mr. Brayne. When Mr. Brayne wanted more coal Mr. Brayne went to the top of the stairs and asked for more coal. And when he wanted hot water at any quaint time he asked for it. And he asked for a kettle at nights with which to fill his hot water

bottle, and if it wasn't there he asked for it. And he bought most of the food, and would always severely audit, if not actually dispute, his landlady's bill at the end of the week. And Anthony benefitted by all this. (263-64)

The brave demands of Mr. Brayne suggest, more than anything else could, just what the timid lodger could expect to do without: sufficient coal for the fire, hot water, a kettle at night, decent food. The psychological warfare between lodger and landlady is exposed through Mr. Brayne's victorious assault, and the financial battle is hinted at through his severe audits and disputes of the landlady's bill.

Financial issues in Monday Morning are linked inextricably with some kind of personal or domestic consequence. What interests the narrative about Anthony's stage career, for example, is not his theatrical achievements, but his salary and concomitant domestic arrangements. When hired at Brayne's instigation for "The Coil," Anthony is "to assist the stage manager, play a small part, and have six pounds a week" (151); when he loses the assistant stage manager job because he has no idea what a prop might be, his salary is "reduced to four pounds" (158) and he is relieved to be rid of the assistant stage manager's responsibilities. On a later tour, he is "given a much larger part with a much larger salary"--ten pounds a week (270). All of Anthony's dealings with "The Coil"

follow this pattern of specifics concerning living arrangements and rates of pay with no information about the play itself, or even Anthony's role in it. Hamilton provides only a brief glimpse of Anthony's first entrance on stage, so we know he is wearing evening dress and is presumably a foppish young man, but that is all the information provided. Knowing little about his original small part, the reader knows even less about that "much larger part."

Inherited money is a further source of income for Anthony, and it too is linked to domestic detail. After the death of his aunt, "Anthony now had three pounds ten shillings a week of his own. This was to be sent to him every week. When he was twenty-one, he understood, he was to have quite a decent amount of money. Not enough to marry on, but quite a decent amount of money" (87-88). That additional income turns out to be "about eight pounds a week. On that they could be comfortable. (They only charge two pounds ten shillings per head at the Fauconberg and places like it. That's three pounds extra for enjoyments and dress.)" (220-21).

Hamilton often makes explicit the connections between income and purchasing power, to the point of identifying the wasteful or trivial allocations his characters make. In Hangover Square, for instance, Bone thinks of his financial resources in terms of actual--as opposed to ideal--expenditure. Bone plans carefully how he will survive on

the bit of money he has left from his mother, and concludes that "if he could live down to four pounds a week (and he somehow did manage, or nearly manage, to do this in spite of everything)" he can go on for quite some time. The need to "live down," however, does not preclude Bone from budgeting his income into wasteful categories of expenditure; his budget translates directly into "two pounds a week for living, two pounds for drinks and smokes and Netta."³ The Christmas money from his aunt, a hoped-for windfall, represents nothing other than "ten pounds of concrete, clearly visualised pleasure, with a beginning and an end--ten pounds' worth of Netta's company. He was going to keep it in a separate pocket, and see when it had gone" (45). Indeed, his Christmas money is "ten pounds extra now, to spend all on smokes and drinks and Netta!" (19). Not only does he know where the money will go, but he thinks of the connection between money and purchase as being so clear that he can convert directly from the pound figure to the rather vague commodity of Netta's company. This is not a direct transaction; he will spend the money in Netta's company but will not give it to her in exchange for her company.

Monday Morning offers a more innocuous instance of this method of perceiving and managing money. When Anthony decides he will buy Diane the pendant (for nineteen pounds), the bulk of the money will come from what he saved while touring with "The Coil," but there is "a rather fascinating way of getting" the rest of the purchase price. The details

of Anthony's scheme are classic Hamilton, as is the idea that it is "fascinating" rather than boring, sordid, or embarrassing. In short, Anthony will skip lunch for a fixed period of time: "At the Fauconberg they would charge him fifteen shillings the less if he went without his lunches. He would go without his lunches and eat bread and cheese in his room. This for two weeks and he would have enough money" (222-23). After buying the pendant, however, "Anthony did not enjoy the subsequent lunchless fortnight" (225); the plan was more agreeable than its implementation. His scheme of improving his French over lunch comes to nothing, of course, and his lie to the hotel about having his lunches out traps him in his room; he is reduced to miserably eating his bread and cheese and having a bath. The inescapable connection between money and material living is never overlooked by Hamilton, and it is captured here in the context of the complicated code governing life in a residential hotel. Anthony is insufficiently anonymous to be able to go out for his lunch, and sufficiently cowed by hotel mores to wish to avoid giving offence.

Introspection on the part of Hamilton's characters often takes the form of cliché; characters think in expected ways and make stereotypical resolutions for change. Anthony's novel-writing plans, Diane's schoolgirl plots, Mr. Brayne's life goals; all these fit the usual Hamilton pattern. Not having been taught to think independently or value their own status, Hamilton's characters rely upon

prefabricated patterns of thinking, feeling, even aspiring to change. Their lack of independence is one marker of how narrow, yet noteworthy, a class segment Hamilton has captured in his fiction. In Wigan Pier, Orwell identifies enforced passivity as a burden of the working class: "This business of petty inconvenience and indignity, of being kept waiting about, of having to do everything at other people's convenience, is inherent in working-class life. A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive rôle" (49).

However, when Orwell talks about the activity of the "other" class, as in the following passage, he is clearly describing a class other than that which populates Hamilton's milieu:

A person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits. Hence the fact that in times of stress 'educated' people tend to come to the front; they are no more gifted than others and their 'education' is generally quite useless in itself, but they are accustomed to a certain amount of deference and consequently have the cheek necessary to a commander. (49)

Hamilton's characters, then, seem to be neither fish nor fowl. Neither totally acted upon, nor possessing mental independence and self-confidence, they perch precariously on a border which seems to possess the drawbacks of both

adjacent classes with few of their advantages.

Bowen's characters, in contrast to Hamilton's, strike out into self-consciously individual territory. In The Hotel, Cordelia Barry, though only a schoolgirl, articulates the essential dullness of hotel dwellers; they are not exciting enough, they do not meet the normal standards for novelistic analysis. When Milton tells Sydney and Cordelia that he comes to the hotel "for people," their response is unanimous:

"Oh!" they both exclaimed. "What an extraordinary thing to come for! -- To come here for," Sydney added.

"Don't you know any people? Do you like them so much?" Cordelia inquired. "How funny! I only like people in books who only exist when they matter. I think it is being in danger or terribly in love, discovering treasure or revenging yourself that is thrilling and that you have to have people. But people in hotels, hardly alive . . . !"

"Well, you don't know what may not be happening to them," Sydney, emerging from her detachment, felt it necessary to point out instructively. (81-82)

This idea, presented by Cordelia in melodramatic terms, is obviously not to be taken at face value. Bowen is, after all, writing a novel about a group of hotel residents. Nonetheless, the novel contains two major groups of characters: the Hamilton-type hotel dwellers, and characters more typical of Bowen's later work. The "major" characters

are of prime interest in the novel's agenda while the Hamilton-types are scenery, window dressing. Bowenesque characters are the principal actors: Sydney, Mrs. Kerr, Ronald, and Rev. Milton. Hamilton types include the two spinsters (Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald), the Lee-Mittisons, Colonel Duperrier and his invalid wife. The spinsters' first names are mistaken in the narrative, signalling their essential lack of importance. Early in the novel, Miss Fitzgerald is Emily (5 and 7), but later, she is Eleanor (109).⁴

Miss Pym, however, is the first to discover Mrs. Kerr's character flaws. Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald "drew in each other's ideas and gave out their own by a gentle process, like breathing" (8); with Mrs. Kerr, however, "her waves came back bewildered, broken against something. She could not bear the ordeal of this gracious listening. Was Mrs Kerr like this when Sydney Warren talked?" (9). And of course, it will be revealed much later that Mrs Kerr was awful to Sydney, that what everyone (Sydney included) thought was a wonderful friendship was a cruel manipulation of a younger woman by an older. Sydney herself ends up "bewildered, broken against something" in Mrs. Kerr.

The two spinsters do have an importance in the closed world of the hotel. They are characteristic of this lifestyle, people with empty lives and no family. They have, primarily, each other. The aftermath of their terrible row opens the novel, and the problem flickers

throughout. Final closure is granted by their reconciliation: "The Hotel from up here was as small as a doll's house; shoulder to shoulder they sat and looked down on it. Hand in hand, reunited, in perfect security, they sat and remembered that day" (175). The hotel itself features in their reconciliation; it is part of their renewed peace.

The spinsters lend themselves to the kind of capitalization Hamilton uses. Miss Pym thinks of their quarrel as "a Moment, not a succession of moments" (8), and she talks to Mrs. Kerr of "Straightforward Persons who can be frank with themselves and admit that they do like to escape the difficulties of Life and the unpleasantness--if they can do so without depriving themselves of experience or evading Responsibilities, or hurting Other People' " (8). The hotel denizens, Miss Pym and Miss Fitzgerald, think and speak in the sort of clichés Hamilton's characters are forced to live by.

The Lee-Mittisons are also lifelong hotel dwellers, and have tried to build a full life around hotel mores. When Mr Lee-Mittison is first introduced, at lunch, he is "going a round of the tables with an open botany-case" (18). The Lee-Mittisons work constantly at trying to build and maintain relationships with their fellow guests, but always with Mr. Lee-Mittison as a kind of father figure in the center:

The Lee-Mittisons always went out of their way to be

pleasant to strangers, making efforts to draw them as soon as possible into the social life of the Hotel centring round Mr Lee-Mittison. They had been predisposed in Milton's favor by the fact that he had come downstairs to breakfast and ordered an egg: this seemed to them virile. Very few people came down to breakfast, a discouraging meal to which the Lee-Mittisons by a punctual appearance and bright nods round tried in vain to impart an atmosphere. (30)

Such efforts, however draining, are clearly doomed to failure. The hotel and its conventions dictate how the Lee-Mittisons proceed; they read Milton's presence at breakfast, and the egg he orders, as telltale indications of his character. Further, they work with the "discouraging meal" they are given, rather than cutting off in a different direction.

These things make the Lee-Mittisons pathetic, especially in light of their long history of living in hotels. They are rootless, and their years of constant social effort have exhausted them. When Mrs. Lee-Mittison tries to picture living in an Italian house, she cannot get across the threshold because she knows so little of life in one's own house she cannot even imagine it. Her happy fantasy disintegrates at that point:

The villino suddenly dropped away from her eye as though she had put down a telescope, and as her life sprang back into focus she must have been dizzy, for

she felt sick at the thought of their hotel bedrooms that stretched, only interspersed with the spare-rooms of friends, in unbroken succession before and behind her. She felt sick at the thought of for how many mornings more she would have to turn the washstand into an occasional table by putting away the basin and jug in the cupboard and drape with Indian embroideries the trunk in which they concealed their boots. (36-37)

Bowen feels sorry for them, which is better than the contempt usually manifested by novelists, but still more remote than Hamilton's concern. His novels identify with this class of people, while The Hotel observes them sympathetically from outside.

CONVERSATIONAL CENTRES

Hamilton's descriptions of the social mores which prevail in the Fauconberg are heavily framed, as one would expect for an author taking on a relatively rare novelistic subject. Hamilton's introductions to hotel mores are both blunt and prescriptive; they are a clear fictional rendering of inside information and social nuances, the gathering of which required remarkable gifts for discerning observation.

The report of Anthony's first evening in the lounge describes what people wear, what they talk about, and how the conversations proceed. This scene takes place during the lull before dinner, while the residents are waiting for the gong to signal the exodus to the dining room. Most of

the residents are in "evening dress. The women were mostly in black lace dresses" (9). As the social round proceeds in the lounge, "frequently there would be the clicking noise of a key at the front door, and young men with double-breasted blue overcoats would come in; they were tired, untidy, office-dirty, and they went upstairs" (11). These people are never identified as part of the conversational scene; when they come down, rid of their office dirt and Tube grime, they have been somehow transformed into hotel residents, and the narrative is not interested in their day jobs.

Conversation proceeds formally, along fixed lines. While Anthony tries to look engrossed in his cigarettes and an old letter,

All about were conversational centres for Bridge, Dancing, "The Beggar's Opera," Setting up as a Dressmaker, The celibate disposition of the Prince of Wales, The Differentiation between Einstein and Epstein, The Adventure of Mrs. Jackson with a Rude 'Bus Conductor. The wife of the Lord Carson man told a young man that she would tell his mother about him. One of the knitting old ladies said that she thought his mother knew. (10-11)

Hamilton's eccentric use of capitalization serves here to set apart these topics and suggest their artificial nature. The mixed bag of topics listed indicates clearly how trivial they all are--not just the obviously silly topics, but, by

extension, even erstwhile serious topics can be assumed to undergo a silly discussion. Finally, to describe them as "conversational centres" rather than conversations underscores the formal, choreographed nature of resident interactions.

The behavior required of one in Anthony's position, revealed implicitly from the beginning, receives a formal airing-out near the novel's mid-point. Hamilton spells out clearly the social expectations, including specific examples of both prescribed and proscribed actions:

The right procedure, if you were a new arrival at the Fauconberg Hotel, was to sit quietly in the lounge, smile weakly at the jokes, not to speak, but to wait, and hope, till some intrepid and particularly chivalrous person spoke to you. If that happened you might make a diffident reply, and perhaps tell a very short story. Then you had to wait until somebody offered to play billiards or Bridge with you for the evening, or until Betty took you up. Soon you would be talked about as quite a nice new arrival, and interesting too, and soon you would be one of them.

You were certainly not supposed to presume at the outset that a hotel was a hotel and that you had the same conversational rights as anybody else--the same conversational rights, for instance, as the people who could remember Mr. Braddon (they always called him Jackie; poor fellow; got killed in Soudan), or the

people who remembered the hotel three years ago. (It was a far jollier place then. The life seemed to have gone out of it now, somehow.)

This is why Mr. Brayne gave offence when he first arrived at the Fauconberg. Anthony found him, one morning a little before lunch, talking fluently and unconsciously to those around him, with no respect for conversational rights whatever. (141-42)

The expectations are precise in spite of being unspoken; the established residents expect new arrivals to follow the unwritten rules and then, as a matter of course, those newcomers will become "one of them." Mr. Brayne's extravagant willfulness marks him out here, as before, as unusually independent of the conventions which keep most residents in their place.

The artificial manner in which Hamilton has chosen to present dialogue draws attention to it, both to its content and to its formulaic nature. Once Anthony finds his first tour lodgings, in Sheffield, the landlady takes him to his room, where the pair engage in the following conversation: "Here it was observed that the weather was much colder, that the train was late, that it had been raining all the morning in Sheffield, that the English climate was fickle, that Anthony should be brought tea and bread and butter" (184). Their exchange is not presented as dialogue in the usual fashion, but rather, as a list of topics. A curious follow-up is the fact that Anthony's conversation with the

prostitute he encounters in Piccadilly is composed of the same topics--the cold and the general nastiness of the English climate (301-02)--suggesting the artificial rigidity of all social contact.

Notable too is the way misunderstanding can be masked by an appearance of mutual comprehension. Anthony and his Sheffield landlady also provide an instance of that phenomenon. He returns home very late, presumably at no small inconvenience to her, but she brings him bread, cheese, and cocoa. Knowing full well that he is very late, Anthony says " 'I hope I'm not late.' " She replies to his misrepresentation, " 'Ah, well, what does it matter so long as it was a nice girl!' " She laughed at this, and Anthony joined in, with the air of one who says, 'We two understand each other perfectly, don't we?' " (194). The reader knows that Anthony has been alone at the movies, and then with some men from the cast--there was no girl, nice or otherwise. The air of perfect mutual comprehension is wholly false.

Anthony's first meal in the Fauconberg is at a table set for two, with a "thin, elderly woman" (12) as his table partner. Their demeanor too suggests the rigid difficulties of boarding-house life; they experience awkward pauses and "bad silences," and the arrival of their food, which requires part of their attention, is felt by both as a social relief. Their topics are also detailed precisely and artificially: "the conversation ran from Germany to London,

to crowded trains, to Richmond Park, and suddenly to John Masefield, because she had heard him lecture a few days ago. Thence to English Poetry and Literature. . . . Then to Foreign Literature" and finally, "while consuming the flimsy sweet they came to more personal matters" (13).

Later, when Anthony is more fully assimilated into Fauconberg society, the novel reports on a rainy after-lunch in the lounge. The social intercourse is more intimate than it has been in previous scenes, but the conversation is presented in the same manner as before. In the lounge,

the people talked about "Monsieur Beaucaire," and about Valentino, and Novarro, and Moreno, and Novello, but they couldn't see what other people saw in them at all. And they talked of playing cards. The children talked of playing hide and seek and thought they were going to have a very enjoyable afternoon. Anthony talked to Diane. (91)

Conversation is the heavily-ritualized field of combat for boarding-house dwellers. It is the main arena open to them in the constrained existence they must, of necessity, lead. Mr. Brayne's refusal to shoulder his responsibilities suggests how these conventions can be used aggressively, to keep others out, or, as he chooses, to muscle in on the society over the unvoiced objections of others. Craven House will do still more with this element of boarding-house existence, and in The Slaves of Solitude, with the introduction of Mr. Thwaites and his eccentric and

domineering verbal style, it will become of paramount importance; even in Monday Morning, however, the reader cannot overlook its essential nature.

Like the residents of the Fauconberg, Bowen's characters in The Hotel are locked in social ritual. Both novels attend to the protocols obtaining in such hotel activities as meals, dances, and afternoons in the sitting-room. The characters, particularly those in the Hamilton-type category, literally cannot deviate from the code set out for them. This is particularly true of their conversational exchanges. After Sydney destroys their tennis match, for example, Colonel Duperrier "had several pleasant remarks in reserve to brush away Sydney's discomfiture, but some kind of an explanation from her was needed to unlock them; he did not know how to begin. She did not apologize, and his embarrassment grew" (12). Since Sydney will not initiate the typical exchange, Duperrier cannot proceed.

Psychological depth is prized by Bowen, while Hamilton largely avoids it to present social--or sociological--depth. Part of the attraction of The Hotel is its combination of Hamilton's kind of emphasis with the concerns more usually associated with Bowen. The conjunction of the two viewpoints is revealing, for the novel occasionally illustrates what happens when the two collide. Conversational styles, ways of speaking to other characters, mark the gulf between them. When Ronald Kerr asks Colonel

Duperrier, Eileen and Joan Lawrence if Sydney and Milton are in fact engaged, Eileen appeals back to Ronald:

"But you ought to know something about it, anyway; she will have told your mother."

"I don't think she has," said Ronald vaguely.

"I'm afraid not. I suppose my mother's not the proper sort of matron. She would hardly, I suppose, provide the bosom that young women on these occasions are supposed to require. I'm afraid she may perhaps feel like I do, that one's friends, however various and delightful they may be at other times, are least interesting--while of course deserving all respect--at these moments when they approximate most closely to the normal. What people call life's larger experiences," said Ronald, "are so very narrowing."

"What a vocabulary you've got, Kerr," said Colonel Duperrier, respectfully offering his cigarette-case.

"I've never heard such a flow of language. Write?"

(129)

There are several noteworthy features in this exchange. Ronald's evaluation of his mother, for instance, is typical of the complex thought behind Bowenesque character's relations to others. Mrs. Kerr is indeed not the proper sort of matron, so not only has Ronald thought a great deal (an inordinate amount) about his mother and her character, but he has come to an accurate understanding of her. The condescension toward other, "normal," people which he shares

with his mother would include nearly everyone in Hamilton's entire oeuvre. Duperrier's response is equally telling for his side of the divide. His comment on Ronald's "flow of language" is sharp, and the more interesting if one studies Ronald's speech: the vocabulary is not in fact very complicated, while the style creates the impression that it is. Even more piquant is the Colonel's idea that Ronald's pomposity makes him fit for writing, setting Ronald apart from the ordinary people he mocks.

In The Hotel, in contrast to Monday Morning, key scenes are filled with psychological depths and profound, although often subterranean, communication. When Mrs. Kerr and Sydney visit the patisserie, for example, almost ten pages are given over to their complicated conversation; they speak of their relationship, of Ronald's relation to each of them, of abstract ideas of friendship. Mrs. Kerr, the novel makes clear, is being cruel to Sydney, but at no point does either character misunderstand a single nuance. The encounter ends when Mrs. Kerr sends Sydney in to pay the bill:

To Sydney the cumulative effect of this succession of touches (especially the last: herself brandishing with commercial insistence a long bill that her bewildered debtor felt unable to meet) was of vulgarity. The attribution to herself of an irritable sex-consciousness vis-à-vis Ronald did not hurt, but sharply offended. Mrs Kerr, however, sitting there with her half-smile, her evident deprecation of the

interlude, her invincible air of fastidiousness, had maintained her own plane, whereupon 'vulgarity' would be meaningless. Sydney could only suppose that cruelty as supremely disinterested as art had, like art, its own purity, which could transcend anything and consecrate the nearest material to its uses. (118)

The subtle method Mrs. Kerr has of administering all these blows to Sydney, and Sydney's elaborate reading of Mrs. Kerr's manner, would be impossible in a Hamilton novel, where characters are apt to misunderstand far more direct and simple communication than that employed in Bowen's patisserie scene. Milton's encounter with Mrs. Kerr in the hotel drawing room is of the same type; long, excruciatingly subtle, yet entirely effective.

The shared inner life of these characters is contrasted explicitly with their surfaces. At one point during the patisserie scene, Sydney calms herself by imagining an observer's perspective: "Presently she let herself fall back on an outside consciousness of their both being well-dressed, distinguished-looking and leisurely, and thought how plainly this must appear from the other side of the street and how, if she were someone else, she would stand on the pavement and look at them" (115). The observed encounter and its reality could not be farther apart. The surface is brought to our attention in order to debunk it, and to provide an ironic contrast to what is "real."

HOME CIRCLE OR ISOLATION CHAMBER?

The Oxford English Dictionary's basic definition of "home" provides a spectrum of possibilities, from the prosaic "dwelling-place" to the more suggestive "home-circle or household."⁵ The idea that "home" is "the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's proper abode" offers the most potential for considering the Fauconberg, "home" to people who lack a fixed home of their own ("one's own house"). The positive aspects of hotel life can make it satisfactory as a home, rather than a necessary evil or makeshift arrangement. When he first arrives at the Fauconberg, Anthony feels homesick for his previous hotel in Sussex: "He thought of his aunt, and the things she would be doing at this hour, down at Hove. He saw her sitting alone at their table, choosing her dinner with the agreeable Swiss waiter. . . ." (9, text ellipses). A sentimental gloss of "home" is cast over the hotel in which Anthony lived formerly, and these terms emphasize some positive aspects of hotel life. Later, at the end of his first theatrical tour, he is "looking forward to long, peaceful evenings at the Fauconberg, and the return of Diane" (219). Evenings at the Fauconberg can clearly serve as satisfactory evenings at "home."

When Anthony imagines his life together with Diane, hotels are an assumed part of that life, and the Fauconberg itself can serve as "home." He does not imagine the two of them away from the Fauconberg, but in the hotel and

participating in its life: "Sometimes he simply dreamed that he was back at the Fauconberg, and Diane told him that she loved him, and they danced the last dance together, and took a long walk after it" (269). When Diane and her mother set off for their vacation in France, there is a crowd of residents on the steps to see them off. After the taxi drives off, there is a flurry of comments about Diane and friendly jokes about Anthony's crush on her. The long-term residents bond together as a near-family, an effect which will become more pronounced in the small society of "paying guests" in Craven House.

Holidays at the Fauconberg have special features which depend upon the Fauconberg's being a large residential hotel. The novel ends in the first hours of the New Year, and both Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve are described in Monday Morning. When Anthony returns again from tour, it is Christmas Eve, and "the people of the Fauconberg had all just gone into the dining-room for the biggest Dinner of the year. . . a turmoil of not very funny fun" (292). New Year's Eve is a fancy-dress ball, and at midnight everyone "crowded on to the balcony of the Fauconberg . . . till they heard the distance hurrying bells coming through the air of the cold, clear night. Three cheers and some more dancing" (310). Even Anthony, with his determined pseudo-sophistication, finds the experience thrilling. The enforced element of public involvement in one's life can thus provide benefits as well.

Nonetheless, while the Fauconberg can serve as a pleasant enough home for some of its residents, the implications of its being the place "one regards as one's proper abode" can turn ominous. Hamilton does not focus on the dark elements of hotel life in Monday Morning, but the picture will become increasingly gloomy as his novels mature. Sean French finds Hamilton's first novel "significant" for "its technical strengths: the delineation of character, the ear for dialogue, the skill of transition between scenes, the sense of pace. In a book that is reminiscent of P. G. Wodehouse, it is remarkable how much of the Hamilton world is already there in embryonic form" (56). Monday Morning is indeed the first charting of Hamilton territory: the culture of boarding houses and tea shops; the geography of Earl's Court and Brighton. In his early novels, the dreariness of such a way of life is hinted at, but the insouciance of youth manages to rise above it. The milieu of Monday Morning is recognizably Hamilton's, but an inherent optimism that the deserving can surpass their drab surroundings creates a radically different impression than that created by Hamilton's later novels.

An illuminating comparison can be made between the Fauconberg Hotel's presence in Hangover Square with its representation in Monday Morning. The repetition of the hotel's name invites the comparison; the results suggest how far the tone of Hamilton's fictional milieu has sunk over the intervening sixteen years. The timid optimism of the

earlier novel has given way to morbid gloom. George Harvey Bone's return to the Fauconberg after his Christmas visit to his aunt emphasizes his disaffection with his residence:

He went up the steps, and into the Fauconberg. He had to pass through the lounge on his way upstairs. It was all decorated for Christmas (he had forgotten that, although he had seen it decorated before he went away), and the only people about were some children who were trying to play blow-football (evidently a Christmas present) on one of the green baize tables normally used for bridge. He knew nobody in the little hotel--the large glorified boarding-house--and he did not mean to. He just slept in a small room at the top, and came down to breakfast when everyone else had gone. For the rest he slunk in and out, only exchanging the time of day with the gloomy porter. (23)

The decorated lounge seems a sham, an empty gesture to a quality of life no one could attain at the Fauconberg; yet this very same lounge is introduced in Monday Morning in rather different terms. Upon his arrival, immediately after unpacking his bag, Anthony

ran downstairs to what Mrs. Egerton had trained her guests to call the Lounge. This was a sort of hall, and entrance, and centre of the Fauconberg hotel. It was a fair-sized room, deadened by thick carpets. There was a large fireplace with a black and grey fire, dull red, leather armchairs and sofas, and some small

tables. In the centre a palm, and in one corner a woman having tea. (8)

The lounge (Lounge) is here explicitly identified as the "centre" of hotel life, and it is in this room that Anthony socializes with Diane, and the city workers are seen returning. Bone's relation to this room forms a marked contrast to Anthony's.

Early in Monday Morning, Anthony reports to St. John, his friend at the Earl's Court crammer's, that he's " 'staying at a sort of hotel place here' " where " 'the people are rather weird, but one can keep absolutely apart' " (38). As a summary judgment, this has some interesting features. First, it is significant that Anthony describes the Fauconberg as "a sort of hotel place" rather than just as "a hotel." Anthony, after all, has been used to living in residential hotels. Even more importantly, his idea of keeping "absolutely apart" is exploded almost immediately, most obviously through his romance with Diane de Mesgrigny, but the novel reveals a whole series of relationships constructed with fellow hotel residents. Some of these are casual relationships while others are more developed, but Anthony's life at the Fauconberg is founded upon a whole edifice of resident interactions. "Keeping absolutely apart" is a condition reserved as the fate of George Harvey Bone in Hangover Square and the "rather weird" people are harmless in Monday Morning.

In Hangover Square, fellow residents are notably absent

from the narrative. The hotel manager and the porter appear as characters, but the other residents are only sketched in, identified as people who speculate about Bone and his life. Their speculations are largely negative:

Without knowing it he was something of a character in his hotel. Practically only seen late in the deserted breakfast-room each morning, and then again walking late at night through the lounge to bed, he was yet part and parcel of the small hotel as a whole, and contributed to its atmosphere. . . . Many guests wondered where he worked during the day. Because he was out all day they were certain that he worked at something, and because they could not gain the faintest conception of what this was, they concluded that it was something not altogether reputable. Only the porter, to whom he gave a weekly tip of two shillings, knew of the complete emptiness and unemployment of Mr Bone's life. (208)

Indeed, Earl's Court itself has become demonic, instead of the temporary landing place of those moving on to better things. Even the furnishings take on a dark significance: "that gas-fire--what sinister, bleak misery emanated from its sighing throat and red, glowing asbestos cells! To those whom God has forsaken, is given a gas-fire in Earl's Court" (27). The fire is later likened to a demonic altar: "That quite pleasant and not undignified little week-end was now lost and to be forgotten for ever--converted into a

small, cynical joke, to be offered up to the beast Peter and the cruel, dissipated Netta on the altar of a gas-fire in Earl's Court" (28). Bone's weekend at his aunt's, pleasant and relaxing, cannot withstand the combined negative influences of Netta and Peter on the one hand and Earl's Court on the other. By emphasizing both the gas fire and the district, this passage not only insists on the participation of Netta, Peter, and Bone in the 'sacrifice,' but suggests that Earl's Court is part of the problem.

That Hamilton was aware of this change cannot be doubted. The second outside observer presented in Hangover Square, John Halliwell, is described in terms not unlike those employed in Monday Morning to describe Anthony Forster. Halliwell appears only briefly, in the one chapter given over to him, the first chapter of the eighth part. He comes from Sussex, and begins his working life in London for "a firm of insurance brokers in the City who thought highly of him for his industry, integrity, and good nature" (201). Halliwell lives in Earl's Court, and spends most of his non-working hours

out of doors in the immediate neighborhood. For he was alone in London for the first time, and at an age when the external world generally bears a totally different aspect than the one it bears to its more battered and jaundiced inhabitants--at an age, indeed, when even the scenery of S.W.7 might be associated with the beginning of life rather than the end of all hope, and its

streets and people charged with a remarkable mystery and romance of their own. (201)

Halliwell's idea of worldliness is to frequent pubs, where he indulges in the proto-typical Hamilton starter drink, port:

most of all he preferred to go to the saloon bars of public-houses, and having one or two drinks, watch and listen to people who were older than himself. On these occasions he would drink small glasses of port, which was the only alcoholic drink he at all liked. He was not even certain that he liked this, but he was anxious to acquire the worldly feeling of liking and taking drink, just as he was anxious to acquire the worldly habit of going into public-houses. (201)

The cumulative effect of Hamilton's work is to suggest, powerfully, how an innocent desire to "acquire" such worldly feelings and habits can lead characters like John Halliwell and Anthony Forster to inhabit conditions like those of George Harvey Bone and Patrick Hamilton. At the conclusion of Monday Morning, Anthony and Diane's encounter with the drunken men is comic; but it attains a new gloom when viewed retrospectively. Escaping the New Year's dance at the Fauconberg to enjoy their new status as affianced lovers, they walk "through the clear, resounding Squares." The novel concludes thus:

Once they passed two drunk men. "Let us weigh the matter out," said one drunk man to the other. "You're

good fellow, but let us weigh the matter out."

Diane and Anthony slipped around a corner. "You wait till we're married, Diane, I'll come back miles worse than that. . . ." (312)

That Hamilton's first novel should end with the accurate reportage of drunken dialogue is fitting; but the self-prophecy of drunken excess concludes a comic novel on a dark note.

NOTES

1. (London: Constable, 1925), 88-89, original ellipses. Subsequent references cited in text.
2. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943), 25. Subsequent references cited in text.
3. (London: Constable, 1972 [f.p. 1941], 19. Subsequent references to this edition cited in text.
4. This is not an error created by the Penguin edition. The first American edition and the scholarly edition by the novel's original English publisher both contain the same discrepancy. (New York: Dial Press, 1928), 8, 10, and 182; (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 7, 9, and 124.
5. The complete text of definition 2a: "A dwelling-place, house, abode; the fixed residence of a family or household; the seat of domestic life and interests; one's own house; the dwelling in which one habitually lives, or which one regards as one's proper abode. Sometimes including the members of a family collectively; the home-circle or household. In N. American and Australasia (and increasingly elsewhere), freq. used to designate a private house or residence merely as a building."

Chapter 4

REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES: THE PAYING GUESTS OF CRAVEN HOUSE

The three novels which constitute Hamilton's "early" period are Monday Morning (1925), Craven House (1926), and Twopence Coloured (1928). Read as a group, these early novels outline many of Hamilton's concerns. They are of interest not only for their foreshadowing of the later novels, but are impressive productions for such a young writer, well worth reading simply for pleasure. Hamilton described his mature view of Craven House when he reread it in 1943 prefatory to revising it:

I have spoken of authors slowly reddening to the roots of their hair over passages in their early books.

Sometimes they do this over their early books from start to finish. Although it was written when I was only twenty-one, I can definitely say that Craven House does not come into this class; and that if it can still find readers, I should still like it to be read.¹

Hamilton was right to place a high value on Craven House; it deserves to find readers.

In terms of its place in Hamilton's fictional milieu, Craven House addresses the uncommon novelistic subject of boarding-house life. After Monday Morning's Fauconberg

Hotel, Craven House seems terribly intimate, and the setting has moved from Earl's Court to the less transient, more domesticated area near Kew called Southam Green, which is clearly modelled on Turnham Green. Gone are the cosmopolitan residents of the Fauconberg: the Swede who takes Anthony out drinking, French Diane and her mother, and the South American who wants Anthony to advise him on a program of reading in English literature. The nearest approach Craven House makes to a foreigner is Mrs. Nixon, with her aggressive, yet false, Scottishness. Perhaps as another manifestation of the transition to the smaller boarding house, Craven House includes intimate scenes in private areas of the house, which Monday Morning avoided. These scenes reveal clearly, however, that residents remain strangers to one another, even those who share a room. The novel's protagonist, young Master Wildman, sharing a room with his father for the first time, decides he should "take this opportunity of studying a Major's habits in his natural sources, so to speak, and thrilling to the adventure of it, arranges a little aperture in the [bed] curtains for his purpose" (24). And indeed he is amazed by what he sees, all of it perfectly innocuous: his father reading in bed, saying his prayers, and finally, kissing goodnight his son, who is feigning sleep. On the basis of that kiss, Master Wildman exclaims to himself, " 'by jove, he must like me!' " (26), as if the idea were new to him. Meanwhile, up the hall, the Spicers are enacting their own version of long-married

strangers sharing a room, their years of marriage underscoring the strangeness.

Hamilton's touch has become even surer, his mastery of how to present boarding-house life even more complete than it was in Monday Morning. Craven House is more ambitious than its predecessor, covering several time periods--1911, 1914, 1918, 1924--and presenting more numerous fully drawn characters. The life of the house itself, as it existed both before and after its human occupants, brackets the action.

Hamilton uses Craven House to reveal the experience of life in a small but genteel boarding house, of the sort where the residents are "paying guests." He recreates the closure of such a world, and identifies fully the geographic, social, and financial contexts in which it exists. Focusing on the conditions of life within Craven House (both material and social), Hamilton informs us of the mores of boarding-house life and the family-based structure of relationships within it. While the novel's focus is narrower than that of Monday Morning in some respects, the treatment is more comprehensive: servants achieve significance in the narrative, and the landlady's life and character are portrayed unusually sympathetically.

THE CONTEXT OF CRAVEN HOUSE

Keymer Gardens, Southam Green, the neighborhood of Craven House, is established directly and economically. The

Green, the High Street with all its activities and businesses, the District Line station: all are vividly sketched in the first few pages of the novel. London itself is in the background, and while it can be reached by the District Line, its existence is vague, definitely elsewhere and other:

the sound of the Southam Green High Road, a quarter of a mile distant, and the sound of all London behind it, beat faintly yet incessantly, like the roar of a waveless sea, upon the inured ears of the inhabitants. Such noises, nevertheless, were unable to disturb the lazy peace manifest in Keymer gardens. They served, rather, to emphasise the hush. (1)

After the residents of Craven House are asleep, "sometimes a faint cry arises, as of a whole city in agony, from the plains of London behind. And through all the night, from lost distances, engines are clanking, gruffly shunting, whistling--the dim, hectic functionings of a nightmare" (28).

Excursions made by the residents of Craven House, such as Mr. Spicer's pub crawls and Master Wildman's vacation treats, are to familiar Hamilton venues. Master Wildman's "Easter holidays were short and rainy holidays, but none the worse for being rainy. You were taken to the Moving Pictures about once a week and once to the Theatre itself, where you saw Sherlock Holmes in person, and afterwards had a dazzling tea at Lyons' Corner House" (43). Lyons also

features in the children's illicit Gamage's outing; it is part of Master Wildman's largesse toward Elsie. He takes her there in an attempt to give her a great treat, with rather mixed results: "It is very crowded in the small Lyons' establishment they enter; it also takes them a great time to get served; the waitress, who belongs to the sneering school of assistants, is not over-civil. ('Got a good mind to leave her tuppence,' threatens Master Wildman.)" (79).

The war, too, receives typical Hamilton treatment. Southam Green and Craven House experience their war much as Thames Lockdon and the Rosamund Tea Rooms, in The Slaves of Solitude, will experience theirs: in small, pinching ways.

The war years

were very unhappy and bewildering years for Southam Green. . . . Years in which (apart from the stalking affliction of Armageddon itself) a thousand local inconveniences and petty tortures were experienced--years in which the main streets grew mudded and more mudded with the wretched hue of the national uniform, and blocked with the forlorn, drab length of the food queues--years in which the act of Shopping became a sharp enterprise, a trial of wits and patience with the retailer, who was no longer the ingratiating creature of the old days, but master of the situation, and taking surly advantage of it--years in which the Servant Problem first arose in stark uncompromise, and

an alarming bent in the Lower Orders towards Answering Back first became acute--potato years, corned beef, and Best Margarine (we like it almost as much as butter) years. (97)

Not only does Hamilton focus on the domestic side, but he does not present a heroic picture of life on the homefront, with the middle classes happy to do their bit for the boys and jolly Old England, choosing instead to consider "petty inconveniences." Hamilton's choice of focus is accurate, in the sense that the people he is writing about would be likely to focus on it themselves. A Mass-Observer reporting from Whitehall on Nuremberg night noted that where there were large groups of people hanging about waiting for something to happen or some news, "in all the talk groups where they were of mixed company, built up from those gathered around, the talk came down from the crisis to how they lived in the last war and the present conditions" (Britain 62). Earlier, this Observer reported one specific instance of this phenomenon, where the conversation went from "what the soldier has to go through, then the wages of the soldier; this starts a talk on what people can manage to live on" (61). This gradual transition is an important one, and in concentrating on the daily and mundane, Hamilton is in consonance with the "ordinary" people who populate his novels.

Significant changes in relations between social classes are also suggested by Hamilton's description of the war

years, but the novel does not directly address the subject, relying primarily on implicit criticism. As a rule, political comment in the novel is implied, as in the treatment of Mr. Spicer's war experiences. He did not have the heroic war he envisioned during his soul-searching pub crawl, but he did enlist and serve:

Mr. Spicer returned to domesticity with a quantity of Little Stories (touching or otherwise); a vivid and unutterable sense of the lurid bestiality of his short experience in France, but no sense whatever of it being in any way other than righteous, seemly, eternal, and cumulatively expressive of the highest glories achievable by men. (103)

Spicer's essential character remains unchanged, as witnessed by his new trove of "Little Stories," as does his political consciousness ("righteous, seemly . . .") but his experience in France was real, not to be shucked off by his usual methods for avoiding reality. While this sentence contains a wealth of ironic political comment, it is implicit rather than overt.

If the narrative does not offer political commentary, however, that is because Craven House and its environs do not do so either: "how far purely international and political factors entered the question, it is not within the scope of this chronicle to discuss. Nor was it discussed with any great earnestness or at any great length at Craven House" (93). Patriotism in Southam Green is a bit

ludicrous; it

made itself felt in the neighbourhood, in the erection of ordinary flags, beflagged royalties, beflagged ministers, beflagged generals, beflagged bulldogs and other beflagged popular symbols on, outside, or in places hitherto consider exempt from decoration. There was really little scope for more direct participation amongst the rather elderly population of Southam Green.

. . when all was said and done the high-intentioned inhabitants of Southam Green had only flags and reviling to fall back upon. (93)

The war, for those who remained in Southam Green, remains remote. Flags, reviling, and "a thousand local inconveniences" are the sum total of their experience of the Great War.

It is further testament to the closed world of Craven House that stereotyped characters are those brought in from outside; only Craven House residents have more than one dimension. Some of these outsiders are pure types, not actually brought into the novel's action--"The Men" who fix the chimney after a storm, for example, and "another (and blackened) man, who appeared before breakfast, and who was unseen by Miss Hatt's guests, but was nevertheless conceived ideally by them, and in the nature of an eternal verity, as the Sweep" (68). Their names, and the narrative comment, draw attention to their existence as pure types. Other outsiders make appearances, but, as non-denizens, are

sketched in broadly and stereotypically. The removal men (Ernie who sings, George and Mr. Ewart) and Edith's connections who hold the Christmas party so fatal to Audrey are examples of working-class characters, about whose stereotyped presentation some critics have complained. None of these critics have complained, of course, about the same kind of treatment meted out to Anthony's coworkers at the Xotopol Rum Company, like Mr. Shillitoe,

a large, fair and virile man of about forty years, brought up at Westminster and Trinity College, Cambridge, but never brought down again. Mr. Shillitoe pronounced his long i's as long a's, and failed to pronounce at all several consonants provided by the language. The strained and high-pitched effort of his voice was almost fascinating to hear. (127)

Barbara Cotterell, although a participant in several scenes, is finally a one-dimensional figure; her situation, accessories (the idiotic dog and the little dog-whip she carries) and behavior are all extremely stereotypical. What distinguishes the stereotyped characters from the fully-drawn is not their social class, but their status in relation to Craven House: the outsiders, regardless of social class, are painted one-dimensionally, while the residents are more nuanced in characterization.

In fact, one of Barbara Cotterell's main functions is to clarify the social status of Craven House's residents. She temporarily distracts Master Wildman from Elsie, causing

that pair a great deal of unhappiness before they eventually unite, but an equally important role she plays is that of class foil. She is, personally, a contrast to Elsie, and generically, a contrast to the social class represented by the residents of Craven House. It is to the latter role that the narrative first directs the reader's attention. Elsie knows Miss Cotterell from school, and has invited her to visit Craven House:

Now the introduction of Miss Cotterell . . . to Craven House is not without significance, for it is the meeting of two very clearly defined, but widely opposed types of the Southam Greener, and Elsie has accomplished a rarer thing than she knows. It is a meeting between the Craven House class of persons, who have long thrown down their higher social cards, and taken to good humour, and a class of persons still steadily at the game. . . . For Miss Cotterell undoubtedly belongs to a class of persons now becoming more and more common in Southam Green--an exalted class of persons, who without having any more in actual pounds, shillings, and pence, look in a rather superior way at Craven House--being that class of persons who possess a Car, and a little dog, and a polo-playing uncle. (116)

Living in Craven House is a sign of social slippage, but the distinction noted between social standing and "actual pounds, shillings, and pence" is an important one. Craven

House is placed socially, but not economically, below the Miss Cotterrel class of Southam Green residents, a fact which helps pinpoint Craven House's station above a whole imagined range of boarding houses which are both economically and socially lower. If the residents have slipped into Craven House, this implies, there are other places waiting for them to slip into if they do not exercise care.

BOARDING-HOUSE CULTURE

The novel opens with a static scene characteristic of Hamilton's construction techniques (and a technique which will be borrowed by his second wife for her novels)²; the first action involves the landlady, Miss Hatt, and the cook, Edith, preparing for the arrival of a new Paying Guest. Such an opening signals the principal focus of the novel: the texture of life in a small, genteel boarding house. Hamilton uses the "selling" of Craven House to Major Wildman as a clever mechanism for describing the basic material conditions of life within:

When, two days ago, the retired Major Wildman stood taking his leave at the door of Craven House--a captured, though still verbally uncommitted and airy-gestured, paying guest--[Miss] Hatt, already a little intoxicated by her own timid but glib reiterations of the beautiful luck and blessings falling in the course of nature upon a Major taking up residence in such a

house, capped the ecstasies of hot water at all times of the day, fires in the bedrooms, hot-water bottles, and three towels changed twice in the week, with the rash and thoughtless promise, "Oh, yes? Well, we have a five-course dinner, you know. That'd be starting with fish, you know . . . and dessert. . . ." (3)

But in fact, of course, dinner has not been so grand as all that, and "Mrs. Nixon had hitherto learnt to expect nothing before the joint in the evening fare, and to regard the dessert, as it lay chilly upon the table, more in its traditional and ornamental aspects than otherwise" (3). Thus the reader is informed not only of the material conditions of life at Craven house, but also which features are important to Miss Hatt and the paying guests, and which therefore might be judged inadequate and in need of exaggeration.

Hamilton is interested in the actual texture of boarding-house life, and so he concentrates on the minutiae of social protocols, conversation, and the functional aspects of this mode of life. Such set pieces as the two boys playing cricket and Mr. Spicer's drunken search for female companionship add to the reader's enjoyment but are clearly of secondary importance. They are clever turns, comic relief--the serious business of the novel is to take readers inside Craven House and its mores. Narrative events are weighted accordingly; the climactic scene at the dinner table, in spite of all its farcical elements, is treated

with the underlying seriousness required by the demise of Craven House. By introducing Jock, with his malicious lies, tales of socialist-baiting, and patent cruelty, to side with Mrs. Nixon, whose cruelty has been demonstrated throughout the novel, against Elsie and Master Wildman, Hamilton suggests that while in some ways this may be merely boarding house strife, the antagonists represent more than petty conflicts.

Most of the events portrayed in the pages of Craven House are trivial rather than grand, and even those events which constitute crises are played small and accurate; this is in keeping with the primacy of Craven House existence. The most significant real-world happenings occur in Book Two, "these chapters of stormy interlude" (105), which is by far the shortest of the novel's three books, taking up little more than ten pages. In this interval, however, Britain declares war, Mr. Spicer enlists, Elsie and Master Wildman reach adulthood, Major Wildman dies, and the war ends.

The treatment given Mr. Spicer's infidelities illustrates clearly Hamilton's interests in domestic detail and the comic set piece; that he enjoys providing the latter does not negate the priority of the former. Mr. Spicer's first pub crawl, which has as its ultimate goal an illicit liaison, is described in some detail although introduced with a disclaimer that it will do no such thing: "We must therefore satisfy ourselves with simply sketching the routes

taken by Mr. Spicer on this highly sinister good tramp of his, as well as some of the adventures met by the way, and make no other comment" (58). In fact, Mr. Spicer is described in plentiful and comic detail as he flirts with a barmaid, tries to pick up a prostitute in Hyde Park and then loses his nerve, and ends up in another pub, attempting to flirt with another barmaid. His second pub crawl, which also begins at Hyde Park Corner, revolves around the need to make a decision about joining the Army to serve "God, King and Country" (94). While it takes him into seven pubs, Mr. Spicer's drunkenly single-minded topic is patriotism: his own, that is. Both pub crawls are examples of comic set pieces; they flesh out the narrative but are essentially self-contained units of humor. They are not connected to the main narrative developmentally or thematically.

Through these pub crawls, Mr. Spicer's interest in women is established simultaneously with his incompetence and inability to arrange the details of an amorous encounter. This is what makes the Catherine Tillotson letter such a surprise, and it underscores the novel's determination to expand upon the domestic. We do not read about Spicer's exploits with his "little companion, Catherine Tillotson"--her existence only becomes known after the relationship has ended--but we do read about the scene he and his wife endure on account of it. In fact, the narrative draws attention to its chosen emphasis on the domestic scene as opposed to the amorous adventure:

All such vain and unprofitable questioning as to Where he Picked her Up, or What on Earth Induced him, or How Ever he Could, or If he had Always, or How far he had Gone, being sad questionings and problems gone over by Mrs. Spicer for years after the event, without any satisfactory answers ever coming to light, we will confine ourselves to relating the mere incident of our involved Tea merchant's downfall before his wife, and the confrontation with his sin. (199)

Like Mrs. Spicer, the reader must rest uninformed about the details of Mr. Spicer's liaison with Catherine Tillotson, but knowledgeable about the ensuing domestic fracas. It is, like most confrontations described by Hamilton, both ludicrous and deadly serious. The impending confrontation is foreshadowed by way of "a curious moment" which "[falls] upon Mr. and Mrs. Spicer shortly after the New Year" (73). Mrs. Spicer discovers, in one of his pockets, a letter addressed to her husband "in what she afterwards summed up to herself as a Feminine Hand" (73). On this occasion, there is no scene; apart from some vague mutterings, nothing happens.

The scene about Catherine Tillotson, however, is striking in its reliance on silly domestic detail; there is nothing grand or tragic about the Spicer's confrontation, but it rings true to the focus on Craven House life. The narrative recalls the "curious moment," as Mrs. Spicer once more tackles the project of cleaning Mr. Spicer's coats.

Before setting out on his walk, Mr. Spicer "takes manifold old garments from the cupboard, taps them easily to see there are no moth [sic], or letters or anything, secreted therein, and says he thinks he will be getting off" (197).

But of course he is mistaken; there is a letter. He returns from his walk in high spirits and very talkative; his wife waits until they are getting ready for bed to confront him about Catherine Tillotson. Mrs. Spicer punches him in the face three times, knocks the blue cricket cap he sleeps in off his head, and corners him on the bed. They have a ridiculous disagreement about the meaning of the word "brothel," brought on by Mrs. Spicer calling her husband one, and are walked in on by Miss Hatt, bringing news of her own "most funny letter" (201) announcing the arrival of the Russian lady. Mrs. Spicer threatens to divorce him, but in the end, the status quo prevails. Every detail included in this confrontation--the presentation of the conflict itself, Miss Hatt's intrusion of her person and boarding-house society, and the scene's conclusion in the Spicer's time-worn tussle over the bedclothes--underlines the primary importance of Craven House mores. The novel bypasses opportunities to enlarge theatrically or melodramatically upon the theme of "a good woman done wrong," for example, and it declines to dignify the confrontation by discussing moral issues such as fidelity. Instead, it underlines precisely how Craven House residents would deal with a personal crisis, and emphasizes their predilection for

maintaining the status quo, at any personal cost.

The short chapter "A Winter at Craven House" enumerates sources of conflict and ways of waging battle without violating superficial etiquette. The winter, reducing residents even more completely to life inside the house, aggravates friction. Christmas, as always in Hamilton novels, is included; details of the festivities, such as they are, further emphasize the fragility of boarding-house existence and the trivial nature of triumph (the Major's red domino costume) and failure (Mr. Spicer's "Tricks") alike.

THE CRAVEN HOUSE FAMILY

The relationships among the residents of Craven House, as befits their status as paying guests, are more complex and developed than were those among the Fauconberg's residents. Relationships in Craven House are built on the model of an extended family, and this interpretation is foregrounded in the history of Craven House's existence as boarding house. When the idea of taking in paying guests is proposed, it appears to be the solution to a host of problems: it would generate income, it would help to fill the "house rather too large for their needs," and, most important of all, it should "solve the Long Evening Problem, which was becoming a very acute and painful problem to Mr. and Mrs. Spicer and Miss Hatt" (5). Thus the family note is struck even before the lodgers enter the scene; the description of the Spicers and Miss Hatt calls to mind a

childless couple, with too much space in the house, and too little activity. Paying guests will fill the role of children.

In many important respects, the residents of Craven House do interact as if they were family members. The half-grown Master Wildman treats the house as if it were his family home and its residents one extended family. He leaves his sporting gear lying about, a bike accident "[sends] Miss Hatt rushing for the pink lint," and of all his other biking adventures--"innumerable punctures, other calamities, and speeding triumphs"--the residents are "kept elaborately advised" (44). On Sunday, the residents go off to church as a group, and they discuss the service afterwards in intimate, critical terms. Meals at Craven House are events, markers of time in an otherwise undifferentiated boredom, and they also illustrate the essentially family-based structure of relationships. On the day of Mr. Spicer's first pub crawl, his late return poses first a puzzle, then a quandary for his fellow residents: "the appearance of Miss Hatt, in her Sunday evening-dress, denotes that supper may soon be taken, but for the fact that Mr. Spicer is not yet In--a most extraordinarily Out, inconsequent and mystifying Mr. Spicer being the subject of some mute speculation by Miss Hatt's guests, for all their easy chatting" (66). Finally, at Mrs. Spicer's suggestion, they start supper anyway,

which is like a class without a master, and none the

less jolly for that--in that an air of gay anarchy prevails, particularly with regard to the carving of the joint, which the Major is at last persuaded to tackle, hacking off and distributing exquisitely unfamiliar parts to eminently charmed recipients, and giving, on the whole, rather better measure than the absent expert. (66)

Upon his return Mr. Spicer, "still in a fuddled condition" (67), which he tries to hide from the company, cannot help but remark surlily upon the fact the Major usurped his place as "father" and carved the joint. Family motifs recur throughout this episode. Miss Hatt's appearance signalling supper, the obvious history of Mr. Spicer's role as "father" and carver of the joint, his disgrace and discomfiture at being deposed: all of these suggest a rigid establishment of behaviors based on family models. It is like "being mother" by pouring out tea; the family pattern is superimposed on unrelated people, with no reduction in consistency corresponding to the absence of blood relation. If anything, the absence of real family ties makes the participants follow the pattern more rigidly than they might otherwise.

Further, everyone in Craven House seems aware of the details of one another's business (although Elsie, through her mother's unnatural malice, turns out to be ignorant of her own business when she has been left a legacy). After the death of his father, Master Wildman learns shorthand,

but does not actively seek a job. The residents of Craven House, knowing the details of his financial situation, are concerned about this state of affairs: "Now as it was known that Master Wildman had but three pounds a week, left by his father, as income, and but three hundred pounds in the Bank, it was clear that each of these weeks [of delay] was drawing Master Wildman nearer and nearer to facts it would one day be unpleasant to face" (121). There was eventually "so much concern amongst his well-wishers at Craven House as to cause" each of them to act upon his or her concern, which generally takes the form of "declaring" something upon the subject. Mr. Spicer is finally deputized, as "father," to speak to Master Wildman about the seriousness of his situation and to offer assistance in getting a job in the city.

The implications of Craven House residents not truly being an extended family are largely negative; that is, they get most of the disadvantages, but few of the benefits, of being related. Tied to the intimacy is a nearly unbearable burden of good manners and civility. These people can and do suffer in their close proximity to one another, but are not permitted to argue or misbehave. Those impulses are translated into face-saving covert battles such as the laundry skirmishing of the ladies, where they take out their aggressions by imposing on one another's airing space.

Unreasonable expectations for non-family who must live in family-like proximity can also be discerned in the egg

episode. What happens is simple enough, although significant: "One morning, early in the New Year, Craven House sustained a minor shock. It was not conceived as a shock, really. It was over in a moment, and only recalled a long while afterwards, when it was seen in a new light" (120). The eggs are off, and not for the first time. Mrs. Nixon, per usual, supplies the catalyst: " 'I wonder,' said Mrs. Nixon, 'you don't change the man altogether.' 'Oh, do you?' said Miss Hatt, sharply, and then the shock was felt. 'I won't have another egg in this house!' said Miss Hatt" (120-21). The unrealistic, indeed unbearable demands, make this incident the means of exposing that Miss Hatt "had a temper." Certainly she would, being human; but it has not manifested itself, and it strikes her lodgers as inappropriate or undeserved ("her guests stared at her"). The dynamics are like those of a family, but more demanding in not permitting tempers, in requiring good manners.

The "aching politeness" required of Craven House residents produces some astounding results, from the Long Evening Problem, through the "Little Music" with its excruciating commentary (18-19) to the "Bit of a Smoking" Mr. Spicer gives Mrs. Hoare's telescope (195). There should be no doubt that such apparently superficial problems as the "Long Evening Problem" are serious, or, at least, are capable of producing serious consequences. After five months of cohabitation in Craven House, "the evenings on the whole were reaching a pitch of ennui and amiability almost

intolerable--if not positively approaching the danger mark" (6). Boredom and excessive politeness are the principal manifestations of the approaching danger, but these cover the potential for social enormities. The two women have their first cross words as a result of the "Long Evening Problem," and the final dinner-table scene which is Craven House's downfall can be seen in some ways as representing the ultimate negative end of ostensibly-minor boarding-house social problems. The idiocies resulting from the impossibility of speaking frankly while living in close quarters, culminate in the "Peculiar Spill" (218) caused by Miss Hatt's outburst. To attempt to write off the passionate uproar of the dinner-table scene as a "peculiar spill" suggests the lengths to which Craven House residents are driven in their efforts to paper over discord.

Miss Hatt, in contrast to the powerful and unpleasant landladies found elsewhere in Hamilton's work, is treated sympathetically. The novel pays tribute to her difficulties, both practical and emotional. To preside over the class of people who live in Craven House is guaranteed to provide blows to one's self-respect:

Mrs. Hoare does not insult Miss Hatt much more than her other guests insult her, by implications of reduced circumstances and having come down in the world, but she does, of course, insult her. She has come, indeed, it is widely know, from the Land--as opposed not to Water, but the middle and lower orders. She herself is

a little touchy on the point of getting this registered. (111)

To rule a roost composed of those who have come down in the world is to be implicated in their downward slide; the landlady herself becomes another symbol of their disgrace. In the summing up which precedes the climactic dinner-table scene,³ the novel describes Miss Hatt's situation with great sympathy:

For Miss Hatt, who has kept up a gallant show for something like fifteen years against the sprawling and lazy insults of the intruders she has contracted to warm, shelter, clean, tidy, and feed in her own house, is no longer the same Miss Hatt. For the sum of three and a half guineas--a wistfully ideal sum, each guest being on very secret and very Special Terms--the sum of three guineas and a half, coyly demanded, and received weekly with furtive and apologetic compliments from each guest in turn, has proved a very untidy sum with respect to that Tidy Little Sum she once looked forward to as a result of her labours; and Miss Hatt is suddenly brought up against the fact that she has been slaving her middle life out in mothering a brood of secretly allied and hostile human beings, who break up her house, and demand replacements, and give out an air of conferring a benefit with every week they remain with her. Which is a black fact to come up against when those fifteen years have been spent in an unending

series of fifteen-hour days (6.30 a.m.--9.30 p.m.) in which you have worked on and on and on, and been merry and merry and merrier, until you are giddy and sick with fatigue, and fall upon your bed, at last, with the one long sigh you are allowed to express, to fall asleep. (208-09)

This aspect too resembles the family dynamic: Miss Hatt, the hardworking and uncomplaining landlady, has given over her life to "mothering" people not her children, and for dubious rewards.

SERVANTS

Another important development in Craven House is the introduction of servants. The Fauconberg, in Monday Morning, would have required a staff of menial laborers for its running, but none appears in the novel. Nigel Jones advances the idea that Hamilton introduces servants only to caricature them. Craven House, he writes,

is also a world of "upstairs, downstairs," with the domestic servants even more crudely caricatured, from their very names ("Audrey Custard") to their Cockneyfied, stereotyped modes of speech. This last--as it does in Dickens's case--reflects the author's own middle-class origins, and his inability to get inside and accurately reflect real working-class life. (113)

While the servants, like most other characters in Hamilton's world, do present stereotypical elements, a closer

examination of their roles in Craven House reveals a more complex situation than that described by Jones. The parlourmaid, Audrey Custard, in particular offers a noteworthy range of Hamilton's responses to working people, and if Jenny Maple of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky was originally conceived of as a servant who slides into prostitution, Audrey Custard can be seen as her predecessor.

In 1941, when Michael Sadleir asked Hamilton to revise Craven House, he identified the servants as one of its most interesting features: rereading the novel, Sadleir found that " 'the two maids in the kitchen impressed me much more' " than before. Servants are important and deserving of respect: one basis of the novel's condemnation of Barbara Cotterell is that she cannot keep servants in her employ, probably because of her contempt for people she can only think of as "the Creature[s]" (234). At the same time, however, the novel acknowledges the servants' remoteness from the lives of Craven House's other residents. After the house is empty, and Master Wildman goes through it, we are given a rare glimpse of the servant's realm: larder, cellar, scullery, servant's sitting-room, and the kitchen itself. So far removed from this realm is Master Wildman, that "he had forgotten there would be an oven" (242), an observation that is surely calculated to draw attention to itself.

Chapter Two is "An Account of Two Servants and a Parrot," and the domestics, particularly Audrey, are compared to this bird several times during the course of

Craven House. Mac, the parrot, is sixty-eight years old when the novel begins. He is introduced in terms which emphasize his involuntary imprisonment in the house and the callousness of his owners, suggesting a more overt instance of what is also true for Audrey Custard and Edith Potter. Audrey and Edith are paid twenty and twenty-five pounds a year, respectively. To earn these wages, they do exhausting manual work from "the first grey stealth of dawn" (29) to 10:15 at night, at which time they are permitted to "creep by candlelight from the bottom of the house to the top. This is done with so stealthy a tread, with such respectful whisperings, as to make the action seem almost apologetic. To the others, prone in their dark rooms, it is a vaguely necessary happening, irrelevant to the main purpose of the day" (28).

The parrot, of course, is idle, but his idleness, like the servant's labor, is imposed from above and with no thought to what his own preferences might be. Both servants and bird are expected to live up to the romantic ideals of their mistress, and all fail to do so. These ideals are described at some length, but in their place, "Miss Hatt was compelled to substitute the human and untheatrical realities of Miss Edith Potter and Miss Audrey Custard" (29). The ideals are stereotypical and romantic, and it is hard to imagine them being fulfilled anywhere except on stage. In spite of being "untheatrical," Edith the cook is "so out-of-drawing and blotchy in appearance" that the others must

"interpret her as a 'Dickens' character" (30). Of greater interest--to the residents of Craven House and the story itself--is Audrey the maid. Audrey's first job in the morning is to scrub the front steps, "a horrid and biting occupation" and then to rake out the previous night's fire, "a vision of sackcloth and ashes in literal truth" (31). Audrey has too many menial tasks to live up to Miss Hatt's rather outlandish aspirations for her.

The parrot, likewise, requires a great deal of imagination to be forced into the mold desired by Craven House's residents. As he will not conform to their expectations, they falsify or exaggerate to construct a more ideal version: "The parrot, during this winter season, was a fair success. Its imaginatively edited remarks were one of the principal topics at meal times. As were also, and in the same tone of amused relish, some of Audrey's and Edith's" (72). The connection between servants and bird is explicit here; Craven House's residents reveal similar attitudes toward them and take similar liberties with their speech and behavior. That these falsified reports would be a "principal topic" is another way of indicating the boredom of living in Craven House; the topics are limited in number and require an assumption of enthusiasm far beyond what they would naturally generate. The novel's description of the parrot underscores not only its situation, but also hints at the futile lives of its human housemates:

its prevailing mood was one of good-tempered caustic

bitterness against its captors--a mood which its abundance of years had served to emphasise rather than soften. It occasionally obliged with a clever mimicry or a relevant saying, which would be repeated for days by the inmates of Craven House, but this was rare. So rare, indeed, that when the parrot had said absolutely nothing worth considering for a month or so on end the disappointed humans were compelled to invent--or at least to distort.

It bit you whenever it could. (32)

The remark about biting is designed to startle; it comes at the end of this section with its tone of remorse, is marked off into its own paragraph, and is the only second-person reference in this section about the bird. Certainly it raises questions about the servants, not allowed to bite but perhaps feeling their own captivity.

The link between servants and bird is extended explicitly in a discussion of Audrey's relations with Mac:

At ten o'clock on the morning of August 3rd, 1914, Audrey Custard was in the study of Craven House, giving new sand to, watering, and otherwise refreshing a sluttish and chaotic parrot. A kind of link had arisen between Audrey Custard and this caustic bird, inasmuch as it was the sole living creature she could meet on equal terms, and to any extent assert her own personality with. This, it is true, only amounted to a rather futile round of such condemnations as "You

rascal, Polly," or "Oh, you bad bird, Polly," together with their dreamy reciprocal questionings, "Aren't you a rascal, Polly, eh?" and "Aren't you a bad bird, Polly?" But the bird would invariably reply, "Rats, sir!" in a very friendly and shrewd style, and a pleasant ten minutes was spent. (92)

Even this relationship, however, cannot survive her eventual disgrace. Audrey, in happier days aligned with the parrot, is snubbed even by him once she has been dismissed for "Talking Back." That in her better days she was equal to a pet bird is its own condemnation, but to leave Craven House less than one is unspeakable. Audrey finds herself alone, and turns to the parrot:

[S]he stumbles down the stairs, and reaches the front door without meeting any one.

But at the front door she stops a moment, and then turns back, and goes in to the parrot. "I'm going, you Bad Thing," says Audrey. "I'm going!" But the creature that has been so friendly and jolly with her, all these years, gives no sign now in the darkness, save the black flutter of a wing, and a distant throaty cackle. "Oh, you Naughty---!" says Audrey, but can get no further than that. (161)

Her disgrace is complete, sealed by the bird with whom she communed when no one else cared about her.

Audrey's role as servant is to mediate between Miss Hatt and her boarders, carrying out tasks that Miss Hatt is

unable or unwilling to do. She functions as a buffer between the landlady, who must maintain her gentility, and unforeseen disasters. This role, which is thrust upon Audrey, is in evidence from the beginning of the novel. When the Major, newly-resident in Craven House, rings his bell after retiring for the evening, that event is, in Craven House terms, nothing short of a crisis: "a house-bell is suddenly heard tinkling in the kitchen below. 'That's his bell!' whispers Miss Hatt, aghast, and flies out into the hall. She has not to call for Audrey, for Audrey is there already, flushed and wide-eyed, breathlessly awaiting orders for the crisis" (19). Audrey is called upon to mediate not only this crisis, but she will also be the go-between during the next one precipitated by the Major's extravagant bathing habits. The Major, of course, "has been Used to things" and is unaware of Craven House's flutter; Miss Hatt, on her way to bed, hears him "making innocent splashing noises" (20, 21). It is the others, more conscious of their reduced circumstances, who interpret these manifestations of better things as a crisis.

Audrey is thus an integral part of making sense of Craven House's inmates, yet that function requires that she behave as if nonsensical things do in fact make sense; she alone bears the brunt of pretending all is well. The Major's request for a nighttime bath throws Craven House into a flurry of confusion; it is Audrey's job to field his demand with a calm front. Audrey is sent up to the major's

room to "see what he wants" and is quizzed upon her return by Miss Hatt:

"Well?"

"He wants a bath, ma'am."

"Bath? What did he say?"

"He said, 'Can I have a bath, please?' ma'am."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Yes, sir,' ma'am."

There is a pause. Maid and mistress look blankly at each other. (20)

Audrey's options are circumscribed by her position; all she can say to the Major is "yes, sir." Hamilton draws attention to this position by bracketing "yes, sir" with the reporting "I said" and the other courtesy title Audrey must use, "ma'am." Audrey must explain to an uncomprehending Miss Hatt the plain-sense meaning of a request with no pre-existing Craven House protocol (and thus no meaning).

Audrey's importance as a character is hinted at from the beginning, when Miss Hatt's good mood at novel's commencement is partly attributed to the character of "her new maid, Audrey (a treasure, she believed)" (4). Audrey is new to Craven House, arriving shortly before the protagonist, Master Wildman, and the possibility is offered that she will turn out to be a "treasure." This is an overt connection to Jenny Maple, whose new employers believe, fearful of disappointment, that she too will turn out to be a "treasure."

Further, Audrey is shown to be kind, always an important attribute in Hamilton's scheme. When Mrs. Nixon beats Elsie after the forbidden Gamage's outing, there is quite a stir in Craven House. Edith the cook opines that Mrs. Nixon's methods of bringing up are only proper. She refers to her own mother, who " 'knew 'ow to bring us up' " the highlight of which bringing up is apparently the time she beat Edith's brother vigorously. Edith approves of this; Audrey is "taken aback" and "rather wants to get this episode justified" (83). Her kindness is no protection for the fate which befalls her later on; quite the opposite, probably. Her disgrace thus becomes more painful.

Audrey's descent into disgrace is traced through its minor manifestations; her experience is another instance of Hamilton's conviction that danger is always around, waiting to be triggered by some apparently innocuous mistake. Just as one drink can lead inevitably to drunkenness and alcoholism (Jenny Maple's one glass of port, for example), so one haircut and one Christmas party destroy Audrey Custard (" 'It was that party that done it,' she says. 'I ought never to 'ave gone to that there party' " [160]).

Audrey's disgrace and departure are given one chapter, entitled "Audrey Answers Back." This chapter begins with retrospective insights from various Craven House residents and ends with the bald statement: "And that is the end of Audrey Custard. Who Answered Back" (161). Hamilton's delineation of Audrey's undoing is suggestive:

Whether or no any signs of the terrible series of ungovernabilities, Answerings Back, and ignorances of her place, which finally dashed poor Audrey Custard to ruin in the space of a week, were to be seen coming in the distance: and whether or no it was the bobbing of her hair that began it; or the moving pictures, which taught a young girl to get above herself, Mrs. Spicer said; or the war, after which they had never been the same, Miss Hatt said; or that Young Man, who had probably put her up to it, Mrs. Nixon suggested--were matters of opinion and long discussion after the event, but Liberties Audrey had absolutely begun to take, a good while before it. (145)

It is a "series" of events, not a random assortment, which implies the inevitable ordering of events that lead up to a tragedy so characteristic of Hamilton's work. Once set in motion, the series plays out swiftly; after all her years at Craven House, Audrey's demise transpires "in the space of a week." The transition is abrupt and insurmountable: "It all comes suddenly the next day. At one moment Audrey is a reproved and intimidated serving maid, but none the less practically accepted as an eternal fixture--and the next moment she is an outcast forever" (154).

Audrey's dismissal is the most painful crisis in the book, the only one with no redeeming qualities or eventual solution. The conclusion of this crisis has no denouement, which accurately reflects Audrey's powerless situation.

Immediately upon her dismissal by Miss Hatt, Audrey disappears from both boarding house and novel. The arch narrative voice, not unwilling in other places to give information about events beyond the scope of the novel's action, declines to throw the reader a sop in the form of comments on Audrey's future happiness (even though she did have a boyfriend in London at the time of the rupture, and an aunt willing to take her in).

THE CONCLUSION

The ending of Craven House is important in suggesting the pivotal role the novel plays in Hamilton's oeuvre; it signals the transition underway between the relative insouciance of youth and the grimmer realities the later novels reconstruct. Nigel Jones objects to what he calls the "contrived happy ending," finding that it "cuts against the whole grain of the book and we must assume that here Patrick bowed to more traditional norms and conventions, and tacked on a conclusion that went against his own better judgement" (113). Not only is this interpretation presumptuous, but it misses Hamilton's essential kindness, and the rightness of Elsie's reward for all her suffering.

The ending, in fact, is rehearsed earlier in the novel, during the children's trip to Gamage's. Elsie is promised the trip, an almost unheard-of treat from her mother, but forfeits it when she accidentally overturns an ink bottle on Miss Hatt's drawing-room tablecloth. The descriptions of

Elsie's fear, her anxious wait and timid intervention, and her mother's cold, rigid cruelty make painful reading. Master Wildman, having his own boyish generosity, invites Elsie to go to Gamage's with him while Mrs. Nixon is away on a visit to her sister. He takes her on the tube, he buys her a present (she chooses "a bottle of gum, which, being marked twopence, she feels it her duty to have") and takes her to tea. Upon their return, Mrs. Nixon is home, and gives Elsie the beating which puts all of Craven House in a flutter. Master Wildman pleads with his father to intervene, and after supper, when the adults play whist, he visits Elsie in her room. He consoles her as best he can-- "she has never had such kindness from him before"--and offers to tell her a story (" 'Ghost or Detective?' "). By the end of Master Wildman's rather outlandish story, she has recovered sufficiently to fall asleep: " 'Elsie!' says Master Wildman, using her first name for the very first time in his life. And 'Elsie!' he whispers, but there is no reply at all, for Elsie is fast asleep. Wherefore, Master Wildman, in a gentlemanly but disappointed manner, rises quietly, ties the cord of his little dressing-gown, and softly leaves the room" (91). That scene forms the end of Book I, while the end of the novel is built around their adult union. In the closing scene, Elsie and Master Wildman both refer to that earlier experience, and Master Wildman makes playful use of the story-telling offer to declare his love for Elsie. It is not a tacked-on and wrong ending; it

is the compassionate ending we have been promised.

The novel's signals are mixed. That such an ending remains possible indicates that happiness is not out of reach, that a comic resolution is still available; the later works do not hold out that hope. Likewise, Mrs. Hoare and her odd habit of using initial letters rather than whole words is a harmless eccentricity which nonetheless points forward to Mr. Thwaites and his verbal tics, judged in The Slaves of Solitude as far from harmless. At the same time, however, Master Wildman's summation of Craven House life marks its tragic character. In spite of all the silliness, this is not the comedy Wildman--and the reader--thought it was:

"I thought it was a comedy, Elsie. I thought it was a silly comedy. I thought it was all so funny. . . . But it's not now, Elsie, now it's over--now they've all gone away. . . ."

"Fifteen years," says Master Wildman. "That's getting on for a quarter century. . . . And after all that noise, and all that silly laughter, and all that aching politeness and cheerfulness, they've gone away and left it to itself." (247-48)

These comments underscore the transitional nature of Craven House, for while Monday Morning clearly is a comedy, and Craven House might be taken for one, there will be no mistaking Hamilton's later works for comedies.

TWO PENCE COLOURED

The novel after Craven House is Twopence Coloured (1928), a deliberately long and "serious" book. It tells the story of Jackie Mortimer, a nineteen-year-old orphan who, after seeing a play in Brighton, decides to "Go upon the Stage" (4). En route to London to do just that, she fortuitously meets Richard Gissing, an older, successful--and married--actor and author who agrees to help her start her career. Against his advice, she joins the chorus line of a travelling show; from there, her career proceeds through a series of uninspiring provincial theatrical tours. Eventually--and inevitably--she and Gissing become romantically involved. They cannot marry because his wife refuses to divorce, but they live and perform together. While they are on the road in Sheffield, Gissing unexpectedly dies. Jackie takes a few roles after that, and backs a production of one of Gissing's early plays. Eventually she realizes that "she was (she now understood) neither a very clever nor exceptionably sensitive being" (334). She decides to quit, and accepts a marriage proposal from Gissing's brother, Charles; at novel's end, Jackie looks forward to the fact "that very soon she would be taken away" (374) from London and her theatrical career.

Ironically, the principal achievement of Twopence Coloured is to underscore how accomplished are Hamilton's other novels; in several respects, this novel represents Hamilton's usual method gone astray. The details are often

tedious or irrelevant; the love story, although presented seriously, is unconvincing. As in Monday Morning and Craven House, Hamilton has little to say about the dramatic productions themselves, a serious fault in this book, which takes theatrical minutiae as its subject. The novel's "satire is directed entirely at the trivia of the stage" (Jones 130), a too-limited subject for such a long novel, particularly since it represents no larger social structure.

Furthermore, the theatrical career of Jackie Mortimer never gets anywhere; as usual, Hamilton has chosen the lower-middle level to examine, but while the results of that emphasis in general life are instructive, in theatrical life they are simply dull. The details of Jackie's struggles are not particularly interesting or instructive for, while the chorus-girl beginning can lead tellingly downward, as in the novels of Jean Rhys, or compellingly upward to success, the flatness of Jackie's career goes nowhere. The "brief period allotted to her as a West End actress" (252) is in a thriller, written by Gissing, called "The Knocking at the Gate." She considers this play to be "restarting her theatrical career" (231), and it runs for four and a half months. There are no long-term consequences of that limited success, however, and she herself notes, late in the novel, that "the whole West End acting world, with its social intrigue and garrulity, remained a closed door to her" (368).

Interestingly, while Michael Sadleir (who liked the

book) describes it as having " 'a much more specialized appeal' " (French 74) than did Craven House, Hamilton wrote to his brother as the novel was nearing completion that it was " 'not nearly so specialised' " (French 72) as his first two novels. Hamilton's assessment, in the letter to his brother, reveals plainly what he wanted to achieve:

It is a much grimmer book, and not nearly so specialised. And it's much longer, and more amorphous, and interesting in itself. You could rob it of its humour, style, and piquancy (let us hope they exist) and it might still remain interesting as a document.
(French 72)

This deliberate attempt to write a "serious" novel, ironically, renders it void of the sociological inquiry and insight of his other novels. While Craven House is a tragedy-comedy, it provides an examination of a class and way of life; Twopence Coloured offers no such reward for its readers. Hamilton's acknowledgement--in 1927--of the value of creating literary documents is worth noting, even though Twopence Coloured is not the valuable social record many of his other novels are. Working in his usual fictional milieu, Hamilton did create some documents of lasting value; he was in tune with his time, and possessed the gifts required to succeed.

NOTES

1. Revised edition, (London: Cardinal, 1991 [f.p. 1943]).
2. Lady Ursula Chetwynd-Talbot, who published five novels under the name Laura Talbot. The first of these appeared in 1950, after her relationship with Hamilton was established but before their marriage, and the last in 1961. Her novels are interesting counterparts to Hamilton's, but beyond the scope of the present study.
3. "We have given the last little dinner scene in some detail so as to demonstrate the nature of the nerve-tearing labours imposed upon Craven House at a moment when its whole structure is hanging by a thread; and to extenuate, if such a thing is possible, the disgraceful public explosion that is to follow. And we should recall, once more and as further extenuation, the relations existing between guest and guest, and Miss Hatt at this critical juncture" (207-08).

Chapter 5

"CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY": PUB CULTURE IN TWENTY THOUSAND STREETS UNDER THE SKY

In Craven House, London featured as a backdrop to the main action; menacing, but in the distance. In the middle of the night, while Craven House and Southam Green sleep, "sometimes a faint cry arises, as of a whole city in agony, from the plains of London behind" (28). In his trilogy of pub novels, The Midnight Bell (1929), The Siege of Pleasure (1932), and The Plains of Cement (1934)--published in one volume as Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky in 1935--Hamilton takes his readers directly to the center of that "city in agony." The Midnight Bell, like Craven House, is an eponymous novel, but it takes its name from a pub rather than a boarding house.

Each of the trilogy's novels tells the story of one person connected with the pub. The Midnight Bell tells the story of the pub's waiter, Bob. His savings, accumulated before the novel's opening, represent his safety net in maintaining his marginal socio-economic status, and it allows him to dream that someday he might live on his savings while undertaking a career as writer. During the course of the novel, however, Bob loses everything because of a destructive relationship with a young prostitute, Jenny

Maple, whom he hopes to reclaim from the streets. Every bit of his savings, his job at the pub, even his forlorn hope of writing a novel are lost, and he returns to being a sailor.

The Siege of Pleasure is Jenny's story. The narrative opens in the aftermath of Bob and Jenny's relationship, but most of the action is retrospective, taking place before the events chronicled in The Midnight Bell. The novel portrays Jenny's short-lived career as a servant and abrupt introduction to alcoholism and the world of prostitution.

The final story belongs to Ella, the barmaid at the Midnight Bell. Plain, kindhearted, and uninterested in consuming the alcohol she dispenses to others, she nourishes an unrequited love for Bob. The antithesis of Jenny, in The Midnight Bell, Ella is partial witness to his self-destruction. In The Plains of Cement, Hamilton reveals the circumstances of her life contemporaneous with Bob's story. She is caught in a dead-end job, aware of the hopelessness of her love for Bob, but trying to hope for something better. The novel follows the development of Ella's possible escapes from her confined life, all of which come to nothing, leaving her even more alone than she was when the novel opened. The Plains of Cement, a strong novel on its own, gains greater power as it ties together the two earlier novels in the trilogy.

THE PUB NOVEL AS GENRE

In writing a series of pub novels, Hamilton has turned his attention from the private institutions of rootless people--residential hotels and boarding houses--to one of their most important public refuges. The trilogy constitutes a significant instance of a relatively neglected genre, that of pub fiction. As Nigel Jones observes, "considering the high profile the public house has in the lives of most British citizens, it is odd that pub literature occupies such a small niche."¹ Nick Kimberley, in his review of the Hogarth edition of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, not only confirms the relative rarity of pub fiction, but suggests why such a genre might be important:

Fans of Coronation Street and EastEnders may have noticed that a pub can provide dramatic focus, a site where conflict and community come to the surface (some of you may even have noticed this in real life, too). But not only does it offer a spectrum of dramatic tensions, it also obscures those tensions through that great social equaliser, alcohol. Given that potential, it's strange that the pub novel has never become a genre in the same way as, say, the sports novel or the hospital novel. The absence of the genre makes Patrick Hamilton's trilogy of London novels, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, all the more remarkable.²

Most of the major events in the trilogy, aside from Bob's

first encounter with Jenny, happen elsewhere. The pub is indeed a location of "conflict and community," but for Bob and Ella, who work there and live upstairs, it is only a part of their lives. A time-consuming and demanding part, of course, but ultimately a job much like any other job available to people of their class.

To whom do pubs matter? Drinkers, of course, or the majority of those who frequent pubs, but the pub is fundamentally a business concern. This fact, often overlooked by the large numbers of people who are inclined to be sentimental about pubs, or at least about their own local, implies how disparate an interest may be taken in pubs as institutions. For Ben Davis, interested in the architectural issues of pub buildings and decor, such a multifaceted interest is a given:

Let us, however, be strictly unsentimental. As long ago as 1938 The Architects' Journal pointed out in a special issue that the essential pub character is important to the brewers who make money out of it. It is equally important to governments, sociologists and social drinkers, and perhaps above all to the licensee, who is the key man in the business.³

Some of Davis's categories are fairly obvious, but they provide a salutary reminder that many other people besides drinkers (whatever their scale of consumption) take a serious interest in pubs. Not included in Davis's list are those who take a negative interest: temperance reformers of

various stripes.

Mass-Observation took an interest in pubs early on, and saw their potential as sites of sociological inquiry.

Valerie Hey, while critical of M-O's patriarchal attitude, describes their study of Bolton pubs as

a radical departure from previous methodology which had been to compile quantitative evidence concerning alcohol abuse, pubs becoming thus categorized under the heading of "Crime and Delinquency"; problems rather than institutions. It is Mass-Observation's serious commitment to seeing pubs as venues for the expression of social relations that provides a fascinating opportunity to "eavesdrop" on the gender/class ideologies of the 1930s and 1940s.⁴

Hamilton too perceived the sociological potential of pubs, and knew from first-hand experience that as social institutions, pubs were anything but uncomplicated. Two decades after Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, Hamilton mocked those who believed pubs to be an equalized arena for social intercourse. In Unknown Assailant, he "quotes" a fictional biographer of Gorse (the main character of Unknown Assailant) on pubs:

"The English public house, as is well known," he wrote, "is a meeting place for all types. Class distinctions vanish and all men, 'over a pint,' thrash out the problems of the day on an equal and amicable footing." Here, Hadlow-Browne, of course, disclosed his lack of

knowledge of public houses.⁵

Hamilton's own experience of pub life has particular value, for this is a world that cannot be fully viewed other than from inside, a phenomenon I examine at length in my chapter on Hangover Square. What outsiders see is one version of pub reality; what the heavy-drinking habitués see is an alternative, no less real but very different. The author's own experience becomes significant, and Hamilton, like Alcoholics Anonymous, believes that only an insider can apprehend, and thus represent, alcoholic existence.⁶

Hamilton chose to entitle his uncompleted autobiography "Memoirs of a Heavy Drinking Man," an odd title which draws attention to his alcoholism without romanticizing it. When Hamilton began planning The Midnight Bell, he wrote to his brother

What a miraculous opportunity for reaping my wild oats!
If ever a man knew the atmosphere and life and ethics
of these places it's me. And what an opportunity for
my own particular brand of fun! Drunkenness. I should
be able to write a rollicking little masterpiece.

(French 90)

The final product is far too dark to be described as "a rollicking little masterpiece," of course, but it does reflect Hamilton's expertise in what he summarizes as "the atmosphere and life and ethics" of pubs.

The point must be made, however, that Hamilton's interest in authentic details, in verisimilitude, becomes,

when pubs--and drinking--are the issue, partial and limited. His expertise in this area translates into a drinker's perspective, rather than a more objective, wide-ranging one. Reading the novels is to be impressed by how well Hamilton knows the culture; reading histories of the pub is to realize how narrow a perspective is relied upon.

Ben Davis's book on The Traditional English Pub: A Way of Drinking is the work of an architect interested in professional details, but Davis takes the attitude of an admirer and patron of pubs.⁷ His analysis and suggestions are therefore not bloodless, but sympathetic and interested, which highlights observations such as this: "A pub, as we are too often reminded by marketing men, is a retail outlet. If it is nothing more than this it will fail, but the fact cannot be refuted, and in seeking the essentials we must ensure that the mundane physical requirements of delivery, storage and service of the merchandise are also taken care of" (2). The business aspects of the pub, from profitability to managing "the merchandise," are wholly neglected by Hamilton. This is not a failing, but a result of Hamilton's focus on the margins of the lower-middle class; the publicans and brewing companies are left to their own devices.

In Hamilton's trilogy, although both main characters live in the pub and readers are ostensibly given an inside view of the whole pub, in fact the scope is narrowed to include only part of the life of the Midnight Bell. The

Midnight Bell establishes immediately which segment of the pub will be its subject. The novel's first chapter introduces Bob and Ella, providing important information about their backgrounds, personalities, and relationship. The second chapter introduces the Midnight Bell or, more precisely, its Saloon Bar and Lounge: "Those entering the Saloon Bar of 'The Midnight Bell' from the street came through a large door with a fancifully frosted glass pane, a handle like a dumb-bell, a brass inscription 'Saloon Bar and Lounge,' and a brass adjuration to Push."⁸ Having thus brought the reader into the Saloon Bar by the street door, Hamilton describes the setting at length--this is the description quoted by Hugh David in The Fitzrovians. Expressly excluded from consideration are the Public and Private Bars:

In here [the Saloon Lounge] and in the Saloon Bar 'The Midnight Bell' did most of its business--the two other bars (the Public and the Private) being dreary, seatless, bareboarded structures wherein drunkenness was dispensed in coarser tumblers and at a cheaper rate to a mostly collarless and frankly downtrodden stratum of society. The Public Bar could nevertheless be glimpsed by a customer in the Saloon Bar, and as the evening wore on it provided the latter with an acoustic background of deep mumbling and excited talk without which its whole atmosphere would have been lost--without which, indeed, the nightly drama of the Saloon

Bar would have been rather like a cinematograph drama without music. . . . (17, text ellipses)

The saloon bar and lounge provide the widest cross-section of patrons. As noted in The Midnight Bell, the saloon bar customers are not working class, but middle-class or on the lower fringes of the middle class. The saloon bar is the refuge of Hamilton's class; while it is part of Hamilton's milieu, the other bars are not.

Furthermore, Hey's discussion of pub rooms, from the "absolutely taboo to women" Vault up through the "women's rooms" like Snugs and bar parlours,⁹ reveals that Hamilton's choice also provides the most mixed gender interaction in a largely male preserve. Women are permitted in the saloon lounge, either accompanied by their husbands or "deposited" there.¹⁰ At the same time, since unaccompanied men are verboten in the snug, they are clearly the norm in the saloon bar. The saloon bar, then, provides the best gender mix to be found in the pub; couples, unaccompanied men, and "deposited" wives.

So deeply does Hamilton draw readers into the world of the Saloon Bar and Lounge it is easy to forget that those other areas exist. When the TLS reviewer complains that the barmaid and waiter would not have the same day off, he has forgotten about those other areas and their staff. Ella hears the news of Bob's departure from another Midnight Bell barmaid, "Freda, the barmaid round in the public bar, who did not sleep in, and whom Ella did not know very well or

like particularly" (498). In spite of the pub staff's Christmas festivities, this is the first we have seen of Freda; totally inconsequential in terms of the story, these bars and their people are none the less there, in the background.

The saloon bar is Hamilton's turf, and his presentation of the neophyte's view of the saloon bar could almost have come straight out of Davis' non-fictional recommendations for their arrangement and decoration. Early in The Siege of Pleasure, when Jenny and her friend Violet are picked up by two men, they go--at the men's suggestion--to the King's Head in Hammersmith, which is

a large and respectable house in the most crowded section of King Street. They went through a door marked "Saloon Lounge" into a spacious room with chocolate-coloured wood panelling, and copper-covered tables all round. There was a bar at one end, and one or two shining specimens of old-time armour in the corners. It was fully and brilliantly lit, though it was not yet completely dark outside and few of the tables were engaged. (264)

The physical descriptions, the interactions between Bob and Ella and their customers, the behavior of the patrons are all part of Hamilton's evocation not of pubs in general, but of the saloon bar and lounge.

What is the value of such detailed presentation of what some might say is "only" a pub? Peter Widdowson, writing of

"The Saloon Bar Society," complains that, in fact, "the 'Midnight Bell,' which should be a focal image of a non-home in the wastes of London, of a phoney warmth and security, remains no more than a punctiliously observed pub."¹¹

Brian McKenna agrees with this assessment, claiming that Hamilton's pub "verisimilitude can seem to be vacuous" ("Confessions" 231). Too many details, a result of Hamilton's determination to get it right, makes critics in pursuit of a socio-political indictment (Widdowson and McKenna) suspect that the author may be enjoying himself too much. Widdowson notes disapprovingly that

it is possibly significant that here even drinking-- Hamilton's most suggestive expanding metaphor--fails to transcend the jottings, precise and detailed as they are, of an individual who spends much time in its vicinity and therefore believes that it contains, intrinsically, a common metaphorical significance.

(124)

Curiously, Hamilton's attention to detail also makes his novels vulnerable to another kind of "debunking": complaints of inaccuracy, presumably based on the commentator's own experience of pubs. The TLS review of The West Pier casts a glance back over Hamilton's career, and complains of inaccuracy in the details of pub life in the trilogy:

In Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky it does not seem to matter very much that the glasses are left unwashed at the end of each evening or that the barman

and barmaid have the same day out. These are factual inaccuracies excused by the force of the narrative.¹²

I have already discussed the question of the alleged staffing problems at the Midnight Bell, and would like to consider the question of washing-up. The first closing shown in The Midnight Bell has Bob showing out a few reluctant patrons; upon his return, he finds that "Ella, about to retire, was patting her hair for the last time in her little bottle-surrounded mirror" (43). The following morning we see "the less spectacular side of Bob's employment" (43). He takes care of the brass, and prepares the new fire in the Lounge while Ella works behind the bar. When Ella becomes the protagonist, we are told that after closing, Ella "wiped the bar and tidied up roughly (ready for next morning) in the same old way" (510). Clearly the glasses are "left unwashed at the end of each evening."

Once again, Hamilton and Mass-Observation can be brought together to resolve this apparent inconsistency, for Mass-Observation has nothing less than a "Report on the Use of Towels for Drying and Polishing Glasses in Public Houses."¹³ Their findings corroborate Hamilton's encyclopedic knowledge of pub practices, for more than half of the 140 pubs studied "definitely allowed" dirty glasses to accumulate, "so that there was more than just the closing-time residuum left to be cleaned after the pub was shut. Of these, about a third leave the cleaning until next morning, before opening time." Furthermore, the cleaning

practices are related, to some extent, to the class of pub involved: "A class-correlation, however, did bring out the fact that the more classy pubs tend to wash up as they go along to a rather lesser extent than other pubs." Twenty-nine percent of B-class pubs, the class of the Midnight Bell, left the washing up until the following morning.

But what is going on here? The pub towel report, bound to draw the ire of the theory police, indicates the high value Mass-Observation placed on precisely the kind of detail that makes high-minded critics suspicious. Mass-Observation clearly believed it was worth doing this kind of work. Mass-Observation originated in the same impulse that drove the well-known literary figures of the 1930s, but what gives their work a lasting interest is its creation, complementary to Hamilton's, of a record of a long-gone era. Tom Harrisson complained of the timelessness of the Auden crowd's literary productions, not meaning the word as a tribute but as a criticism of the disembodied, immaterial nature of their writing. Work like the pub towel report can be seen as an answer.

One peculiarly significant aspect of pubs is how money is handled. A pub is a place where money is spent in the same way that it is earned by workers: piecemeal, a little bit at a time. Patrons must pay as they go, and even heavy drinkers could not be described as extravagant. Such boundaries make the pub a perfect site for Hamilton's analysis of what ails the socio-economic system, for no

other setting would provide the same constellation of material circumstances. The pub, then, is not just a tosspot's choice, and the accuracy of its presentation does matter.

As Hamilton's superior knowledge of pub "trivia" is to be trusted, so are his instincts in creating the record at all, for literary works can accomplish things no other kind of writing can. Pierre Bourdieu, in The Rules of Art, makes this point in the context of Flaubert:

There is no better testimony of all that separates literary writing from scientific writing than this capacity, which it alone possesses, to concentrate and condense in the concrete singularity of a sensitive figure and an individual adventure, functioning both as metaphor and metonymy, all the complexity of a structure and a history which scientific analysis must laboriously unfold and deploy.¹⁴

Hamilton's novels, in a compact and graceful form, record the same kinds of details about everyday life in England that Mass-Observation believed it was important to record. The details are not only accurate, they are a central part of Hamilton's success.

FITZROVIA AND THE LITERARY PUB

There's no literature at the Midnight Bell, only Mr. Sounder, in spite of the Midnight Bell's clear connection to Fitzrovia.¹⁵ The literary pub regulars, like Julian

Maclaren-Ross, create the impression of a scene comprised of writers in the foreground and others non-existent or purely background--like the rather generic noise from the public bar that filters into the saloon bar in the Midnight Bell. As Hugh David demonstrates, the shifting of literary bohemia from hangouts such as the Café Royal to the seedier Fitzrovia district proper was well underway by the mid 1920s (125). He notes, too, that whether viewed from outside or inside, "Fitzrovia had none of the neat coherence with which it has been imbued in many later accounts and memoirs," and claims that "for most of its life Fitzrovia was no more colourful or exciting than any other district" (164). Hamilton's rendition of Fitzrovia, in a period predating its 1940s heyday, confirms David's analysis. The only literary regular that the Midnight Bell boasts is Mr. Sounder, and he is "not a particularly welcome figure" (21).

Mr. Sounder is the first Midnight Bell customer (and regular) introduced to the reader, but any suggestion that this signals the importance of literary production is immediately dashed. First, Mr. Sounder cuts a ridiculous figure:

His appearance was eccentric. Though of short stature he wore a thick beard and moustache which (though they did not in fact decrease his height) created an illusion of dwarfishness. This impression was augmented by the hair on his head, which went back in a thick mane magnificent for his age, which was

something over fifty. But then Mr. Sounder went in greatly for hair. Apart from that already mentioned, he had a great deal of hair upon his hands, and great deal of hair between his eyebrows, and great deal of hair in his ears, and rather more hair coming in two exact little sprouts from his nostrils than modern fashion allows or nicety dictates.

He wore, and had worn for years without interruption, a thick tweed suit, a soft collar, and a heavy bow tie. But sometimes his tie was a piece of black ribbon tied into a bow. (21-22)

Mr. Sounder's stature is further reduced by the gap between his background and his achievements, for "he had been to Oxford University, and was a man of letters--mostly to the papers" (22). His literary activity takes the form of writing "articles and short stories for the press, which were very occasionally accepted. He called this Turning Out Little Things from Time to Time. An enormous Thing perpetually in progress was postulated but left in the dark" (22). Partly because he spends so much time at the pub, however, Mr. Sounder's "enormous Thing" is destined to remain forever in progress, never completed.

The Little Thing he has Turned Out when the novel opens is a letter to the Star. He has brought a copy of the paper with him, to share with his adoring public. Ella takes pity on him and reads it; it turns out to treat "in a manly but rather vituperative style with the topic of woman's hair.

He personally liked it long. That much was clear from the start" (23).

Later, the specimen of Mr. Sounder's poetry Hamilton provides is on a par with his Little Thing about women's hair; reading Sounder's poem about Westminster Abbey, "knowing the subject, [Bob] was able to get a pretty fair picture of Mr. Sounder sitting in the Abbey and enjoying the scenery and organ" (67). Hamilton cannot pass up the opportunity to mock Mr. Sounder's poem by citing its vapid rhymes and clichéd content. A sample of the beginning will suffice to reveal the poem's merits and the novel's attitude toward it:

Beginning with an impassioned apostrophe to the "fretted lights and tall, aspiring nave," Mr. Sounder went straight ahead to describe the music, which was coming in "wave on wave," and which in so doing (as we might have known) his "soul did lave" in all sorts of mystic feelings. (67)

Not only does Hamilton draw attention to the rhymes by presenting them out of context, as it were, rather than 'transcribing' the whole poem, he underscores them further by italicizing the words forming the rhymes. The appeal to the reader's recognition of the banality of both image and language--"as we might have known"--seals judgment on the poem. The description continues through the rest of the sonnet, each cited rhythm further condemnation of Mr. Sounder's gifts for poetry and his pretensions as a literary

man. Insinuating himself into the good graces of Mr. Loame, the actor, in order to be bought drinks by the latter, Mr. Sounder uses a mixture of self-promotion and flattery. It transpires that Mr. Sounder has

Little Things in--ah--Mr. Loame's line--dramatic sketches, to be blunt--which he thought Mr. Loame might just like to cast his eye over. But he had only Turned them Out every now and again and was quite willing to admit that the dramatic craft was very different from the literary one. That was where Mr. Loame came in.

(116-17)

If this is Fitzrovia, The Midnight Bell suggests, it is rather overrated as an alternative literary salon--though not, perhaps, as a pub world. One of the Midnight Bell's regulars is specifically identified as living in Fitzroy Square. He is known as the "Illegal Operation," for the obvious reason; again, Fitzrovia is hardly a literary paradise in Hamilton's view. Early in The Plains of Cement, Hamilton describes the environs of the pub, which is "in the vicinity of the Euston Road and Warren Street" (333-334). The novel proposes "a student of the streets" visualizing the pub's geographic base, and this is what he would see:

The respectable, residential precincts of Regent's Park, the barracks and lodging-houses of Albany Street, the grim senility of Munster Square, the commercial fury of the Euston and Tottenham Court Roads, the criminal patches and Belgian penury of Charlotte and

Whitfield Streets, the vast palace of pain known as Middlesex Hospital, the motor-salesman's paradise of Portland Place itself--all these would crowd in upon each other in the microcosm thus discriminated--a microcosm well-nigh as incongruous and grotesque as any that the searcher might be able to alight upon in the endless plains of cement at his disposal. (334)

In imagining this variety, and insisting upon its grotesque and unappealing nature while omitting any reference to those writers and artists who "occupied" its pubs, Hamilton has turned his back on the widely-held perception of Fitzrovia's publand as an artistic bohemia.

This non-literary view of Fitzrovia may be self-explanatory, or even self-serving. One of John Betjeman's principal observations about Hamilton in "Moustache or Clean-Shaven?," one that could only be made by an interested and informed contemporary like Betjeman, was that Hamilton was literally invisible.¹⁶ Julian Maclaren-Ross's description of himself as "a professional writer as opposed to being a professional literary man"¹⁷ (Memoirs xv) applies even more acutely in Hamilton's case than in Maclaren-Ross's own. Maclaren-Ross, after all, was often seen in Fitzrovia, and tales of him are not hard to find. Hamilton, in contrast, must have been there--familiarity with the literature of Fitzrovia and with Hamilton's pub trilogy makes plain just how much time Hamilton must have spent there--but while its real-life denizens remark on

Hamilton's fiction, they never betray any personal acquaintance or report sightings of him. Based on Betjeman's testimony, it is not difficult to imagine that he was there, unnoticed and unrecognized.

The only person who claims to have seen Hamilton in that cosy, pub-regular way is Arnold Rattenbury, who says he encountered Hamilton

as very much the junior in groups of pub-goers including such people as Randall Swingler, Claud Cockburn, Reggie Smith. . . . After Swingler's disappearance into the army and my own re-emergence from it in 1943, and while Hamilton, I now realise, must have been writing The Slaves of Solitude and The Governess I saw him now and again in necessarily changed company--John Davenport, Arthur Calder Marshall, Jim Phelan, Maurice Richardson, I would have thought Julian Maclaren Ross, though he says not. (When social meeting-places for writers in the wartime blackout were three or four contiguous Soho pubs and another pair off the Strand, many more than Dylan Thomas and Patrick Hamilton drank solidly and long: Orwell, more often considered a sobersides, for one.)¹⁸

Rattenbury, however, is remembering these people and events more than fifty years later. He puts names to an awareness that Hamilton must have been there, but these names are driven by that "must have" sense rather than actual

recollection. This is demonstrated by his reference to Julian Maclaren-Ross, which is footnoted to Memoirs of the Forties. Which of the others may have been named in the same spirit it is impossible to tell.

Maclaren-Ross is worth looking at in the context of Fitzrovia and Hamilton's presentation of its mores and inhabitants. If Arthur Calder-Marshall is a noteworthy counterpart to Hamilton in terms of political ideology and what might be called "thirties experience," Julian Maclaren-Ross fulfills similar functions under an equally-important constellation of Hamilton concerns: pubs, drinking and addiction. Maclaren-Ross enjoyed few privileges of the Calder-Marshall stripe (which is perhaps one reason he lampoons Calder-Marshall's affectation of working-class traits); like Hamilton, he needed to earn money by his writing, and he too lived a life of rented rooms, pubs, and bad restaurant meals. The similarity of their professional contexts and fictional interests make the contrasts that do exist particularly informative.

Most critics speak of Maclaren-Ross in terms nearly identical to those used of Hamilton by his commentators: failure to live up to early promise and tragedy are the normative critical and biographical emphases. Robert Hewison and Hugh David describe Maclaren-Ross as "finally a tragic figure"¹⁹ and "in the last analysis a tragic figure" (David 180). Dan Davin baldly summarizes Maclaren-Ross as a "major talent of minor accomplishment."²⁰ That Hamilton's

critics overstate his failings can be seen in the contrast between his financial circumstances and Maclaren-Ross's. Hamilton's plays, through their movie adaptations and countless stage performances, generated a substantial regular income for their creator. Without that income, "there is no doubt that . . . Hamilton could not have financed his consumption [of alcohol]" (French 191). In contrast, Maclaren-Ross's later years were filled with "endless pressure to finish small things quickly to get money for the rent, for food, cigarettes, alcohol, and taxis" (Davin 11). Their expenditures were similar in kind, if not in scale, and it was Hamilton's literary success that allowed him to spend £2,000 a year on whisky in the mid-1940s²¹; Maclaren-Ross never achieved such (doubled-edged) success.

Both Hamilton and Maclaren-Ross were solitary figures, heavy drinkers who maintained severely professional standards for their writing. Rayner Heppenstall's fictional alter-ego in The Lesser Infortune is amazed by a thinly-veiled Maclaren-Ross: "I gazed at these manifestations of sinful pride and marvelled at the purity of the man's ambition and resolve."²² At the same time, their professionalism never entailed life-as-research; while both writers made use of their experiences, they did not permit a desire for fictional material to select those experiences in advance. This puts them in marked contrast, not only to more-privileged Marxist writers of the thirties and forties

like Calder-Marshall, but to other professional writers such as Graham Greene.

Maclaren-Ross's tale of his encounter with Greene is profoundly illuminating, with Maclaren-Ross's lived experience contrasting frequently with Greene's deliberate pursuit of material, a contrast Maclaren-Ross emphasizes. Greene is shocked to learn that Maclaren-Ross is selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door (although Greene's housekeeper had immediately identified him as a salesman), but assumes this to be in pursuit of material; in fact, Maclaren-Ross is doing it because he " 'wouldn't have any money otherwise' " (16). Even their shared Catholicism represents a divide between lived-life and reflective arrangement: "Greene said: 'Yes, I was converted in 1926.' I said: 'I was baptized one in 1912,' which disconcerted him more than the vacuum cleaners" (18).

Further, Greene enjoys the workings of a whole system of support and defense. His wife screens him from what she views as wastes of his time--"she was sure that he would have liked to read my stories but she was also sure that I would understand why this would not be possible" (27-28)--and Greene trails in his wake a whole entourage of lawyers and accountants, while Maclaren-Ross must rely on his own efforts and such advice as his friends can supply.

The fictional milieus of Maclaren-Ross and Hamilton share considerable overlap. Both wrote "thrillers" of sorts (and took a keen interest in the genre), and both portrayed

the seedy life of pubs and rented accommodation. Hugh David believes that Fitzrovia brought together the "disparate elements" of Maclaren-Ross's life:

Not only was Fitzrovia's undercurrent of shady wheeler-dealing reminiscent of so much of the thirties roadhouse talk of Bognor [but] as the years went by he found his talent uniquely well honed to the task of immortalising that milieu of which he discovered, or made, himself the uncrowned prince. (177)

Such a description could well be applied to much of Hamilton's work, and in fact, Maclaren-Ross saw Hamilton as a model for what he wanted to accomplish. When, in 1938, he met with Jonathan Cape after the publisher had seen some of his short stories, they discussed

Arthur Calder-Marshall, who had done successfully in some of his work what I was trying to do--namely to create a completely English equivalent to the American vernacular used by such writers as Hemingway, Cain and O'Hara, concentrating in my case mainly on the middle and lower-middle classes, an area cornered so far by V. S. Pritchett and Patrick Hamilton. (9)

Maclaren-Ross distinguishes the level represented in Calder-Marshall's fiction from the one he and Hamilton portrayed in theirs--middle and lower-middle class--and identifies their ability to re-create the very texture of language as the collective strength of the writers he names.

Maclaren-Ross, like Hamilton, denies the simple and

sentimental reading of Fitzrovia as a place where, during its forties heyday, "every night saw Dylan Thomas and Julian Maclaren-Ross, a tight clique of Apocalyptic poets and other, similarly impecunious members of the new literati clustering amiably round the Wheatsheaf's bar" (David 164-65).²³ Maclaren-Ross's formulation, as the ultimate insider, has particular significance. Alan Ross's description of an evening in the Wheatsheaf, one for which "absolutely everyone was there" (Memoirs 159), left out whole categories of important people. According to Maclaren-Ross,

But there were other figures whom he did not mention and possibly did not notice, without whom the Wheatsheaf wouldn't really have been complete: they made up the background and the unsung chorus and occasionally, on an off-night, the entire cast.

These fell roughly into three categories:

Regulars, Wits and Bums. (159)

This kind of observation matches neatly with Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, though it might be argued that Hamilton has overcompensated, and left out the writers altogether. Mr. Sounder, of the pseudo-literary persuasion, and Mr. Wall, two of the Midnight Bell's regulars, have cultivated their own style of being bar bores to the points of being unable to adapt. Put together, they are "notoriously incapable of hitting it off, and the thwarted condescension of the one, together with the invulnerable

impudence of the other, were features of "The Midnight Bell" in the evening" (65). Life at the Midnight Bell, or at the Wheatsheaf, is not comprised of wonderful evenings and scintillating wit, according to Hamilton and Maclaren-Ross, but a great deal of boredom and frustration and a great many "off nights."

LIFE AT THE MIDNIGHT BELL

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky has an unusually large number of characters for Hamilton's fiction. Most Hamilton novels present only a handful of characters by name or in any depth; here, more characters, of more backgrounds are introduced than is Hamilton's common practice. Nonetheless, the trilogy really belongs to Bob and Ella, both of whom work and live at the pub.²⁴ The openings of all three novels establish an impression of loneliness, monotony, even fear. In The Midnight Bell, Bob wakes from a dream of sailing to re-enter the painful drudgery of his everyday existence; upon waking, "the burden of cold and ever-recurring existence weighed down his spirit. Here he was again" (11). Jenny's novel begins with a prologue which places her, for readers of The Midnight Bell, on the street shortly after her final encounter with Bob. She is frightened by the prospect of imminent arrest by a policeman who "was clearly out to get her" and by the prospect of Bob's reappearance; in order to get off the streets, she lets herself be picked up by someone whose appearance "as a

business proposition" she does not approve (222). Ella's story opens with an even more resolutely downbeat note; London and the Midnight Bell are identified as weird and dangerous places, while her own physical plainness and dull life are described.

The opening of The Plains of Cement has not only its regular task to perform--setting the scene, introducing the characters, grabbing the reader's attention--it must also connect itself to The Midnight Bell without simply repeating what is in the earlier novel. The connection between the two novels carries great weight, for a significant part of Ella's aloneness is revealed by the disjunctions between Bob's version of events and her own. In an early stage of his self-inflicted troubles with Jenny, Bob reflects on how much easier Ella's life is than his own: "He envied her her plainness and goodness. . . . It was a facile mode of life, and he wished his own temperament was the same" (100, text ellipses). What The Plains of Cement achieves is to show just how wrong Bob is--Ella's life is anything but "facile"--and to show just how alone Ella is, when the person closest to her totally misses her struggles and pain.

Hamilton singles out several key aspects of existence for those who work at, as opposed to patronize, the pub. His interest in language, how these marginal people have only clichés with which to communicate, is evident in The Midnight Bell and The Plains of Cement. As Andy Croft notes, the trilogy novels

were partly comic novels, stories of working-class and lower middle-class London whose humour depended on the ironic distance between a knowingly pretentious style and an unpretentious subject matter. Hamilton's frequent use of 'Komic Kapitals', for example, simultaneously subverts the power of received ideas and phrases, dignifies his inarticulate characters--by separating them from their second-hand expressions--and draws attention to the politics of expression, custom, etiquette and class snobbery. (144)

In a similar vein, Arnold Rattenbury sees Hamilton's characters as trapped by their language:

Moreover the characters themselves are increasingly liable to further restriction by those other sealed-in qualities of drunkenness, schizophrenia, silence between classes, somnambulism, blindness, but chiefly--and from the start--by a strangle-held version of English language. They can only express themselves codedly, by clutching at single phrases which may have once expressed a thought but are now become mantras, catch-phrases, slogans only thought to express a thought or belief. (204)

Both critics are correct, for in these novels Hamilton does not simply present the language of these characters, but he provides an authorial voice to comment and explain. Several features require attention.

First, while these characters rely on stock phrases,

they also make use of clichéd images from other media, particularly films, to communicate with others. When Jenny and her fellow prostitute first come into the Midnight Bell, for example, movie images allow them to communicate across a considerable social divide. The older woman, trying to compliment Bob, compares him to " 'that man we saw on the pictures the other night' " (32). In spite of the comparison's reductive nature and the transparency of the ruse, "the compliment enriched his soul, as he stood there" (33). Trying to convey to these two women his image of his father, an American policeman, Bob fails until Jenny calls on her knowledge of American films: "Jenny, however, suddenly and surprisingly, caught on to the idea. 'Like what you see on the films,' she said" (34). Bob is pleased by her response, seeing in it an indication of her comprehension.

This habit is not limited to Hamilton's characters; he himself used movie images as communication. When explaining his romance with the prostitute Lily Connolly to his brother, he relied on actresses and their images to convey his vague ideas of "Romance" and "Thought." Sean French finds that such a mode of description "undermine[s] its reality" (91), but as a literary device in Hamilton's fiction, it is offered as a means of communication available to people lacking sophisticated language or simply in need of illustrating their point to someone who might not understand it.

The language limitations faced by these characters are fully spelled out in The Plains of Cement. It must not be overlooked, however, that their use of clichés and stock phrases is defended. Hamilton does not make fun of them, or imply that they are stupid because they necessarily communicate in such stale and limited ways; as Croft notes, he is illuminating a larger problem, one that they do not control. Ella, we are told, like a poet breathes new life into old forms:

Nor was she by any means inarticulate. The banality of the expressions she employed in voicing her thoughts was no criterion of those thoughts' real shrewdness or aptness. Infinitely stale and hackneyed idioms she certainly used, but this was merely because, having access to the wisdom of the ages, she used the expressions sanctified by the ages. Ella always meant what she said. She breathed life into old forms. Hence, when Ella remarked, say, that "the longest way round is the shortest way home" she was not echoing a proverb as a parrot would. On the contrary, after the continually recurring experience in her everyday life, of the fact that short, hasty, or violent methods on behalf of any end generally involve the frustration of the whole endeavour, she had long sought in her thoughtful mind for some law to convey the detached instances of this phenomenon, and had at last alighted, with joy, upon the ready-made aphorism. (335)

Two points that Hamilton is at pains to make--he includes several detailed examples of how Ella's trite phrases are not mindless repetitions--are first, that "a poet could have done no better" and second, that "a superficial observer . . . might easily mistake for dullness her genuine love of artistic self-expression" (336).

Furthermore, her use of language is a defense mechanism, one which allows her to cope with situations that might otherwise be unbearable. Her job, for instance, would be untenable for "a virtuous, homely, and simple-minded young woman" without a technique for rendering it manageable. For Ella, it is her use of clichés that transforms her surroundings:

"We get all sorts in here," she would say, in her slow, amiable way. Or, "Oh yes. They get ever so fresh, sometimes." Or, "It's a funny business, that's a fact." And having thus peacefully called upon her wonderful inner machinery for rendering the abnormal normal without a qualm, she would not give the matter another thought. (334-35)

Language may be a limitation, or a trap, for those on the margins of the lower-middle class, but it can also serve an important purpose.

Another issue that receives attention in Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky is drinking, although the trilogy is not primarily an exploration of alcoholism. Jenny's drinking, discussed in the next chapter, is

alcoholic; Bob's could be characterized as problem drinking, not yet deteriorated into full-blown alcoholism. His drinking is identified as an issue almost immediately, in the opening scene of The Midnight Bell. It is implicated in his depressing return to wakefulness: "Why had he slept? He remembered coming up here, a happy man, at half-past three. . . . Then he cursed himself softly and vindictively. He faced facts. He had got drunk at lunch again" (12). Not only is he introduced with an afternoon hangover, but the situation is recurring rather than unusual-- Bob got drunk at lunch again. Ella mildly chastises him for his behavior, mentioning " 'all them drinks' " and observing that " 'If this was my place, I'd've sent you out of the bar' " (15). Bob's denial and rationalization are given short shrift by sensible Ella:

"I wasn't drunk."

"Well, you weren't far. I thought you said you was giving up drink, Bob?"

"Well, I can't help it, if they give 'em to me."

"Oh yes," said Ella, with profound sarcasm. "The Penalties of Popularity, I suppose." (15)

If Bob had said he was giving up drink, and particularly if, having said so, he is unable to do so, clearly he already has a drinking problem before the action of The Midnight Bell ever begins.

Drinking is implicated in many of his mistakes, including the first, his too-friendly remark to Jenny: "the

three beers he had had--all this time plotting their subtle loosening along his brain--now had a sudden piece of luck and managed to release his next remark before he was ready for it" (32). Here drink is personified, given responsibility for a mistake that Bob made.

Nonetheless, Bob is not too far gone. His drinking does increase, and his control over the circumstances of his consumption can be weak at times, but he still has standards by which to judge his intake: "He had been fooled. He had not, after all, had a great time: he had merely been drinking again. . . . He had spent two pounds. He had, in fact, done it again: and he was becoming, according to his own standards, totally dissolute" (62). The ending of The Midnight Bell strongly suggests that Bob has recovered from both Jenny and his problem drinking. His descent into alcoholism is abruptly arrested, and not until Hangover Square will Hamilton fully explore the nuances of alcoholism.

Most important in The Midnight Bell is Bob's money, which, as Sean French correctly notes, is "at the centre of the story" (96). Bob's savings are treated very seriously in the novel. Special attention is given to the painfully built up credits and the wild flurry of debits brought on by Bob's infatuation with Jenny. The two fit together in an essential relation; our knowledge of the credits makes the debits more painful. As long as he has the slowly-building savings, Bob can deceive himself about his aspirations to be

a writer, and believe that his job as waiter is only temporary. The money on deposit when the novel opens is Bob's hedge against life; his job may be tedious and not spectacularly remunerative, but his savings allow him to remain in the respectable reaches of the lower-middle class. He is aware of this himself: "Not that Bob had any greed for money itself, or had any formulated intentions towards his own. It merely stood between him and the dire need to toil, and made a man of him" (45). Once the money is gone, at novel's end, Bob is effectively demoted to laboring class and must resume his career as a sailor. The tale of that saving's gradual accretion and sudden dispersal signifies the great fear of those precariously-situated characters who inhabit Hamilton's fictional milieu: any assault on their limited means drives them out of the middle class altogether.

It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that Bob's money is the most important thing in his life, or that making Jenny more important than it dooms him to failure. Ella, wondering about his afternoons off, suspects him of having a girl, but "he did not really want a girl. There would be a Girl one day, but at present he walked, on his Thursday afternoons, with far richer and more tremulous absorptions--those of his youth, and his aspiration, and his eighty pounds" (45).

The money on deposit dates from before the novel's opening, but the stages of its growth, and Bob's increasing

pleasure in it, are carefully detailed:

His eighty pounds resided at the Midland Bank in the Tottenham Court Road. It had once been only forty-seven pounds, which had come to him on his mother's death seven years ago. It had only been within the last two years or so that he had begun properly to save. He could still remember the calm satisfaction with which he had brought it up to fifty: the self-applause caused by its reaching sixty: the elation and sheer priggish conceit of seventy--and now it was eighty--eighty exactly. Having, like most of us, a congenitally decimal mind, he always enjoyed his money most when the sum was exactly divisible by ten. Eighty-three, for instance, would be quite a bore--just a depressingly distant halting-place on the road to ninety. (45)

While we are not shown any actual deposits, Hamilton explains the method behind Bob's savings plan: his "nightly aspiration was five shillings. He was a young man who kept a keen eye upon his finances, and a pound a week in tips he regarded as a peremptory necessity" (25). To that end, he exercises several stratagems, for "he believed it possible, by energy, subtlety, and dexterity, to manipulate and augment the largesse of his customers. The great thing was always to have plenty of coppers" (25). Through the course of Bob's first working evening in the novel, Hamilton provides periodic updates on how Bob is doing: he "achieved

twopence," "he had already made one and six", "he had made four and ninepence already" (26, 27, 34). The sixpence Jenny gives him (36) puts him over his scheduled goal, but Bob's total for the night is a negative: he lends Jenny ten shillings (38) which, in spite of her promises to repay, it is obvious to the reader Bob will never recover.

Because Bob's money is built up so painstakingly, he knows exactly what things are worth in terms of time and labor. In a pub with Jenny, he calculates their drinks in time:

"What'll you have?" he asked. "Same again?"

"That's right."

He got up and brought them to her. They came to one and eight--a good hour's work at "The Midnight Bell."

(127)

Hamilton's predilection, noticeable from his first novel, to explicitly tie expenditure to income finds a very fertile field in the world of the Midnight Bell.

Bob's withdrawals commence fairly soon after he begins his pursuit of Jenny, and they escalate in their violence. His first withdrawal takes the most rationalizing on his part. Having already spent money on Jenny that he could ill afford, Bob decides to withdraw five pounds from his account. To allow this unprecedented debit, he

came to a new theory of Money. He was shrewd enough to see that his eighty pounds was not really lying at the Bank. Long ago embraced in oceans of money and credit,

it existed merely in his mind and that of the Midland-- had no reality. The whole thing being, then, purely arithmetical and immaterial, if he drew from the sum he would not be subtracting anything from a lump of money, but simply changing his mind about what he possessed-- revising his mental attitude towards his own wealth.

(83)

But of course, for Bob and those in his class, the only safe attitude towards money is a concrete one; by keeping diligently on top of his shillings and pence, Bob has amassed those pounds at the Midland Bank. To become theoretical about money is fatal, and indeed this new "theory of Money" signals Bob's submission to his fate. Bob is aware of his "sophistry" in coming up with this new plan but, notably, the compensation is "having in his hands, in crisp notes--five pounds to do whatever he liked with" (84).

His next withdrawal is also for five pounds (132), but the third increases to ten (153). Part of that money--six and a half guineas--goes for a new suit, so all is not thrown away. He draws ten again (168), but then, on Christmas Eve, takes twenty-five in expectation of a trip to Brighton with Jenny (196). When she attempts to cancel the trip, on the pretext of a more important obligation with a "Proper gentleman" (199), he simply hands the money over to dissuade her from going. Having done that, and gotten her agreement to a Boxing Day departure for Brighton, he asks the landlord at the Midnight Bell to cash a check for his

remaining twenty-five pounds. He tells himself that "he would never spend all this, but . . . he wanted to leave a broad margin and feel secure. It was awful to think that it was the last of his money, but he just wouldn't think about it " (208). Jenny stands him up, he gets blind drunk, and is robbed of his money. The final indignity is that he must borrow money from Prunella, one of Jenny's fellow prostitutes, to stay in a doss house. The sum Prunella supplies is, ironically, five shillings--the amount of Bob's nightly aspiration in better times.

Meanwhile, Ella has her own money problems, and her painful ending is set up by her hopes of escape them. She balances several possibilities, but all come to nothing, each in a particularly rude and crushing fashion. These possibilities, while they remain alive, underscore her essential helplessness and passivity. Bob dreams of writing; when he has come to the end of his rope, he returns to his previous profession (one could even say, rather melodramatically, that he runs away to sea). These kinds of options, flawed as they are, are not available to Ella, who must wait, endure, and hope if she is able.

As a woman, she is even more powerless than Bob to be an active agent in her own life. This state of affairs is made more painful by her awareness of it. Christmas, a fixture in Hamilton's novels, drives home to Ella the futility of her life. Her Christmas gift for Bob--who, unbeknownst to Ella, is nearing his final defeat at Jenny's

hands--gets no response from him, and she feels exhausted by the world's indifference:

So much for Christmas presents. And, alas, it was beyond reasonable expectation to imagine that a silk handkerchief wrapped around a box of twenty Players could make a man love you.

Two hours later she was still awake and it was raining in the dark of Christmas Day. It poured down gently with a steady level of dripping murmur on the roof--like something wishing to instil in her, in the quiet blackness of the night, a sense of the hidden but ever present realities of her lonely and meaningless struggle in the world of London--of the endless procession of solitary nights after senseless working days--of the endless procession of meagre triumphs and frustrations in connection with the disinterested agents of her fate--Mr. Eccles, her stepfather, Master Eric, India, Christmas, Bob, the Governor. And though months had passed, with all these playing their stimulating or wearying parts, where was she now? In her cave, at night, with the rain coming down on the roof. And on Christmas Day--like the last Christmas Day, and the next. And still she could not sleep and still the rain came down. (494)

These "disinterested agents of her fate" represent pitifully small hopes, and their lack of fruition underscores Hamilton's championing of London's invisibles. Throughout

The Plains of Cement, Ella is pursued by Mr. Eccles, a ridiculous and annoying middle-aged suitor who, nonetheless, offers the possibility of financial support and thus is tolerated by Ella as long as she can manage it. The luxuries he offers her--a night at the theater, a meal at the Lyons' Corner House--show how limited are her means. Additionally, her disliked stepfather is seriously ill, and for a time it looks as if he will die, leaving her mother in peace and both women with a small legacy. Finally, she gets a lead on a job as nanny to the children of a wealthy family about to go to India. Ultimately, however, Mr. Eccles becomes unbearable, her stepfather recovers, and she does not get the India job. Bob leaves the pub to return to the sea, and Ella is left even more alone than she was when the novel started. The novel ends with Bob's replacement, John, overhearing Ella's weeping.

As the public refuge of his boarding-house and hotel characters, the pub has great significance for Hamilton's fictional milieu. As a setting, it provides a chance to examine the mores of a widespread social institution, one whose routines are manifestations of larger social truths. As Andy Croft summarizes the achievement of the trilogy, "the three novels contain a strong presentation of the political structures behind social ritual, the powers of oppression and collusion attached to ideas of class and gender" (146).

Furthermore, Hamilton's choice of a pub as setting for Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky allows him to bring to life such overlooked and heavily-stereotyped figures as the barmaid and barman. Hamilton draws attention to this in The Plains of Cement when he observes that what Ella considers to be her "real" life is a complete blank to those who stereotype in order to render other people invisible:

for those who saw the neat, beer-pulling, chaffing Ella in the bar of "The Midnight Bell" carried social introspection no further than the epithet "barmaid," and it no more occurred to them to suspect that she had some such human background and spiritual resource, that she carried on a complete life of her own in other words, than it would have occurred to them to suspect her of murder or arson. Not even the Governor or Bob suspected. (390)

In Ella, Hamilton has captured the essence of life for those who inhabit his fictional milieu. Her loneliness, surrounded by the socializing pub world, is total and unrelieved.

NOTES

1. Quoted by B. McKenna, "Confessions," 231.
2. "One Man in His Time," New Statesman 17 July 1987, 29.
3. The Traditional English Pub: A Way of Drinking (London: Architectural Press, 1981), 2.
4. Patriarchy and Pub Culture (London: Tavistock, 1986), 39.
5. The Gorse Trilogy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 584.
6. In a curious coincidence, Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in America in 1935, the same year Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky was published as a one-volume trilogy.
7. In reference to a new pub of which he approves, the City of London Yeoman, Davis comments, "would that all owners of pubs would provide us, the drinking public, with environments as satisfying and acceptable in new pubs" (21) and considers that in general, English pubs are "probably the most civilised social-drinking environment yet produced anywhere" (3). Davis admires pubs and identifies himself as a customer.
8. Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky (London: Hogarth, 1987 [f.p. 1935]), 16. Subsequent references to all three of the trilogy's novels are from this edition and will be cited in the text.

9. Because she is working with names that vary slightly from pub to pub, her category for the saloon bar and lounge is "Lounge/parlour/'best' room" (46).

10. "Deposited" is Hey's term, and not inaccurate; I use "permitted" intentionally, to suggest the level of welcome that would have been accorded to women in any area of the pub. When Hamilton describes the first appearance of Jenny and her friend, he refers to their "quaint chaperonage" of each other; as remarkable as they are, two prostitutes in the Saloon Lounge, even they perceive the need for not entering alone.

11. "The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s," in The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy (London & New York: Harvester/Barnes & Noble, 1978), 123.

12. "Patrick Hamilton's Novels" 7 September 1951, 564.

13. File Report 1491, dated 5 November 1942.

Interestingly, the attached list of pubs included in the study lists the Fitzroy Tavern, alone under the geographic heading of "Euston."

14. Translated by Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 24.

15. Hugh David, The Fitzrovians (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), 158-59.

16. Spectator 28 December 1956, 930.

17. Memoirs of the Forties (London: Cardinal, 1988 [f.p. 1965]), xv.

18. "Literature, Lying and Sober Truth: Attitudes to the Work of Patrick Hamilton and Sylvia Townsend Warner," in Writing and Radicalism, ed. John Lucas (London & New York: Longman, 1996), 222. Subsequent references cited in text.
19. Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 66.
20. Dan Davin, Closing Times (London: Oxford U Press, 1975), 22.
21. B. Hamilton 110, calculation repeated in French 190.
22. Quoted in Hewison, 66.
23. David does not offer this summary as his own view, but rather as the kind of sentimentalizing too many people--both those who were part of Fitzrovia and those who were not--have indulged in.
24. Not only is Jenny's story briefer, and only loosely tied to the central location of the Midnight Bell, but Hamilton cannot muster the same sympathy for--or identification with--her character that are obviously felt for Bob and Ella. A fuller discussion of Jenny and her story appears in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

HAMILTON: A "FIRST-CLASS FELLOW TRAVELLER?"

My chapter title comes from Terry Eagleton, that monument of the British Left, who thus entitled--without the question mark--his review of Sean French's biography.¹ Marxism or, more generally, Leftist politics, constitutes one of the most important concepts for Hamilton studies but, curiously, encircles only his least-interesting literary production. The main literary focus for this chapter is necessarily Impromptu in Moribundia (1939), which Brian McKenna accurately labels Hamilton's "one explicitly Marxist novel," ("Confessions 240), but The Siege of Pleasure and The Plains of Cement are discussed as informative examples of how politics and novel-writing interconnected for Hamilton.

CRITICAL ISSUES

Ideologically-motivated critics, including McKenna, Andy Croft, and Peter Widdowson, are generally the most committed to paying attention to Hamilton's work; at times, they have been the only critics disposed to do so. In the same kind of paradox that makes Hamilton's political commitments important but not productive of his best

literary output, however, these critics, while very properly taking an interest in an often-overlooked and talented writer, do not produce commentary calculated to draw new readers to Hamilton's work. Either they are writing strictly for the already-converted (politically speaking) or their commentary focuses on Hamilton's politics to the exclusion of his literary merits. To put this another way, Hamilton's most interesting fiction is not produced by his undeniable commitment to Leftist politics; when the only critics writing about Hamilton are determined to emphasize his politics, they necessarily miss, or even misrepresent, Hamilton's achievements.

Having said that, however, I must add that one of the most perceptive critics of Hamilton's fiction is Arnold Rattenbury, who also has Marxist affiliations. What makes Rattenbury so insightful, in part, is that he eschews both the kind of automatic response Raymond Williams complained about and the sometimes-casual sweeping judgments of people like Eagleton, who Rattenbury describes as "that ubiquitous professor" (227). Eagleton's review of French's biography, which was headlined on the cover of The London Review of Books as "Everybody's Favourite Sad Stalinist Drunk," annoys Rattenbury considerably. He complains about Eagleton's triviality for much of the review, and about his political correctness. When Eagleton finally gets serious, Rattenbury says, "it is too late. Eagleton, the layout man, the journal both of them work for--Media and Academe--have

connived at Hamilton's trivialisation and belittlement" (227).

The final result of this attitude--smugly complacent university Leftism--is that while a critic whose ideological motivation is explicit, Peter Widdowson, makes a too-small claim for Hamilton's work, a critic who disavows politics aims much higher on Hamilton's behalf. Widdowson's principal claim in "The Saloon Bar Society" is that "Hamilton, at his best, does for pre-war England what Isherwood's 'Berlin' novels do for Germany" (117).²

Meanwhile, John Bayley, who believes that "Hamilton's Marxism may play a needful part in his inspiration as a writer but it is of no great interest to his appreciative reader,"³ places a very high value on Hamilton's fiction. In Bayley's view, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky's

true individuality . . . consists to a very large extent in the dégustation, as the French say, of boredom: excruciating, fascinating, endless banality, interspersed--not varied--with a pathos so homely and total that it brings tears to the eyes. Beckett and Pinter have nothing on Patrick Hamilton at his best: in fact, beside him they seem as mannered and formulaic as the Jacobean dramatists do after Shakespeare. (6)

Since scholarly study proceeds by forging connections with previous work, this paradox creates problems for anyone who wants to advocate Hamilton's work without placing the politics first. The largest body of criticism on Hamilton

emphasizes his Leftist affiliations, but does his work a disservice by minimizing its value. To connect with those who have asserted the worth of Hamilton's fiction requires assembling an eclectic body of mostly minor critical pieces, many of them reviews.

The lack of agreement on Marxism's role in Hamilton's work is hardly surprising, considering the lack of agreement about the extent of his real-life involvement in the CP. While there are some critics who casually attribute party membership to him, those most likely to know say he never joined. Sir Kenneth Robinson, a Marxist friend of Hamilton's, told Jones in an interview that Hamilton " 'was not a joiner' " (191), of political parties or any other group. Bruce Hamilton claims that his brother "never became a party member, or any sort of an activist" (81), a view that Andy Croft corroborates.

This, of course, raises the question, why not? It is true, I believe, that Hamilton would have made a curious member of a political movement structured around large groups, masses of people. A determined individualist, he fits oddly with an aggregate mentality. It is irrefutable, in any case, that Hamilton did things his own way, Marxism included. Even those most adamant about Marxism's significance for Hamilton's life and work are forced to admit that he did not adhere to any party line. In his review, Eagleton puts it like this: "though his Marxism was certainly idiosyncratic--what other Communist cheered on the

invasion of Suez?--it was a good deal more central to his literary vision than his biographer's resolute depoliticising of him allows. . . . Hamilton retained some bizarre version of his leftist faith until the end" (12).

If Marxism was "central to his literary vision" (12), Eagleton makes no move to suggest how this might be true. In turning to Hamilton's fiction, I will examine the political qualities of Hamilton's most Marxist-oriented novels. Hamilton's work is the best place to seek answers to these questions about politics and literary value in that work. Rather than imposing a preformed model on his fiction, it is more profitable to examine what is in the novels themselves.

PUBS, PROSTITUTES, AND POLITICS

Shortly before his quasi-official conversion to Marxism, Hamilton was following his long-established interest in the submerged classes; he was planning a book about a prostitute. This project was conceived as an economic exposé about the pressures on servants which make them vulnerable to prostitution. This conception of the project, however, is very different from the resulting short middle novel of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky. In May of 1927, he was already describing his idea to his brother; it was to be "a novel 'about both servants and harlots (possibly the slow transformation of the one into the other)' . . . a 'kind of Mrs Warren's Profession brought

up to date', an exposé of the economic exploitation of working-class women" (French 119-20).

Later, early in 1928, he wrote to his brother that " 'the only book of importance on my horizon is the prostitute one' " and he planned to write two novels simultaneously, " 'slowly constructing the prostitute one, and writing another short one for publication' " (French 90). "The short one" was a novel about pubs, the "rollicking little masterpiece" that became The Midnight Bell. In the planning stages, then, The Siege of Pleasure was to be an important novel illuminating Leftist political doctrine, while The Midnight Bell was to be short and entertaining. The final products, however, do not match those projections. There is a marked contrast between the explicitly Marxist conception Hamilton began with and the bourgeois novel he ultimately published as The Siege of Pleasure.

Hamilton is far more compelling on the subject of Bob's life than he is on Jenny's, and the part of Jenny's life that receives the most insightful treatment is her drinking problem rather than the larger economic forces allegedly acting upon her. In the end, Jenny's personal qualities are more responsible for her fate than is her socio-economic position. The Siege of Pleasure never justifies Jenny or her casual cruelty to men, especially Bob, but it does an effective job of examining her abrupt descent into alcoholism. In other words, the individual consciousness and addiction receive far more convincing treatment than

that provided for economic forces acting upon a vulnerable servant-class girl.

Jenny's character--in the sense of her own inner character or personality--is singled out as reprehensible, missing qualities that good people, such as Bob and Ella, possess. The cards, of course, are stacked against her from the beginning, for her story follows The Midnight Bell, in which Hamilton shows all too clearly her lack of integrity and other failings. Because the time frame for The Siege of Pleasure is mostly before and very slightly after the events of The Midnight Bell, rather than synchronous, we do not get to see the relationship with Bob from Jenny's point of view. While sympathetic to her plight in some ways, the novel's judgements on her character remain sufficiently harsh as to undercut our sympathy for her.

The glass of port may have set the events in motion, but Jenny was ripe for such a fate anyway, as the novel makes plain. She is not excused from responsibility for her personal failings, but blamed squarely for them:

Probably there was never any doubt of Jenny's social destiny, but can it not at least be said that that glass of port unlocked her destiny? Her ignorance, her shallowness, her scheming self-absorption, her vanity, her callousness, her unscrupulousness--all these qualities--in combination with her extreme prettiness and her utter lack of harmony with her environment--were merely waiting and accumulating in heavy suspense

in the realms of respectability to be plunged down into the realms where they rightly belonged: and a single storm, lasting no longer than six hours, achieved this.

(329)

It would take an unusually strong exposition of the forces acting upon Jenny to counteract this really damning catalog of character traits. In fact, the strongest force exposed in the novel is a tendency to alcoholism, and were those character faults in abeyance, Jenny would not have had her chance at that fatal glass of port. The novel builds up to her first exposure, takes readers carefully through that first night of drinking, then describes how Jenny's reaction to it is peculiarly her own; that is, rather than being turned off drink by its calamitous effects, she consciously chooses to pursue its risks and rewards in the future.

Jenny's exposure to alcohol is preceded by her thoughts on the subject, as clear a statement of the Hamilton one-false-step-leads-to-ruin philosophy as any of his novels provide.

Jenny had inherited from her mother what her mother called "a horror of drink." She knew that so soon as a "taste" was acquired, ruin followed in clearly discernible stages. The danger lay in once starting: a single drink had been known to lead to ruin. On the other hand she had no desire to be fanatical, and for one in full control of herself a "nice glass" of something, before or after a meal, could do no harm.

(264-65)

Thus Jenny, at eighteen, foresees the danger awaiting her in very melodramatic terms ("ruin"). Her decision to join the others in drinking stems from her desire to fit in, her highly favorable impression of the saloon lounge, and the kind of rationalization--a "nice glass" that could do no harm--people often call on when they want to do something that goes against previously-held principles. As Bob came to a new theory of money in order to begin withdrawing his savings, Jenny comes to a new theory of drink.

Jenny's understanding of the risks of alcohol foreshadows how completely she will fall to its charms. Strengthening the effect is the language Hamilton uses to describe her first drink, language that parallels contemporary medical understanding of cocaine's effect on the body: "It was like the effect on the body of good news, without the good news--a delicious short cut to that inconstant elation which was so arduously won by virtue from the everyday world" (271). Jenny's feelings become even more positive the next morning, when she has something on her conscience that she would prefer to forget. Scotch, although at first she hates the taste of it, helps wash away her fears about the road accident:

It seemed to trickle down and heat and awaken every little cell and channel with its brisk medicining. It was like what she had felt last night--a little nicer if anything. Last night it had been like the feeling

of good news without the good news. Now it was like the news that her bad news was not such bad news after all. (321)

The presentation of burgeoning addiction means that alcoholism, rather than general economic pressures, seem most responsible for Jenny's slide into prostitution. Hamilton considered "A Glass of Port" as a title for Jenny's novel, and he emphasizes that first glass of port in the novel's summary of Jenny's initiation into prostitution. The drink itself is the catalyst: " 'All through a glass of port,' Jenny, the girl of the streets, had said. She had said it in jest, but who shall decline to surmise that she had not stumbled upon the literal truth?" (329).

Economic factors are not left out of The Siege of Pleasure; but they are subordinated to the other factors of personal qualities and alcoholism. The allusions to economic pressures are illuminating. Their routine quality suggests that Hamilton's reconstitution of Marxist ideas into fiction is only partially successful. The fictional milieu he was so gifted at creating finally takes precedence over the abstract political ideas introduced. As ideas, these economic allusions appear, rather inertly, and are immediately undermined by reference to some personal attribute or deliberate decision.

For example, when her "gentleman" takes her to a pub the morning after the accident, he is very nonchalant about her job. Can't she telephone? Send a wire? And is it a

job worth keeping, anyway? Jenny, enjoying the pub's fire, the drink he bought her, and the cigarette he lit for her, thinks that

he would never understand. He was just a "gentleman"--an idler without knowledge of the laws governing workers. She took another sip, and looked wretchedly at the decayed, wanly lit fountain. She ought to have gone by now. But she couldn't leave this fire just for a moment. (320)

For these ideas to be more than an automatic response or mere gesture, Jenny would have to be more governed by those laws than she is. While mention was made during the course of the story of her tedious and difficult labor as a servant, Jenny only worked in that capacity for a few days. To be precise, she worked one Thursday evening and one Friday. The idea of being a fashion model is tempting when Andy first mentions it to her, and she is much impressed by the leisure of her "gentleman friend," but these things are explained as expressions of her personal vanity.

Notwithstanding these quickly sketched socio-economic aspects, Jenny is described, in this concluding section, as having "resolved to abandon herself to the pleasures and perils of drink" (329). Her decision, the novel insists, is based on her strange affinity with alcohol. It is not a result of her subaltern position in a capitalist society, which is driving her into prostitution (although the latter presumably would be closer to Hamilton's stated intent in

writing the novel).

The temptations offered to Jenny by this "gentleman" appeal to her for reasons that return us, once again, to her shallow personality and desire for alcohol. He tempts Jenny by offering her lunch at the Clarendon. Jenny immediately leaps on the most superficial aspects: "that swell place at Hammersmith! . . . That would be something to tell 'em. What would Violet think of that?" (322). He further offers her ten pounds cash, and to take her to "the pictures." This manner of spending her day is contrasted with the drudgery of being a servant--"and the alternative to go back, and plead lying excuses, and wash dirty dishes, and make beds, and cook!" (323)--but what settles the matter for Jenny is not her oppressive life as a servant, but the chance to show off to others and, inevitably, the opportunity to drink more. As the scene ends, her prevaricating turns into acceptance. That acceptance, significantly, takes the form of another drink: " 'That's better,' he said. 'Will you have another now?' 'All right,' she said. 'Ta' " (323).

While The Siege of Pleasure provides one way to measure the effects of Hamilton's politics upon his fiction, because of its explicitly near-Marxist conception, The Plains of Cement offers another sort of opportunity. Hamilton's road accident, in January 1932, temporarily halted his literary production; when he resumed writing, it was to work on The Plains of Cement. In between the accident and that novel was his much-discussed conversion to Marxism. 1933 was the

year of his brother's trip to the Soviet Union, which marks the time Hamilton became seriously immersed in Marxist theories, periodicals, and activities. The trilogy's final novel, then, is his first after his conversion; it ought to reveal something about how his new political philosophy affected his work.

There is no clear consensus on this; like much of the discussion of Hamilton's politics, it seems to hinge on previous conviction. Brian McKenna voices the Marxist line when, taking his cue from Peter Widdowson, he first complains of the emptiness of Hamilton's pub verisimilitude in the first two novels. He finds a new value appearing in The Plains of Cement, however, that can be attributed to Hamilton's new-found Marxism:

This stricture applies less fittingly, it seems to me, to the third volume of the trilogy, The Plains of Cement--written after Hamilton's intellectually enriching conversion to Marxism in 1933--where London and its pub world are metaphorized to render the human alienation at the heart of the crisis of capitalism in Britain in the 1930s. ("Confessions" 231)

McKenna's interpretation overlooks the fact the Hamilton's conversion was not a sudden and dramatic shift. The Siege of Pleasure, as we have seen, was very Marxist in its conception; McKenna, however, lumps it in some broad category of pre-conversion. Andy Croft, while committed to revealing the value of interwar Leftist fiction, sees it a

bit differently than McKenna. After quoting the conclusion of The Midnight Bell ("for there is this about men . . ."), Croft observes that

This was the argument of all Hamilton's fiction, the enduring capacity of ordinary people--the common people--for optimism, generosity and goodness. Though the trilogy was begun before Hamilton had any interest in politics, he was a committed Marxist by the time he completed it. Yet there is no new tone of hectoring "politics" in The Plains of Cement, the third volume. Ella's story is pitched at exactly the same level of mundane detail, emotionally charged rituals of trivial dialogue and small-scale tragedy. Marxism had only confirmed Hamilton's faith in human personality and potential, endorsed his interest in the way working-class society was informed by received lower-middle-class ideas, convention and idiom, increased his fascination for the fine calibrations of every day class consciousness and class conflict. (145)

McKenna's view and Croft's are obviously incompatible. McKenna finds the third novel substantially different from its predecessors, while Croft finds it to be a continuation of themes and techniques found in the earlier novels. While Croft praises the third novel for a lack of "hectoring 'politics,'" McKenna sees the politics as a tool for rendering global significance to what is trivial in the first two pub novels. McKenna, however, trivializes

Hamilton's work in ways similar to those Rattenbury complains about in Eagleton's case: wanting to find that the post-Marxist novel shows a great leap forward, McKenna feels the need to belittle its predecessors.

Considering what is in the novels themselves, rather than presuming a change in their quality based on knowledge of Hamilton's "conversion" to Marxism, one can see how skillfully Hamilton makes use of what readers already know from the first novel to demonstrate the fatal isolation of London's Ellas and Bobs. Croft is right to say the story is pitched at the same level; added power is gained by its interconnections with The Midnight Bell. The best place to look at politics in The Plains of Cement is through the character of Ella's stepfather, Mr. Prosser. It is around him that Hamilton supplied most of the economic and political rhetoric.⁴ It is noteworthy, then, that Ella's stepfather is judged by standards that suggest however much the abstract and political may have fueled Hamilton's plans for this novel, the individual and personal end up taking precedence.

Mr. Prosser is judged negatively, a judgment we learn of before we actually meet the character. For Ella, whose judgment we are given no reason to doubt, he is a bad person. Neither she nor her mother can take any satisfaction in her mother's remarriage; in fact, the subject is the biggest obstacle to their otherwise congenial relationship. For Ella,

to hear her mother being called Mrs. Prosser--that was to say after a fiend in human shape--was often more than Ella could bear, and she would be on the verge of crying out upon her mother for her responsibility in the error. Her mother, however, bore such an apologetic and uncomprehending air about the matter, and had obviously so completely forgotten the variety of motives which seven or eight years ago had prompted her to commit the act, that Ella always reproached herself for her resentment, and remained silent. (390)

Marriage to him was an "error," one which presumably is responsible for much of Mrs. Prosser's "apologetic and uncomprehending air." What we see of her in the novel is pathetic; timid and mousy to an extreme, she shyly encourages Ella regarding Mr. Eccles in hopes that financial well-being would allow Ella to rise above the circumstances in which her mother is trapped.

In Mr. Prosser's defense, Ella's mother feebly offers the notion that "he was not as Bad as he was Painted," a question the authorial voice takes up: "Whether, actually, Mr. Prosser was, or was not, as Bad as he was Painted (by Ella at any rate) was another matter" (391). This is followed by authorial commentary on how larger economic forces had driven Mr. Prosser down, from his former small eminence as a saddler with an independent business until just after the first World War, to his present miserable situation as an unemployed laborer. This, according to the

omniscient voice, is owing to "the laws governing the benign progress of capital" which "had by slow and painful methods pinched and thrust him from the ranks of the petty-bourgeoisie into the ranks of the proletariat" (391). He has never gotten over this descent, and is a very sour and unpleasant man:

there was thus much to excuse him, but not enough to account for his invincible and chronic silence and savagery, which he wreaked upon his wife, and which arose, perhaps, less from sheer distress than from a vindictive sense of vanished superiority. Ella, uncomprehending of social causation, saw no excuse.

(391)

Two voices are brought to bear on the question of Mr. Prosser's socio-economic "excuse": the authorial voice, which says there was "not enough" excuse in the circumstances of his life in a capitalist society, and Ella's own voice, who puts aside "social causation" and judges him from her own simple, virtuous point of view. It is as a mean-spirited person, not as a victim of a corrupt socio-economic system, that Mr. Prosser is finally judged.

Further damnation is brought on Mr. Prosser's head by his hypocritical relations with the prostitute who lives in the top-floor flat. Mr. Prosser

had been known to publicly storm at her and Show her Up (as the phrase was) from his landing, although, oddly enough, he had himself acquired the sinister reputation

of having been Seen with her in a public-house not far away, and even of having been in the early days one of the actual smuggled concupiscent gentlemen in the nightly Takings-Place Above--but this was gossip. (454)

Dismissing it as "gossip" is a half-hearted gesture; we are not meant to disbelieve it based on that description. After Mr. Prosser is taken ill, the prostitute takes charge of the flat, the invalid, and Ella's mousy mother. Eventually, it is she who brings Ella the (bad) news that Mr. Prosser is better. She comes to the Midnight Bell to announce his recovery with great satisfaction, causing Ella much pain by forcing her into a false attitude of agreeing with the wonderful nature of the news. The prostitute, on the strength of this good news, gets drunk, and is picked up by a "stout middle-aged gentleman" (493), with whom she will (Ella imagines) return to her flat above the Prosser's, thus closing the circle yet again.

While the novel records Mr. Prosser's demoralizing treatment under the socio-economic system, it finally insists that he be judged for his personal failings. Those larger forces, undeniably malignant and at work, do not exculpate him. At the same time, Ella's rather capitalist conviction, arrived at reluctantly but inevitably, that his surprising £500 legacy is worth more than he is, is not derided or mocked, but endorsed by the novel. The Plains of Cement, Hamilton's first post-Marxist novel, does not mark a sudden deviation from his previous path as a result of his

new political philosophy. If anything, it shows how committed he was to exposing social ills person by person, rather than in terms of masses of any kind.

ON THE PLANET OF MORIBUNDIA

The only overtly Marxist novel Hamilton wrote, Impromptu in Moribundia (1939) ought to reveal the clearest version of Hamilton's politics. Looked at carefully, it yields up what can be described as, at best, an ambivalent verdict on the intersection of Hamilton's literary strivings and political commitments.

Impromptu in Moribundia is generally described as a "Marxist fantasy," but this label, while accurate, does not adequately capture the work. It is, as Peter Widdowson writes, a "fable"; alternatively, it is a dystopia. While not a particularly elaborate example, it is also science fiction of the H. G. Wells stripe (although Wells is one of the writers Hamilton's novel takes to task). The novel's beginning sets the tone and suggests what it takes from each of the above-named categories:

It is now generally known that, after the general controversy and outburst attendant upon John Sadler's initial heroic journey to another planet, and later the partially fruitless attempt of the Gosling brothers, it had been decided by Crowmarsh to keep my departure hidden from the press and unknown to the general public. This was as much for Crowmarsh's own personal

safety as for reasons of scientific detachment. (1)
The allusion to top-secret scientific advances, the references to other known space travellers, the suggestion of danger and sabotage, all these are intended to provide authenticity and significance.

The plot of Moribundia revolves around the unnamed narrator's journey to a planet named "Moribundia," and the novel details what the unnamed narrator finds there. His destination was deliberately selected by Crowmarsh, the scientist who invented the spaceship Asteradio, rather than being the chance result of a random hurl into space.⁵ Once the narrator arrives, he discovers that "Moribundia" is in fact very like England. Through a series of adventures--on buses, in posh hotels, at men's clubs, at "Seabrightstone" on a illicit weekend--the narrator learns many lessons relevant for the English. Most of these lessons are political in nature, although the narrator also forms impressions of science, religion, and literature while he is on "Moribundia." Advertising is one of the more prominent objects of satire; Moribundians live as if they were in advertisements, saying and doing the foolish things people are made to say and do in ads. While this may point out the complete unreality of advertising, hardly anyone would be confused by the difference between advertising's "reality" and everyday life.

The two most prominent devices in the novel are backwards spellings and the "ballooning" speeches of

Moribundians, in which their ideas appear in cartoon balloons, plainly visible above their heads. Hamilton's more usual defense of "his" people's enforced reliance on stale clichés for communication is given a rather nasty spin on Moribundia through these balloon speeches. Indeed, there is a problem throughout the novel distinguishing between the perpetrators and the victims of these Moribundian monstrosities--there is no sympathy for those who "balloon" their speech, when surely it is simply an exaggerated version of Ella and her truisms.⁶

The political theme of life on Moribundia is "Unchange!" and the middle class--in its stereotypical manifestation as little men in bowler hats--is blamed for the moribund state of affairs. Throughout the novel, Hamilton strives mightily for authenticity, primarily through repeated references to the "well-known" facts of his case. This technique--referring after the fact to ostensibly well-known but actually fictional/mythical published sources--is one Hamilton will return to in the Gorse novels, when once again he finds himself compelled to establish authenticity externally, rather than creating it on the page. Moribundia, in spite of these attempts, lacks the verisimilitude of his more realistic novels.

Much of the novel can strike the reader as schoolboy humor: undeniably clever, but soon irritating because it is both undisciplined and juvenile. The novel takes what can only be described as cheap shots at famous people. James

Jeans and Henry Newbolt are the sources of the novel's two epigraphs; both come under fire in the novel under their reverse-spelled names. Modernist writers are given the same sort of treatment; Joyce, Eliot, and Lawrence, among others are chastised for their sterility, which is presented as nothing other than a sign of the times. The results are fairly typical of how things go wrong in Moribundia, for Hamilton is discussing a very valid complaint against the Modernist writers--their excessive subjectivity and inward-turning gaze--but the complaint is made in such a whining and fretful manner it can hardly achieve its purpose.

A consistent problem, already mentioned, is that the novel tries to have it both ways by sending up and reaffirming at the same time, making the human object of the satire insufficiently well-defined. For example, the portrait of cockneys and the "hopeless" Juggins family is intended to take umbrage at the stereotypes rampant about working class people. Cockney humor is dissected, as are those ideas about how working class people will only ruin good things (should they ever get any). The Juggins family actually does keep coal in its bathtub and breaks up the piano to use it for firewood. While on the one hand, this shows up the ridiculousness of these middle-class ideas, it also works as mockery of the working-class family. The novel's ambivalent attitude towards Cockneys is evident when we meet our first cockney on earth, before the narrator sets off on his journey: "The door was opened by the famous and

incongruous Albert Fry, that curious Cockney figure so devoted to Crowmarsh, and bustling always so buoyantly, naïvely, and possessively about the outer fringe of his master's mysteries" (9). Surely this is itself a condescending and stereotypical portrait of a cockney. Overall, I believe the target of Hamilton's satire is not always distinguished carefully enough; it is as if he gets so caught up in the fun he loses sight of where the tar is flying.

The principal key to understanding Moribundia's relationship to England is itself seriously flawed because of a similar ambivalence or inconsistency. Their relationship, the mechanism that drives Hamilton's narrative, is stated plainly at the end of the second chapter: "I had by that time gleaned the inner secret of Moribundia--the land in which the ideals and ideas of our world, the striving and subconscious wishes of our time, the fictions and figments of our imagination, are calm, cold actualities" (42).⁷ Clearly, a concrete manifestation of abstract ideas provides the opportunity to critique them differently, to lay out their implications and reveal their true ugliness. The actuality of Moribundian life permits Hamilton to do some interesting things with subconscious ideas; for example, the notion that wealth is a sign of virtue, never expressly stated or even fully formulated in England, is manifested on Moribundia by money magically appearing overnight in everyone's pockets according to his

or her desserts.

The problem is that the central theme self-destructs as a result of its very actuality, for this grants a literal truth to these oddities. That literal truth pulls against the satire, particularly the dominant satire directed against advertising. On the subject of hotels, for example, the narrator observes that

It is in keeping with the general character of Moribundia, which, as I have said, is the land of ideals made concrete, that its hotels are everything that they proclaim themselves to be. Up there, if a hotel calls itself the "Grand," the "Splendid," the "Royal" or the "Palace," it is because it is, in cold fact, really grand, really splendid, or really furnishes an appropriate setting for kings and queens.

(86)

If all things in Moribundia truly are what they claim to be, then it is hard to make much of a case against them. Is the charge laid against advertising that it is specious, misleading, and unrealistic? Then Moribundia's quite literal truth-in-advertising neatly refutes that charge. The disjunction between grandiose claim and jejune reality, one of the great faults of modern society, disappears on Moribundia.

One of the novel's most noticeable devices, the backwards spellings, offers an opportunity to use Hamilton's first, and most lighthearted, novel to form a judgment on

Moribundia, his most political novel. Nearly everyone who comments on Moribundia cites instances of the backwards spellings; they are, along with the balloons, one of the most striking surface features of the novel. The question remains, however, how the reader should view such atrocities as "gnikrow ssalc," "Drofxo Teerts," and "Teivos Noinu."⁸ Hamilton has provided the key himself, in Monday Morning: the political spirit expressed in Moribundia is enthusiastic but immature.

Anthony Forster, the young protagonist in Monday Morning is treated sympathetically, but he is gently mocked for his silliness, the schoolboy residue that he retains as he enters the adult portion of his life. His ideas are often stereotypical and sometimes outright laughable, as when he thinks about his future en route back to London after the death of his aunt: "Not that Anthony did not relish a bitter fight for fame. But he did not like this way of setting about it. A far nicer way of doing it would be to starve somewhere, in a garret, writing immortal things, and being free. Even being found dead one morning in the red, new sunlight. . . ." (88, text ellipses).

Before we ever see Anthony in the novel, we are shown his room in Hove. Its contents are described at length in order to give an impression of his character and, to a lesser extent, of his mode of living. There can be no doubt that he is held up as an example of a schoolboy not yet matured into adulthood:

And by the bed was a small wicker table. On this a chess-board, a box of chessmen, Staunton's Chess Handbook, Wisden's Cricket Almanack, and "The Cloister and the Hearth."

The front cover of the last was open, and there was an inscription on the fly-leaf. This was not an ordinary inscription. It would be gathered from some quaint turns in the phrasing, and the spelling, and numerous elaborate curls and flourishes in the lettering, that the writer was giving his impression of what he thought, perhaps, a very old-fashioned inscription might have been like. It was certainly no success as this.

First, the writer's great, unbridled delight had been to alter each available "s" into "f," which peculiarity, to begin with, an old-fashioned inscription never had. And then, having tasted a substitution or two, and found them good, the writer had lost his head quite, and turned even each sibilant "c" into "f."

"Thif book," it went, "if the fole property of one Mafter Anthony Charterif Forfter, and waf purchafed by him in the yeare of Grafe One Thoufand, Nine Hundredf and Twenty One, fhortly after leaving Weftminfter Fchool, where he refeived an college education af befitf a young gentleman.

"A moft model young perfon, loved by all hif

friendf, respected by all hif acquaintenfef, and gone in fear of by hif enemief.

"May hif life prove an highly merrie one, and pleafaunt, and fucfefful."

"Fucfefful" was surely a triumph. The author might have done well to finish on "Fucfefful." But he could not forbear one final poke, in the tombstone manner--"Not gone before but loft." (3-4)

Anthony's silly play with language, given in plentiful detail, is one sign of his immaturity. A nice young man, yes, but not particularly outstanding in intellect, maturity, or insight.

A final passage from Monday Morning makes the connection clear between Anthony's "f" game and other idle and foolish ways of passing the time:

A train came in on adjacent rails, and Anthony played the game of imagining that his own train was moving. Then he played the game of F with the advertisements in the carriage.

"Doctor Collif Browne."

"Haftingf and Ft. Leonardf."

"When Knightf were bold

They all wore armour.

Nightf hot or cold,

Wear Fwan Pyjama."

The last did not adapt itself well. He tried another game which had occupied him a good deal lately-

-the game of turning upside down, or reading backwards.

Doctor Collis Browne was good--"Enworb Silloc
Rotcod."

And Swan Pyjama--"Amajyp Naws."

Something said that the train was about to start.

. . . and five minutes later the train moved out. (86)

Here is backwards spelling explicitly identified as a mindless game played by a young man killing time waiting while for his train to depart. These passages, taken together, render their own verdict upon one of Moribundia's most prominent devices. Backwards spelling is amusing, distracting, but most significantly, it is juvenile. Why would Hamilton, almost fifteen years after Monday Morning, choose just this cumbersome trick to use in his only explicitly Marxist work? His Marxism is perhaps not entirely grown up.

Evidence for this interpretation can be found outside of the literature as well. Hamilton's interest in Marxism, while not uncommon for someone of generation, of course had its own specific origin, one which reveals a great deal about Hamilton's attitude in embracing it. Bruce Hamilton first came to be interested in Marxism through a short-lived scheme of learning Russian in order to be a translator. The language idea fell by the wayside, but he made a trip to the Soviet Union. He shared his enthusiasm with Hamilton, who promptly began reading Das Kapital and whatever other Marxist books he could get his hands on. Meanwhile, Bruce

Hamilton, back in London, sent Leftist periodicals to his brother, then living in Norfolk. In a letter thanking his brother for sending copies of Labour Monthly and other Leftist periodicals, Hamilton describes his new-found enthusiasm in very telling terms:

"What delights they are! Needless to say, I propose to contribute to all regularly . . . and really believe that one may have found some form of adult replica of the weekly bliss of the Magnet or Gem!" (Jones 194).

How adult the replica is remains open to judgement; the failure of Impromptu in Moribundia makes clear that, however interesting Hamilton may have found Marxism, it did not make a productive basis for his fiction.

NOTES

1. Terry Eagleton, "First-Class Fellow Traveller," review of Patrick Hamilton: A Life, by Sean French, London Review of Books 2 December 1993, p. 12.
2. I would argue, in contrast, that Hamilton's fiction--and not just his best--does far more than Isherwood's rather self-regarding stories.
3. Review of Hogarth edition of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, London Review of Books 1 October 1987, 6.
4. The other place Hamilton seems to have followed his politics is in the introduction of the upper-middle class characters with whom Ella interviews for the India job. They are nothing short of a caricature, and provide the least convincing possible escape for Ella. Ella's brief encounter with them, rude and unpleasant people that they are, makes little impression in the novel. It is not possible to believe in these people.
5. "If only it had been at night, if only the stars were shining and I had been able to see where I was going, to perceive my destination as an actuality, a solid orb, however tiny, occupying its own position in space, I believe I could have faced matters with greater calm. . . . One unforgettable night Crowmarsh had actually shown me my

destination through the telescope, and I had felt very grand, and audacious, and noble, and unutterably large; but where was it now, and why was I feeling so unutterably small?' (8).

6. Ella, in fact, can do even better than balloons when it comes to reading Mr. Eccles' thoughts: "And because she could read practically every thought going on in his silly head about five seconds or so before he uttered it she did not have to hear his dashingly suggestive 'I do like Bubbly, don't you?' (as he steered her across the traffic to a public-house standing conveniently over the way) to be apprized of the next trick up his sleeve--the fact that they were about to drink champagne" (424). The ridiculous words Mr. Eccles chooses further corroborates the aptness of the comparison between Moribundian balloon-speak and the real-world language of Hamilton's people; but without the mixed signals of blame or judgment.

7. Moribundia's actual manifestation of what England desires, secretly or openly, is also spelled out in the context of literature. The chapter on Moribundian literature concludes by asserting that "this concrete world [Earth/England] is coming to grips with that ideal one [Moribundia]" (253).

8. Their cumbersomeness is particularly noticeable in contrast to Orwell's achievement in Nineteen eighty four: the awkwardness of Hamilton's "gnikrow ssalc," for example,

becomes even more exasperating next to Orwell's graceful
"proles."

Chapter 7

"THE WHOLE POISONED NIGHTMARISH CIRCLE": DRINKING IN HANGOVER SQUARE

He had forgotten again. He was
drunk. He was ashamed of himself.
He took another gulp at his gin.

While Hangover Square (1941) provides the basis for variously-emphasized readings, most academic critics have analyzed it as an indictment of political events in pre-WWII Britain. For its many non-academic readers, the novel survives in contemporary awareness as a crime novel or thriller. Christopher Morley observes that "no slaughter in fiction was ever more desirously anticipated by the average reader than good simple George Bone's murder of the glamour-bitch, Netta,"¹ a sentiment shared by other commentators. Hangover Square is also, however, a notable fictional portrait of alcoholism. It is a stellar example of what John W. Crowley calls "the drunk narrative: a mode of fiction that expresses the conjunction of modernism and alcoholism in a pervasive ideology of despair."² In this chapter, I first examine the frontiers of addiction as charted by the novel, then analyze the narrative structures used by Hamilton to re-create such key aspects of alcoholic experience as claustrophobia, repetition, and despair.

Hangover Square, set in Earl's Court and Brighton,

shows the phoney war period through the eyes of a pub-crawling group of various disreputables. The central trio is comprised of Netta Longdon, bit-part film actress; Peter, her ex-blackshirt lover; and the protagonist, George Harvey Bone, who nurses an obsessive love for Netta while being treated with contempt by her and the rest of the group. Although not affluent, these people do not work, but spend their time drinking--in pubs, at home, at private parties, anywhere, everywhere--and borrowing money from others. Bone, in addition to alcoholism, depression, and his masochistic obsession with Netta, suffers from schizophrenia; when in his "dead" moods, he plans how he will kill Netta. The central plot of the novel is constituted by Bone's cyclically made, forgotten, and re-made plans to murder her. Eventually, on the day Britain declares war, he murders both Netta and Peter, then commits suicide.

The phrase "hangover square" is of key importance for the novel, marking it as pre-eminently a novel of alcoholism. As Bruce Hamilton notes disapprovingly, the novel "explore[s], with such awful percipience, every shade, every nuance, every degree in the processes of getting intoxicated and sobering up" (96-97). He credits Patrick Hamilton himself with coining the phrase, making a joke on Hanover Square³ as the two walked through it (95); in the novel, the phrase is attributed to Mickey in a parenthesis: "('Taking a little stroll round Hangover Square'--that was

Mickey's crack.)."⁴ Mickey's role in Netta's group is peripheral, yet, paradoxically, crucially enabling to their imagined well-being. He appears less frequently than does Peter, and he is absent from several significant episodes, including the first trip to Brighton. He is, however, on the scene just after Bone finally commits murder, and adds to Bone's difficulties by wanting to visit Netta's flat. Characteristically, he interprets Bone's trembling and upset state as yet another visitation from " 'our old friend Hangover Square' " (275).

Mickey, although only twenty-six years old, is a has-been, whose job in Asia has ended (the novel offers no reasons for this), leaving him "unemployed . . . [on] the hard, frozen plains of Earl's Court" (32). His associates value him

because, by his excesses, he put his companions in countenance, making their own excesses seem small in comparison. Your hangover was never so stupendous as Mickey's, nor your deeds the night before so preposterous. The follies of each individual were forgotten, submerged in his supreme folly; by his own disgrace he brought grace to others. For this reason, if he tried to live soberly, and in the desperation of his self-inflicted illness he was sometimes forced to do this, his friends at once revealed their cold dislike of his change of front, and by combined chaffing and indirect bullying soon forced him to

return to the character in which he was of such service to them. (32)

This description combines several 'explanations' of alcoholism: it is a disease; but a "self-inflicted" one; yet forced upon an unwilling Mickey by his fellows. Bone believes, however, that Mickey shares "something of his own private loathing of the life they were all leading, and the same occasional, hopeless aspiration to live otherwise" (32). It is precisely those most enmeshed in their addiction who feel this way: Bone and Mickey can only aspire, hopelessly and helplessly, to live apart from their addiction. As in the epigraph I chose for this essay, "again" and "another" are the operative words for the alcoholic's existence, and it is that quality of experience Hamilton has caught so well in Hangover Square.

FROM SOCIAL DRINKER TO DRUNK

Hamilton's meticulous presentation of Bone's experiences--both in and out of the pub--addresses a central task of writers interested in alcohol addiction: charting the frontier which lies between social and addictive consumption. At what point does drinking cease to be an enjoyable social activity and become one's primary occupation? This is a question not readily answered, as the British psychiatrists Kessel and Walton note in their book, Alcoholism:

The difference between having a drink and becoming

drunk depends upon the quantity of alcohol taken. . . . Between the drinker and the alcoholic there is another kind of difference. It cannot be measured in amount of alcohol nor even be shortly defined. It depends upon intangibles, upon personality and upon opportunity, upon circumstance and often upon chance. Yet the steps from social to excessive drinking can be demarcated and it is the extent of his passage along this road that defines the alcoholic.⁵

Moving along a continuum of alcoholic behaviors implies a borderland, a location where the subject's situation is some unidentifiable shade of gray rather than predominantly light or dark. That the difference between drinker and drunk cannot be shortly defined lends extra significance to in-depth fictional portrayals, like those found in Hangover Square, which can enlighten through accurate representation.

Thomas Gilmore, in considering some of the risks of addictive consumption, identifies the border between renewal and destruction as a key issue for modern novelists:

alcohol, which in some uses seems to be a life-renewing force, is always potentially and sometimes actually a destructive force. When heavy drinkers themselves or when representing characters who are, modern writers seem particularly interested in exploring that borderland where the renewal of life, by extending the limits of ordinary perception or experience, impinges on destruction or death.⁶

The shift from renewal to destruction parallels the transition from social to alcoholic drinking. Arthur Calder-Marshall, who actively pursued Fitzrovia's pub culture, provides anecdotal testimony to the significance of this issue:

I enormously enjoyed evenings at the Fitzroy, the Marquis of Granby and the Plough, and the companionship of painters, writers and models older than myself [an undergraduate]. The illusion that I was at the centre of the intellectual and artistic tavern life of the great city was at first complete; then gradually it began to dawn on me that the painters and writers whom I met there were only part-time artists and their main occupation was drinking.⁷

How does one make the transition from full-time artist and social drinker to alcoholic, part-time artist? Novelists who have the background to write convincingly of the crossover are, as a direct result of their expertise, at risk of being unable to do the writing. Hamilton knows this frontier as well as anyone, and his pub novels reveal an unusual commitment to treating the subject fully and unsentimentally. The characters in his pub novels are fully immersed in their own addiction; like Bone, they assuage their shame at being drunk yet again by "[taking] another gulp" of the drink in front of them.

In Monday Morning, Hamilton foreshadowed the harsh condemnation of Netta and her friends in Hangover Square

through his descriptions of what Anthony Forster, the young protagonist of Monday Morning, learns of "the ways of actors" (158). Their casual appropriation of one another's cigarettes and matches are noted, for instance, as is their heavy drinking. The characters in Monday Morning remain actors who drink, while Hangover Square's Netta, theatrical hanger-on and would-be actress, is a drunk. She has made the transition to full-time drinker; the scenes in the earlier novel reveal people in earlier stages of drinking life, although their mores would lead quite naturally to full-time drinking and would-be acting.

Anthony is instructed in the drinking customs of the theatre community almost immediately after joining it. He learnt that the first thing done with an actor is to go and have a drink, and the next thing to have another. And he learnt that you didn't say "Thanks awfully," when the actor paid for it, and suggest that you should pay your share, but paused awhile until he said "Well--cheerio," and then drank. And when the drink was finished you didn't say, "Let me pay for some more drinks now, in return," but you said, "What are you taking?" and the actor probably said, "Bitter," and you said "Two bitters, please," to the barmaid. And when a third actor came in and said, "Well, what are you two going to have?" you didn't say, "I don't think I'll have any more. I've had two bitters already and my head's feeling rather funny, and anyway it'll be

frightfully expensive for you to pay for drinks for both of us," but you said, "I'll have another bitter, I think." (158-59)

By the time their play, "The Coil," goes on tour, Anthony is conversant with these habits, drinking more and staying abreast of the social niceties. After he joins the "middle-salaried male members of the company" on their Sunday pub crawl in Sheffield, he "was given four half-pints of beer and a double whisky. Just as he had finished some quick arithmetic, and was going to ask everybody what they would have, 'Time' was shouted amid the bawling, and the actors sidled mechanically out into the street, and had another happy conference in the middle of it" (188). Then they repair to another pub, one which serves illegally after hours, where they drink a great deal more. After "a table and an actor started swimming firmly for his forehead," (190), Anthony sets out to find his way, through the deserted streets of Sheffield, to his "combined room." He finally arrives, but only after an exercise in drunken comedy, with him prancing and swaying and getting lost. This approach has changed in Hangover Square, where the results of excessive drinking are decidedly not comic, but awful.⁸

The downward trend is apparent not only in the course of each novel, but in the overall change in tone. Ten years after Monday Morning, Hamilton published the trilogy, Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, which is committed to pub

culture to the extent of being set in a pub but does not serve principally as an exposé of alcoholism. Hamilton devoted the interval between the trilogy and Hangover Square to his stage play, Gaslight, the two highly-praised radio plays, Money with Menaces and To The Public Danger, and his Marxist dystopia, Impromptu in Moribundia. Hangover Square marks Hamilton's return to his usual territory after an absence of over five years, and while the pub trilogy addresses the problem of alcoholism, the subject has become central in Hangover Square.

The trilogy's Bob and Jenny are clearly precursors to Bone and Netta, but the misery of the first pair pales before the mature form of alcoholic infatuation, which is fatal to Bone and Netta. Alongside the deteriorating setting and problem drinking, the central love relationship becomes more obsessive, hopeless, and destructive. The decline marks the characters themselves--Bone is less functional than Bob, and Netta is more deliberately cruel than Jenny--the 'progress' of the relationship, and the ultimate fate of those involved. Bob loses his life savings and most of his self respect, but can finally put his disgrace aside and start again; for Bone, there can be no redemption, only suicide. Bob flirts with crossing the frontier between problem drinker and full-time drunk, but Bone really makes the trip, never to return. He comes near salvation more than once, but cannot survive. The very nature of his chances for redemption indicate the

hopelessness of Bone's situation.

Bone's first chance to recover is during his brief period of calm after the first trip to Brighton, when he thinks that

he had burned his passion out. It was only just in time. His whole health would have been wrecked if he had gone on like that. But now the climax had come: he had had a rest: the 'flu, and the 'dead' moods (both brought on, he believed, by drinking and nervous exhaustion) had receded, and he could start again. He limited himself to two beers in the morning: had lunch at the hotel, slept in the afternoon, had a few more beers in the evening, and went to bed early. (212)

This is still a crushingly lonely existence, however, and certainly a very compromised model of a sober life.

Nonetheless, he does feel better, and it is during this period that he and John Littlejohn talk of rooming together, an arrangement that might have changed his life permanently. Bone returns, however, to his old cycle of heavy drinking, 'dead' moods, and misery. The pain is increased because he is aware of his fall and what it is likely to cost him: "he knew he was making a fool of himself: he knew he ought to run for his life: but how could he?" (223). There is no uncertainty regarding the stakes involved: even Bone realizes that it is a matter of life and death for him, and it ultimately becomes a matter of life and death for Netta and Peter as well.

Bone's second glimpse of salvation is snatched even more swiftly from him. His evening in Brighton with Eddie Carstairs, Johnnie Littlejohn, and the famous actors marks a turning point in his emotional life. Finally he feels accepted and successful, and he learns that people more substantial than Netta and Peter can value him. This is the only time in the novel Hamilton allows Bone to be happy. His happiness here turns out to be even more fleeting than his pleasurable moments on the golf course, however. As this penultimate section of the novel closes: "He flung himself on the bed, and hid his face in his arms, uncontrollably, vastly sobbing, uncontrollably, vastly happy. And then, of course, a little later, something snapped in his head" (259, emphasis added). Bone's mental illness becomes increasingly difficult to shake, until, finally, it has become inescapable.

THE TWO PUBS

The narrative of Hangover Square is structured to reveal the difference, fully visible only to those who have experienced addictive drinking, between the two co-existing views of drinking culture: the observer-participant's and the addict's.⁹ Capturing this division is crucial for any project of recreating alcoholic existence, and Hamilton's novel gives it full weight. The outer view of pub life can be found elsewhere in literature; Gordon Comstock's observation of the Crichton Arms, in Orwell's Keep the

Aspidistra Flying, is a characteristic example. Peering into the crowded saloon bar, "Gordon's heart sickened. To be in there, just to be in there! In the warmth and light, with people to talk to, with beer and cigarettes and a girl to flirt with!"¹⁰ It is the inner view that is so infrequently found in British literary fiction, and deliberately giving the view of the inside sets Hamilton apart from his peers.

The life described so exactly in Hangover Square dictates the claustrophobia of the novel, because it is a life fully visible only to those who are trapped within it. The two briefly-used outside perspectives in the novel, John Littlejohn and John Halliwell, are used to illustrate this maxim. These two voices are introduced in ways that suggest their important structural roles; John Littlejohn appears at the opening of the novel's fourth part, while John Halliwell is introduced at the opening of the novel's eighth part.

Halliwell is eighteen, recently arrived in London from Sussex, and he provides a fresh, optimistic point of view, sorely needed by this point in the novel. He spends many of his evenings in the saloon bar, trying "to acquire the worldly feeling of liking and taking drink" (201) and observing those older than himself. He is interested in Bone's circle, envying them their apparent sophistication and the youth which, at about age thirty, has not yet abandoned them. He vouches for the attractions of Netta's "dark beauty" (203) and for Bone's good nature and kindness.

Littlejohn, too, endorses Netta's physical appeal but moral emptiness, and Bone's true goodness. He is a particularly relevant and significant observer of Netta, the bit-part film actress and theatrical-set habitué, given his position "in the West End as accountant to Fitzgerald, Carstairs & Scott, the well-known theatrical agents and producers" (96). This firm is the one that Netta most longs to be part of, and its Eddie Carstairs is the man she pursues throughout the novel, so that John Littlejohn, when he gives his opinions of Netta, speaks not only for himself, Bone's only friend, but also for the specific part of the theatrical world Netta most covets. As the firm's accountant, Johnnie is uncontaminated by the corrupting elements of the theatrical business, uninterested in seeking parts or posturing self-aggrandizingly, while his close participation with the business, both with its owners and its clients, is demonstrated thoroughly in the novel. Of his personal fitness to judge character, the omniscient voice is clear that Littlejohn, "though a kind-hearted and polite man, was no fool: anything but it" (95), and when he meets Netta, he at once takes her measure. Littlejohn, then, is the witness best suited to judge Netta, to endorse the conclusions drawn from Bone's confused ideas and experiences.

The strengths of these outside points of view are also used to underscore the message about alcoholic existence in the pub. If Halliwell is uniquely positioned to offer a

young, fresh opinion of Netta, and Littlejohn is equally well-placed to judge her since he is an experienced man in her line of work, both of them testify to the inner/outer divide of Bone's drinking life. Halliwell consciously studies Bone's circle, observing their habits and speculating about their lives. He is impressed by them: not only their self-confidence, high spirits, apparent sophistication, and film connections, but "the amount they drank and the money they spent in conjunction with their seeming total idleness or unemployment" (202). In Hamilton's public-school analogy, Bone's group is "the 'bloods' " and Halliwell is the "new boy" (203). Halliwell's view is in marked contrast to everything the novel reveals about their real existence: the acrimonious fighting amongst themselves, constant hangovers, physical illness, and financial worries. The outside is about fun; the inside is its "queasy authenticity."¹¹

John Littlejohn provides further insight into the participant/addict divide. When he first visits Bone in Earl's Court, Bone entertains his guest in a series of pubs, first locally and then in the West End. The second pub Bone chooses is one of his "regular places," and it is described invitingly:

The long, warm, bright days still persisted, and the door of the pub was flung and fastened back. It was cool, dark, and restful inside and pleasant with the peaceful beginnings of the little house's evening

trade--two men talking quietly, another reading a newspaper, the flutter of a canary in a cage, the barmaid vanishing into the other bars and returning, the occasional oily jab of the beer-engine and the soft spurt of beer. It was good to sit back in this cave of refreshment, and stare at the blinding brilliance of the day outside, the pavement, the dusty feet of temperate but jaded pedestrians. (95)

This is what Littlejohn sees, and what most other casual customers would see as well; it is the warm-weather version of the outside view, as characteristic as the cold-weather version voiced by Gordon Comstock. The initial appeal of pub culture lies in such a picture: peace, relaxed socializing, and refreshment, both liquid and spiritual. Once trapped inside, however, the view changes dramatically, and the regular's sense of belonging can become menacing. Addictive participants have a sort of x-ray vision, allowing them to see behind the pleasant surface:

But, of course, [Littlejohn] could not see what George could see--the wet winter nights when the door was closed; the smoke, the noise, the wet people: the agony of Netta under the electric light: Mickey drunk and Peter arguing: mornings-after on dark November days: the dart-playing and boredom: the lunch-time drunks, the lunch-time snacks, the lunch-room upstairs: the whole poisoned nightmarish circle of the idle tippler's existence. He saw merely a haven of refreshment on a

summer's day. (95)

What must not be overlooked is that both views are valid, true to the experience of the observers. For Hamilton truly to reveal Bone's existence, his novel must spend most of its time in the Bone-circle, replicating the closeness and futility of that kind of pub life. Occasional glimpses of other viewpoints serve to mark the contrast and suggest the possibility of such an underground existence in any/every pub. The novel is, in that sense, an exercise in the sinister consciousness-raising of noir; once acquainted with both surface and depths, one cannot escape imagining depths whenever enjoying the surface.

HAMILTON'S METHODS

Discussion of what issues Hangover Square addresses would be incomplete without some consideration of the means by which those issues are addressed. Hamilton chose an ideal method of re-creating alcoholic existence, and the novel benefits from his provision of what might be best described as variations on a theme; these repetitions re-create the claustrophobia and repetitiveness of drunken life. Descriptions of Bone and his actions are followed by scenes of his efforts to try to remember, and make sense of, what readers have already seen happen. Bone's schizophrenia, along with everything else, worsens, both gradually over time, and in sudden bursts. The transition into the "dead" mood, which was originally simply "a funny

click, a pop, a snap," becomes a "frightful crack" (193) in its later manifestations. The effort of trying to recover from the hangover, and from the schizophrenia, is eventually abandoned as hopeless.

Hangover Square is, like most of Hamilton's novels, noticeably circumstantial. Verisimilitude is pursued everywhere: Hamilton never stints on prices, locations, train times, restaurants, street names, even newspaper headlines. Verisimilitude in presentation of the addict's experiences in the saloon bar profits from the narrative strategies Hamilton has chosen. The pattern of action abruptly arrested, followed by a period of trying to remember, and then an attempt at recovery, followed by another cycle, ad infinitum, recreates the addict's point of view; here, Bone's. This structure can become a contested issue; some readers eventually reject the pattern, and thus the novel.¹² Instead of being lamented, the novel's patterns of repetition should be seized on as an opportunity, afforded to his readers by an expert, to watch addiction play itself out. The novel is, indeed, excruciating reading at times, but that is faithful to the inside perspective Hamilton provides.

Bone's schizophrenia is a device which allows Hamilton to put an extra spin on the underlying narrative pattern of variations on a theme. The novel includes Hamilton's usual realistic depiction of pub life, but adds to it recognized mental illness. Schizophrenia in Hangover Square functions

as alcoholism writ large, and the narrative implications of Bone's schizophrenia are considerable. In the guise of Bone's mental illness, Hamilton is able to present, intensified in form, the experiences of the alcoholic: after Bone feels the click inside his head, he entertains extravagant notions of reality, he does not know where he is, where he has been, or what he has been doing. When he is in one of his " 'dead' moods," when "life, in fact, which had been for him a moment ago a 'talkie', had all at once become a silent film. And there was no music" (3), he realizes clearly that "this Netta business had been going on too long. When was he going to kill her?" (6). During these moods, he plans carefully how he will kill her; when his mood is "normal," he knows nothing of it. In this fashion, the narrative can represent the "Jekyll and Hyde" effect of addictive drinking; Bone becomes someone different, depending upon whether he is drunk (in a "dead" mood) or sober (in a "normal" mood). Further, in making Bone schizophrenic, Hamilton has created a bona fide version of the alcoholic's talent for self-deception, for Bone is sincerely ignorant of his own dark side.

Hamilton's presentation of schizophrenia in Hangover Square was timely and topical, particularly for someone with Hamilton's interest in crime. In May, 1944, Vera Brittain, well-known writer and pacifist, wrote an article entitled "Political Schizophrenia," which begins with an extended definition:

Within recent years, those who follow the accounts of murder trials and other criminal cases have become familiar with a psychological abnormality known as "schizophrenia." This technical expression means "divided mind," and those who suffer from it are directed, as it were, by two distinct personalities, the one normal and benevolent, the other sometimes eccentric and malevolent. In literature the classic instance of this phenomenon is the story of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.¹³

It is noteworthy not only that Brittain should feel compelled to explain schizophrenia at such length--defining, describing, and offering a literary example of it--but that she suggests it is cutting-edge in criminology.¹⁴

"Sociopath" has replaced "psychopath" in the last twenty years; clearly "schizophrenic" was the villain for aficionados at the time of Hamilton's novel.¹⁵

Hamilton's delineation of Bone dovetails neatly with Brittain's description and, in fact, its merits have been discussed by critics and reviewers. Many accord it considerable credit as an accurate depiction of someone suffering from schizophrenia; a position courted by Hamilton's choice of epigraph, taken from Black's Medical Dictionary.¹⁶ Perhaps the most significant implication of this credibility is the certification it provides for Bone's other illness: schizophrenia is universally acknowledged as a mental illness, in contrast to the violent disagreements

about whether alcoholism is a disease, a moral failing, or simply a bad habit. By including a generally-recognized mental illness, Hamilton has raised his alcoholic protagonist partially above that debate and staked out a promising arena for serious representation of addiction.

Like the pub world, which is simultaneously benign and malignant, Bone, as an alcoholic and schizophrenic, is himself (in his person) an instance of conflicted representation. His "public" self appears benign even to those who, like the manager of his hotel, dislike him. The manager

would have been glad, in her heart, to have got him out of the hotel. There was no means of doing this, however, as he was regular in his payments, and, at least within the walls of the hotel, quiet and impeccable in his behaviour. Indeed, apart from one slight eccentricity--that of having adopted, and of feeding with milk from outside, the hotel cat, whose affections he had completely captured--his normality was nowhere to be questioned. And even this little eccentricity, if such it could be called, was, she had to admit, of the most amiable kind. (209)

His surface normality hides a profound abnormality; his amiability, real enough, hides violence. The novel makes this point directly, at the end of section five:

Living in a vacuum, with practically no vision of the future, and practically no awareness of the past, she

[Netta] bothered very little about anything--least of all about George, who, oddly enough, and unknown to both of them, at certain seasons directed his mind exclusively to the problem of killing her by violence.

(126)

What is seen from the outside is, at one and the same time, both accurate and unseeing; even Bone cannot transgress the boundary between his sane and crazed selves. His crazed self cannot comprehend the apparent laziness of his sane self, while that consciousness is unaware of the plans his crazed self makes.

The obsessions of Bone when in his "dead" moods are very like drunken obsessions, for the notorious persistence and obsessive repetition of the drunk need little transformation to appear as schizophrenic obsessions. Bone knows he is obsessed in multiple ways, that there is an inner/outer divide even to his love for Netta:

He could see through them, and, of course, he hated them. He even hated Netta too--he had known that for a long time. He hated Netta, perhaps, most of all. . . . You might say he wasn't really 'in love' with her: he was 'in hate' with her. It was the same thing--just looking at his obsession from the other side. He was netted in hate just as he was netted in love. (29)

Bone is resigned to his obsession(s) with Netta, yet, paradoxically, it is when he is crazy that he decides to free himself by acting.

The fusion of mental illness and alcoholism is mirrored in Bone's confusion between the violence he plans and his own geographic solution. Killing Netta and going to Maidenhead become inextricably linked in Bone's mind; both seem to him necessary preconditions for ending his excessive drinking. For Bone, the geographic solution merges with murder to offer catharsis. He believes that he cannot leave Earl's Court for Maidenhead unless he first commits murder, and he believes he must leave Earl's Court to stop drinking: "Was he, then, going to kill them in Brighton, now: today or tomorrow? Yes. Of course he was--no more putting off. He had got wise to himself now. Here was half the summer gone: it would be cold soon, and he would have to wait another year. Another year in Earl's Court!" (163). Earl's Court and Maidenhead are linked in a mutually-feeding obsession. As his hatred of Earl's Court increases, Bone's vision of Maidenhead and its powers becomes increasingly bizarre; as Maidenhead is endowed with more and more recuperative powers, Earl's Court becomes increasingly scapegoated by Bone.

Brian McKenna recognizes the interweaving of Bone's masochistic love for Netta, his mental illness, and his drinking problem: "Of a piece with this obsessive-compulsive disorder [his love for Netta] is George's dependence on the bottle, which he needs in order to cope with Netta but which intensifies his schizophrenia (as well as being analogous to it)" ("Confessions" 237). To say that Bone needs alcohol

"in order to cope with Netta" seems naive; of more interest is the relationship among these elements of Bone's travails. It is difficult to separate them but, in terms of the narrative, it seems clear that the alcoholism drives the rest.

Bone's own awareness that his various "failings" interconnect deserves to be taken seriously; in the passage quoted earlier, he attributes his physical and mental illnesses to the combined agency of drinking and nervous exhaustion. While Bone is addicted to self-destruction in myriad ways--drinking, smoking, Netta, untreated mental illness--his alcoholism overarches the others, compounding their effects and making escape from them well-nigh impossible.

George Harvey Bone's situation and experiences are singular, of course, but they suggest unseen dimensions possibly possessed by ordinary places, people, and activities. Hangover Square puts readers inside the circle of alcoholism; it provides both inner and outer visions of the pub. These are noteworthy achievements. "Alcohol is the symptom, the motif, in Hamilton's world, of the personal crisis, of irresponsibility, of failure, of fear and breakdown, of an inability to cope with the world, and of decline and inadequacy," writes Peter Widdowson; "Occasionally, it transcends itself and becomes a metaphor for some wider malaise."¹⁷ That, for Widdowson, is its

only possible accomplishment: to be a metaphor for an abstract political principle. At times, in Hamilton's pub fiction, Widdowson notes disapprovingly, "the bottle of Haig in the suitcase means alcoholism. Nothing more" (124). Alcoholism in literature, however, is one of the principal subjects of the steadily growing field of literature and addiction studies, and Hamilton's contribution to this important area should not be overlooked.

In order to re-create alcoholic experience, Hamilton is relentlessly specific; the particular alcoholic, Bone, and his precise activities, construct one version of experience from which readers may generalize. The setting is part and parcel of George Harvey Bone's spiral into death; it is also a vital part of the fictional milieu of Hamilton's oeuvre. Bone lives out his drama in Earl's Court, and the novel begins to convince its readers that the geographic solution is more than mere fantasy:

Earl's Court in the rain . . . The summer had crashed: it had crashed at Brighton: It would never rise again. Only rain now--the grey, wet end of hope and love.

Where was he going? He had a week to decide. Where? Anywhere, Notting Hill, Bayswater, South Ken, Shepherd's Bush, Knightsbridge, but never again Earl's Court. Good-bye to the Square, the Gardens, the Mansions; the Penywerns and Neverns; the Private Hotels; the Smith's, the Station, the Turkish Baths; the A.B.C. and Express Restaurants; the pubs, the

florists and tobacconists, all the bleak scenery of his long disgrace and disaster--good-bye for ever. The grey, ending rain was cool and blessed on his face.

(210; original ellipses)

The novel's full title, Hangover Square: A Story of Darkest Earl's Court, indicates not only the importance attached to the particular location, but also what attitude will be taken toward it. Hamilton's novel exposes the darkness behind the dreary facade of Earl's Court through a realistic and circumstantial treatment of the alcoholic round of its pub dwellers.

Hamilton uses the unlikely setting of Earl's Court, "a typically bourgeois middle-class pseudo-frolicsome semi-suburb of London" (Morley viii), to produce a stunning portrait of alcoholism, social malaise, political dangers, even murder. Hangover Square draws together the principal components of Hamilton's fictional milieu--pubs, transient accommodations, cafes--and puts it under an even more microscopic gaze than before. The impending war and George Harvey Bone's insanity lend added horror to the everyday horrors of this world and the lives of its inhabitants.

NOTES

1. Introduction to Murder With a Difference: Three Unusual Crime Novels (New York: Random House, 1946), vii.
2. The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), x.
3. The spell check on Word Perfect 5.1 baulks at "Hanover" and proposes, appropriately enough, that the writer meant to write "hangover."
4. (London: Constable, 1972 [f.p. 1941]), 18. Subsequent references to this edition cited in text.
5. Neil Kessel and Henry Walton, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 11.
6. Equivocal Spirits: Alcoholism and Drinking in Twentieth-Century Literature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 12.
7. The Magic of My Youth (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1951), 176.
8. Hamilton's commitment to what may be called--a bit melodramatically, perhaps--the dark side of pub life contrasts with the interests of a fellow writer like Julian Maclaren-Ross, a contemporary whose pub credentials are as faultless as Hamilton's own. In his Memoirs of the Forties,

and story collections like The Nine Men of Soho, Maclaren-Ross makes light of the consequences of leading such a pub-based life and presents himself as a sort of ideal pub companion: heavy-drinking, yes, but always witty and accommodating. Hamilton's work traces the downward spiral in ways that Maclaren-Ross's does not.

9. Observer-participants are not defined by how much they drink, and they certainly need not be teetotalers; they are people who have observed, and probably have participated in, pub life.

10. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1954 [f.p. 1936]), 81.

11. Nick Kimberley, "One Man in His Time," review of Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, New Statesman 17 July 1987, 29.

12. For example, Brian McKenna's doctoral thesis laments this aspect of the novel, finding it monotonous and irritating.

13. Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby, ed. Paul Berry and Alan Bishop (London: Virago, 1985), 242.

14. And, indeed, Hangover Square predates Brittain's article by 3 years.

15. In the 1950s, when Hamilton wrote the three Gorse novels, he again examined a criminal with a contemporary relevance; although he never uses the terms "psychopath" or "sociopath," his explanations of Gorse's personality and

behavior capture the peculiarities of that criminal type.

16. "Schizophrenia: . . . a cleavage of the mental functions, associated with assumption by the affected person of a second personality."

17. "The Saloon Bar Society: Patrick Hamilton's Fiction in the 1930s," The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy, ed. John Lucas (Sussex and New York: Harvester/Barnes and Noble, 1978), 118.

Chapter 8

"NOT A WAR TO BE TAKEN IN A LOCAL-LIBRARY WAY": WORLD WAR II AND THE SLAVES OF SOLITUDE

The Slaves of Solitude (1947) is Hamilton's last great novel. In the fifteen years he lived after its publication, he wrote the three Gorse novels which, although they represent an important change in direction for his writing, are not up to his highest standards. He also worked on two versions of a never-published autobiography, "Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man," whose title indicates the main reason for the falling off of literary production during this period. Hamilton's drinking problem was killing him, and he underwent several "cures," including electro-shock therapy, none successful.

HAMILTON'S MILIEU DURING THE WAR

The Slaves of Solitude makes a fitting end to the period of Hamilton's best work, and to the present study, because it draws together the major threads of Hamilton's fictional milieu. Its principal character is Miss Roach, a lonely single woman of 39 who has been bombed out of her London flat and is living in the Rosamund Tea Rooms, a boarding house within commuting distance of her London job. She represents the kind of people Hamilton has always

written about: insignificant, overlooked, rootless. Her encounters with the other main characters--the American Lieutenant Dayton Pike, German Vicki Kugelmann, Mr. Thwaites--take place in familiar Hamilton settings of boarding house and pub. The novel is set in late 1943, when all are worn out by the war but the end is not yet in sight, and in Thames Lockdon, modelled on Henley-on-Thames. In The Slaves of Solitude, Hamilton focuses nearly equally on both the private and the public institutions of his milieu, and shows how these reacted to the pressures of the war, a story few other novelists would bother to tell.

In Elizabeth Bowen's war novel, The Heat of the Day, also a homefront fiction, the protagonist Stella asks " 'Now who can be ordinary?--it's too late. All the years to have been ordinary in are gone' " (221). This sentiment fits with the widely-held view of the "People's War," but is countered by Hamilton's characters. His war novel disproves Stella's claim that people can no longer be ordinary, and it does so by demonstrating the ways in which they are ordinary; the novel records what ordinary looks like under such unusual circumstances.

Alan Munton's book, English Fiction of the Second World War, calls The Slaves of Solitude "the outstanding novel of non-combatant experience."¹ Hamilton, Munton notes, "specializes in finding meaning in the insignificant" (51) and this novel "record[s] the minute details of social inhibition and the subtle destructiveness of private

languages" (53). These features are present in all of Hamilton's work, but achieve particular significance when placed in contrast with the rhetoric (and activity) of the People's War. In Craven House, Hamilton sketched in the ordinary person's experience of World War I, noting the everyday and trivial ways in which the war made itself felt in places like Southam Green (the southwestern suburbs of London). The Slaves of Solitude represents a more in-depth look at how the fictionalized Henley-on-Thames, Thames Lockdon, coped with World War II.

Novels about the war, or set on the homefront during the war, have considerable significance. Munton points out the role that these novels have played in widely-accepted views about the war experience:

One difficulty in using the term "People's War" in a discussion of war fiction is that the concept is partly built up from that fiction itself. . . . This tendency is not sufficiently marked for the People's War concept to seem to chase its fictional tail, but it does suggest that fiction is not an autonomous activity separate from historical developments, and that under certain circumstances it can possess the same persuasive status as fact. (9)

Munton's comments suggest that English fiction of World War II is a particularly clear example of how the sociology of literary texts can have consequences outside the realm of literature and literary criticism. Throughout his career,

Hamilton's novels created this kind of record for his chosen milieu; in The Slaves of Solitude, with the addition of World War II, his work approaches a category of literature already recognized as having special sociological status.

Hamilton's treatment of the war is characteristic of his interests; the news is strictly in the background, and the war itself is personified in order to highlight its mundane, everyday ramifications. Its frustrations are legion, and although each annoyance is minor in and of itself, the cumulative effect is wearing. In particular, two aspects of homefront experience parallel boarding-house culture in Miss Roach's life: nagging admonition and lack of available resources.

The novel describes Miss Roach as having to "timidly run, on her way to the office, a sort of gauntlet of "No's" and "Don'ts" thumped down on her from every side" (101). Through Miss Roach's experience of them, new life is breathed into those British war campaigns with which we are familiar, but only in a remote or abstract way. Hamilton uses cataloguing, juxtaposing the sensible ("she was not to use unnecessary fuel") with warnings less obviously linked to the war effort ("she was not to leave litter about") in order to show how hemmed-in someone like Miss Roach felt--and indeed was--during the war.

Another element of homefront life that resembles boarding-house life is a widespread lack of common household items. Shopping is a trial for Miss Roach because

the war, in its character of petty pilferer, had been as busy in this little town as in London, and, for a woman's personal needs, the shops had little save frustration, irritation, or delay to offer in almost every department. There were no stockings, there was no shampoo, there was no scent, there were no hairpins, no nail-varnish, no nail-varnish-remover, no ribbon . . . (161)

The list continues, all of its items daily supplies with little apparent connection to the war effort. Miss Roach, worn down by years of such unavailability, feels snubbed. As soon as she leaves the Rosamund Tea Rooms, she is confronted with:

NO CIGARETTES. SORRY

in the window of the tobacconist opposite. And such was Miss Roach's mood nowadays that she regarded this less as a sorrowful admission than as a sly piece of spite. The "sorry", she felt certain, had not been thrown in for the sake of politeness or pity. It was a sarcastic, nasty, rude "sorry." (100)

The war makes itself felt everywhere; Thames Lockdon is "not even permitted to be Thames Lockdon, all mention of the town having been blacked out from the shop-fronts and elsewhere for reasons of security" (100). The war has crashed into the library, as well: "the pilferer was an insatiable reader, too, and Miss Roach spent a good deal of time at the library failing to find anything she wanted to take out"

(162). It seems to generate crowds:

In the war everything was crowded all the time. The war seemed to have conjured into being, from nowhere, magically, a huge population of its own--one which flowed into and filled every channel and crevice of the country--the towns, the villages, the streets, the trains, the buses, the shops, the hotels, the inns, the restaurants, the movies. (26)

Inevitably, the war effort has resulted in rationing (65). It has also affected social relations, mixing together oddly-assorted groups of people (118-119), and it makes it way into the hospital, where Mr. Thwaites must wait, in agony, due to "a hitch in the arrangements" (214) related in an uncomprehended, vague way to the war.

The war, for people like Miss Roach, is principally confusing. Hearing overhead the planes returning from their bombing mission over the continent, Miss Roach worries about the unfathomable complications of being part of a country at war. What is she to make of these planes, on "her" side, "coming back from burning and burying and exploding German Vickis, German small children, German charwomen and others. . . It was all very confusing" (134, text ellipses). When she is finally goaded by Vicki into declaring her patriotism, she does so in terms suggestive of her lack of engagement with the war effort: " 'I'm just not going to have remarks made like this when people are dying all around us for what they think's right.' Miss Roach realized that

this was rhetorically and logically a little feeble, but she could do no better" (198). This is the best she can do, and it is notable primarily for its reference to others: since others are dying for what they believe, they must be supported in this fashion by Miss Roach, who leaves her own beliefs well out of it.

Finally, however, the novel turns against the view of the war it has so circumstantially laid out. After her return to London, Miss Roach is reminded of the seriousness of the war, and concludes that it must be faced in more meaningful ways than she has become accustomed to facing it while in Thames Lockdon. It is wrong to think of the war as a pilferer, and petty nagger. People must not duck reality. At Claridge's, she sees

many men in uniforms, English and American.

These uniforms reminded her that she was back in the centre of things, the world and the war. She was glad to be back, in spite of the danger of bombs. You had to square up to the war. The horror and despondence of the Rosamund Tea Rooms resided in just the fact that it was not squaring up to it. The Rosamund Tea Rooms was hidden away in the country, dodging the war, in its petty boarding-house lassitude almost insensible of it, more absorbed in the local library. And this was not a war to be taken in a local-library way. (237)

The situation cannot be so easily remedied, however, for the

Rosamund Tea Rooms had far more problems than simply not facing up to the war. As a continuation of the boarding houses examined in earlier Hamilton novels, it must be seen as unable to change its ways. How could the Rosamund Tea Rooms "face up" to the war? Its problems are inherent in the boarding-house mode of living, and the war simply added another layer of unreality and bizarre pettiness.

The Rosamund Tea Rooms' inability to deal meaningfully with the war is also related to the time period Hamilton chose as the setting for his novel, a drab and difficult period of the war effort. At the end of 1943, little of dramatic import was happening, the war had been going on a very long time, and the end was not yet in sight. Munton describes the difficulties posed by such a period:

To periodize the war requires the political interpretation of an historical moment that is not yet complete. . . . Periodization became more difficult after the end of 1942, when for the British the war ceased to be a matter of spectacular defeats or victories and became a hard and persistent struggle.

(25)

Finishing the book after the war, Hamilton added a sketch of post-1943 developments to the novel's conclusion.

Hamilton's intermittent work on the novel over a period of several years, however, lends itself to the successful capturing of the mood relevant to the novel's timeframe.

Resignation is the only way for Miss Roach to cope.

The Lieutenant, nearly as exasperating and incomprehensible as the war itself, soon becomes too much for her to try and analyze. She decides to simply endure: "But she was by now resigned to being perplexed by the Lieutenant--whose appearances and disappearances, whose enthusiasms and fluctuations . . . could be withstood and surmounted by resignation alone" (109). The Lieutenant, an American soldier whose presence in England has not yet become directly useful to the war effort, serves as an analogy for the war effort itself, as these affect Miss Roach.

LIFE IN THE ROSAMUND TEA ROOMS

The setting for the Rosamund Tea Rooms is not substantially different from the context of Craven House and the Fauconberg Hotel. The novel's first sentence begins with London: "London, the crouching monster, like every other monster has to breathe, and breathe it does in its own obscure, malignant way" (1). Set outside of London, the novel's opening section takes pains to establish London's still-exerted influence:

The area affected by this filthy inhalation actually extends beyond what we ordinarily think of as the suburbs--to towns, villages, and districts as far as, or further than, twenty-five miles from the capital. Amongst these was Thames Lockdon, which lay on the river some miles beyond Maidenhead on the Maidenhead line. (1)

Images of commuters rushing in and out of the city are reminiscent of Craven House; here, instead of the District Line, transportation is provided by regular trains from Paddington Station. We are to see Thames Lockdon as under the influence of London, an influence newly-powerful because of the war. Miss Roach exemplifies this spreading of London's sphere of influence, as the blitz has forced her to commute by rail from Thames Lockdon rather than by tube from West Kensington as formerly.

Thames Lockdon, as the author's note observes, "bears a rough geographical and external resemblance to Henley-on-Thames" where Hamilton made his home throughout the war. Henley was fictionalized by George Orwell as Upper Binfield in Coming Up For Air, an earlier novel intent on examining the town's ordinariness. In The Slaves of Solitude, Thames Lockdon is specifically situated as "a place to pass through, above all" (3). As he did in Craven House, Hamilton supplies a description of the components of the town center and summarizes its features as "characteristic of the half-village, half-town which Thames Lockdon was--a place a stockbroker or bookmaker, passing through in his car in peace-time on the way back to his centrally-over-heated flat in a London block, would designate as 'very pretty' " (3). The yoking of stockbroker and bookmaker is curious, but suggests how easily pigeonholed Thames Lockdon is by those who pass through it.

The misleading name of the Rosamund Tea Rooms is our

first clue about how dysfunctional a place it is. No one knows where "Rosamund" originated, and the establishment is no longer a tea shop. Among its many effects, the war is responsible for the latter change. The landlady, Mrs. Payne, bought the shop before the war and had minimal success running it as a tea shop; the outbreak of war suggested its more profitable potential as a boarding house. When Miss Roach first came to the Rosamund Tea Rooms, thankful to be alive and with very few possessions, it seemed a safe haven:

Thames Lockdon had been "heaven." . . . And the town was "pretty," and the food "very good," and the people "very nice"--even Mr. Thwaites had seemed "very nice."

But now, after more than a year of it, Mr.

Thwaites was president in hell. (7-8)

Miserable as she is when the novel opens, things will only get worse for Miss Roach. Her salvation arrives, finally, in the form of a small legacy² and sufficient renewal of energy to leave the Rosamund Tea Rooms and Thames Lockdon. What has changed over the year she has been there? Nothing. The course of the war has worn down the nonheroic residents, but the problems that arise, and are exacerbated by the war, are characteristic of boarding-house life more than anything else. Once again, Hamilton has chosen as his subject the mores and methods of life for the class of person which inhabits second-rate boarding houses.

Mrs. Payne is a classic landlady, subduing her "guests"

and channeling their behavior into increasingly narrow ruts. She holds the power to do so, particularly under the circumstances of war: there is great demand for housing out of, yet convenient to, London, and Mrs. Payne has "never had a room empty." The structure of life in her boarding house is near-tyrannical and very uncomfortable for the residents. In particular, the arrangements for meals are excruciating, and Mrs. Payne's notes constantly badger the residents.

Readers are introduced to Mrs. Payne's notes before we actually see the landlady in person. These notes serve myriad functions, not the least of which is to crush independent behavior on the part of the residents:

One's responsibility in regard to the black-out had been the occasion of one of Mrs. Payne's famous notes. "N.B. Visitors will be held personally responsible for completing their own black-outs in their bedrooms"--this being pinned, sensibly enough (Mrs. Payne was nothing if not sensible), underneath the electric-light switch. Mrs. Payne left or pinned up notes everywhere, anywhere, austerely, endlessly--making one feel, sometimes, that a sort of paper-chase had been taking place in the Rosamund Tea Rooms--but a nasty, admonitory paper-chase. All innovations were heralded by notes, and all withdrawals and adjustments thus proclaimed. Experienced guests were aware that to take the smallest step in an original or unusual direction would be to provoke a sharp note within twenty-four

hours at the outside, and they had therefore, for the most part, abandoned originality. (5)

This "nasty, admonitory paper-chase" finds an echo in the hectoring signs posted by the government; Miss Roach runs that gauntlet on her way to and from work, while at home she must face Mrs. Payne's notes.

Meals are another means of oppressing the Rosamund Tea Room's residents. "About the dining room," the novel asserts, "there was something peculiarly and gratuitously hellish" (8). The furnishings are leftovers from the tea room days, and residents are seated at an assortment of small tables. Each has a regular spot, and all suffer under the peculiar restraint imposed by these separate tables:

in the small space of the room, a word could not be uttered, a little cough could not be made, a hairpin could not be dropped at one table without being heard at all the others; and the general self-consciousness which this caused smote the room with a silence, a conversational torpor, and finally a complete apathy from which it could not stir itself. No one, it

seemed, dared to speak above the level of a murmur. (9)

No one except Mr. Thwaites, who seizes on this arrangement as a perfect setting for his verbal bullying. Mrs. Payne, of course, "made no attempt to assist her guests in their predicament, for she was careful never to appear at meals" (10). Miss Roach's situation is particularly painful, for she is seated at a table with Mr. Thwaites and feels

constitutionally incapable of demanding a change:

How she had originally got "put" at this table Miss Roach could not remember, but there was nothing to be done about it now. Nothing, that is, apart from asking to be put at a separate table, which, in a room and atmosphere of this sort, would bring about a sensation such as she was incapable of creating. (11)

The rigidity of such a manner of living means that, aside from Mrs. Payne and her weapon of nasty notes, the dwellers of the Rosamund Tea Rooms can barely cope with the unexpected. When Mr. Thwaites dies unexpectedly, there is no protocol for broaching the subject, and so no one knows how to proceed. Ironically, had he been there, Mr. Thwaites would have taken on the responsibility:

When they were all seated, all wondered who was going to begin it. Normally such a thing would have been left to Mr. Thwaites himself, but the circumstances prevented precisely this, and at last Miss Steele undertook the task.

"Well," she said. "It's very terrible about Mr. Thwaites, isn't it?" (217)

The difficulties of communication are nearly insurmountable. Much of the stylized interaction covers potentially-serious matters which, under normal circumstances, will never be allowed to see the light of day. During the argument which culminates in Miss Roach pushing Mr. Thwaites on the stairs, for example, the conversation is unusually revealing. It

also, in its frankness, illuminates just how much has been lurking beneath the surface. In Hamilton's image, "there was another pause, and then Vicki made the remark which, blowing up the ammunition dump, disclosed the amount of ammunition stored away" (196). Presumably this revelation came as something of a surprise to everyone, observers and participants alike.

Similarly, after the crisis of Mr. Thwaites' death, when Miss Roach has decided to leave and learned of her inheritance, although no resident speaks directly to Vicki, they find a way to tell her what they think. Miss Roach, tailoring her remarks to Miss Steele for maximum effect on Vicki, gets "the impression that Miss Steele, instead of really speaking to her, was, like herself, really speaking to Vicki" (226).

One of the reasons Mr. Thwaites has been so successful in his bullying is that he uses these social and conversational conventions against the other residents. He is willing to speak while others are intimidated, and he deliberately poses conversational problems. Mr. Thwaites is not to be seen as independent or original; his investment in this rigid code is, if anything, greater than that of the others. It is simply that he has grasped how to turn those conventions against other people. When he is first introduced, we are told that he had spent his whole life in boarding houses and private hotels, that "such places, with the timid old women they contained, were hunting-grounds for

his temperament--wonderfully suited and stimulating to his peculiar brand of loquacity and malevolence" (12). The effect of his verbal bullying is captured nicely after he has started flirting with Vicki: "It was easy to see what he was getting at: at the same time it was almost impossible to do otherwise than pretend that one saw no such thing--a classical Thwaitesian dilemma" (148). In this manner, Thwaites can take any conversation well past the point it ought to be taken; the flustered recipient of his remarks can do little but utter "the drearily familiar 'What do you mean?' " (149).

Because Miss Roach is coming out of such a context, where life is constricted and communication impossible, she is initially willing to overlook Lt. Pike's faults; he offers a kind of conversation she is totally unused to. Lt. Pike is found to be, by both Miss Roach and the authorial voice, inconsequent. This is a serious charge; inconsequence is damning in Hamilton's fiction because of his belief in people's responsibility to and for other people: to behave inconsequently is to toy with the lives and feelings of others. The restrictions of boarding house life, however, invest inconsequent others with a certain appeal. Lt. Pike's initial attraction is that he represents freedom from, even opposition to, the over-rigid protocol Miss Roach is used to living with at the Rosamund Tea Rooms:

On Miss Roach and Lt. Pike's first trip to the pub, the Rosamund Tea Rooms were mentioned, and he asked

what the hell sort of a joint was that anyway? He just couldn't get the hang of it. This attitude delighted her. She said that if it came to that, she couldn't get the hang of it either, though she had been there more than a year. (29)

Miss Roach's delight is quite sincere, aided of course by her consumption of alcohol, but honest. She has been miserable at the boarding house, and is exhilarated to hear it assessed so frankly, and in the exotic Americanisms of Lt. Pike. Afterwards, she thinks of him as having "been on her side against the Rosamund Tea Rooms" (35).

On their second visit to the River Sun, he takes their collusion against the boarding house one step farther; he buys her dinner upstairs at the pub. She protests that the boarding house must be informed of her non-appearance, so he phones. He declines to give a detailed report of the kind she would like--who he spoke to, what they said--but instead has taken

an inconsequent attitude in regard to the Rosamund Tea Rooms and any social consequence whatsoever.

She was far from being in a mood to criticise this characteristic trait tonight, however. On the contrary, in her escape from the long inhibitions enclosing her at the Rosamund Tea Rooms, she was disposed to regard it as a merit. (36)

Once his inconsequence extends itself to other arenas, however, Miss Roach has increasing difficulty reconciling

herself to it. His attitude towards herself puzzles her enormously, and when Mr. Prest informs her of the Lieutenant's various amours and his proposals of marriage to many women (besides herself, as Mr. Prest presumably does not know she had received an offer to be a "Laundry queen" [45]), she sees this as the final, painful proof of his inconsequence. Ultimately, his inconsequence becomes unbearable. Without the window provided by her boarding-house existence, the Lieutenant would probably have been dismissed out of hand by the sensible Miss Roach.

WOMEN IN PUBS

The war also gives Hamilton an opportunity to record the significant social changes brought about by the war; again, not sweeping or abstract changes, but changes in the daily minutiae that affect the lives of ordinary people. Women in pubs, one of the areas that interested Mass-Observation, gets an airing in The Slaves of Solitude. The studies conducted by Mass-Observation and Hamilton's fictional portrayals corroborate each other, and offer further proof of Hamilton's sociological accuracy. Without conducting formal research, Hamilton pinpoints the changes and understands their significance.

Mass-Observation produced several reports on the pub-going habits of women during the war: "Social Change I: Women in Public Houses" (undated), "Women in Pubs" (3 March 1943), "Report on Women in Public Houses" (30 March 1943),

and "A Note on Behavior of Women in Pubs in Certain London Areas" (11 June 1943).³ Mass-Observation believed that women's changing habits of pub-going was one of the most noteworthy of the wartime changes, one that would require watching during the postwar period. Women had already been identified by Mass-Observation as being particularly affected by the war in terms of everyday modes of living. In a July 1941 report on "Habit Changes in Wartime," Mass-Observation determined that "from answers to this particular series of questions it would appear that in many ways war is impacting much more heavily on women's habit patterns than men's."⁴

Looking at changes in women's pub habits, Mass-Observation believed, is one way of considering how women's overall position has changed as a result of the war. Their first report on women in pubs makes this claim clearly, for they begin by quoting Mrs. Corbett Ashby on the enormous force of public opinion wanting to push women back to their post-war status. Women's pub-going is an important marker of their changing status and will be an important gauge of whether or not they consolidate their gains:

Just how enormous or otherwise this force is, we shall be discussing in a later bulletin. But it is clear that there are a great many places out of which women will have to be pushed if they are to return to the 1939 position. War-jobs are not by any means the only places in which women have become entrenched during the

war. They have not only taken over mens' activities in working hours, but to a very considerable extent in leisure hours too. Perhaps one of the most significant changes is the extent to which they have entered during the war into the life of public houses. We give below the results of a small survey undertaken last month in one London borough into the changing position of women in pubs, and people's feelings about it. (FR 1661, 1)

Their pub studies relating to women's pub-going and the war (as opposed to their earlier work on pubs in Bolton) were based on research in Metrop, their pseudonymous London borough (most likely Fulham). Their March 1943 report was based on five pubs with a total of fifteen bars. One study found that 33% of men and 52% of women were "favourable" regarding young women going to pubs while 40% of men and 28% of women were "unfavourable" (FR 1611), and another study found that 27% were favourable on young women going alone while 43% favoured the general idea of young women going into pubs (FR 1635). The reports, taken altogether, explain the multitude of attitudes behind those percentages.

First, Mass-Observation records the mixed attitudes toward women in pubs, including some ambivalence on the part of the women pub-goers themselves. A 50 year old artisan-class woman,⁵ for example, told the observer

I think it is a very good thing, just as it should be, women going into a public house the same as a man would do. You might as well say, should women ride in buses.

You can't build special pubs for women any more than you can run special buses. We're all just people nowadays. And I don't think men resent it; they like to be able to take girls to a pub without being thought low. Its a great improvement on the old days, so long as women don't overdo it. I don't like to see a woman drunk. (FR 1611, 5)

She believes that women have the right to patronize pubs, and that the new state of affairs is an improvement for everyone. At the same time, she worries about women "overdoing it," a concern that will be repeated over and over in Mass-Observation's reports. The observer summarizes the general version of this complaint: "it is clear that a strong social feeling exists against women being in pubs which has little to do with their behavior. The feeling that it is 'unwomanly' and 'not nice' to visit pubs was often expressed vehemently" (FR 1611, 3).

Support for this notion comes from a variety of sources. A 55 year old working-class woman, herself a pub-goer, said

"Well, I shouldn't like my Emmie to go running around pubs on her own--indecent I calls it. Of course, if you goes in with other women you never know what will happen; people think you're cheap. Its all right for an old body like me, but youngsters, no." (FR 1611, 3)

Clearly the issue appeared very complicated, and Mass-Observation records many interpretations, often

inconsistent.

There are also, of course, those who are against women being in pubs and who will concoct any complaint against them. One landlord of a large pub opines that

The trouble now is this lipstick . . . these young girls . . . it comes off . . .

They don't last more than six weeks at the most. They're worn absolutely threadbare. That's the point. You must wash them more now because of this lipstick. Probably before the war it never came off, but it comes off now. (FR 1491)

To save this gentleman's towels, apparently, young women ought to be kept out of pubs.

The age and class of women are both important factors in determining their attitude towards pub-going. A survey resulted in these figures:

<u>women pub goers</u>	<u>30 and over</u>	<u>under 30 yrs</u>
Go alone sometimes	45%	25%
Never go alone	55	75 (FR 1611, 4)

This chart disguises a significant class factor: "22% of both middle and artisan class women admitting that they sometimes visited pubs alone, compared with 61% of working class women" (FR 1611, 4). Older working class women, according to the report, were most likely to enter a pub alone.

Furthermore, even while more women are beginning to go to pubs more frequently than formerly, there are definite

limits on their participation in pub culture. They are still a definite minority; according to a random sample, 82% of men and 58% of women said they do go to the pub, while 18% of men and 41% of women said they do not (FR 1635). This is a substantial difference.

Among those who go to pubs, there is also a noticeable difference in how often they go. In Metrop, in 1943, "nearly three-fifths of the women now visit pubs at times, compared with rather over four fifths of the men" (FR 1611, 1). But men are more likely to be regulars, if a regular is defined as someone who visits "the local weekly or more often." (FR 1611, 1). The observer reports that "in a street sample in the study area [Metrop] . . . among the pub-goers, the men go much more often than the women. There are five regulars among male pub-goers for every three among women" (FR 1635, 5).

What drives Mass-Observation's interest in this topic is how the war has affected these behaviors, and the reports on pub-going characterize the war's effects on the ebb and flow of pub-going. They offer several noteworthy observations on how the war has affected pub-going as a whole. Certain kinds of war news, for example, drove up pub attendance: "The general indication from these figures and others at interim dates is that more people tend to patronise public houses when the news is very bad and there is nothing much which they feel they can do about it" (FR 1635, 2; their emphasis). People went to pubs for reasons

which might be anticipated; the news is bad, and people need others to share it with. Pubs are refuges for many people, and the war simply underscored that fact:

It was not personal disaster which produced peak pub attendances, but national disaster which seemed avoidable at the time. The highest attendance recorded was on the eve of the fall of Crete (31.5.41), a point of extreme depression when it looked as though reverses would never stop, and when many people felt that the war effort was not all-out. (FR 1635, 3)

During the mid-war years, people went to pubs not to celebrate, but to seek relief from bad news. People go to the pub when they feel "depressed and personally aimless, other factors being equal" (FR 1635, 3).

Earlier, Mass-Observation used Saturday night headcounts in late 1939 and early 1940 to conclude that "the immediate effect of the war on pubbing was to stimulate it tremendously." One of the reasons for this was purely social, again pointing to the necessary social functions pubs perform for at least some segments of society: "there was more to talk about than usual, and the pub is above all a place where people can get together and talk to one another in groups."⁶

A final purpose of their 1943 work on women and pubs was to consider what might follow once the war is over. Are these changes permanent, or merely transitory effects of living during a time of war? One of the most interesting

features of Mass-Observations discussion is how much it resembles contemporary discussion of pub facilities, suggesting that whatever gains women made during the war were not fully consolidated afterwards. Mass-Observation's report considers the kinds of amenities that might be provided to make pubs more appealing to female patrons--gardens, more plentiful and more comfortable seating, facilities for children--and speculates that

How far such changes as these will be made in the pubs of the future depends partly, at least, on whether women continue to patronise them after the war is over.

. . . It seems likely that the large-scale change which war has brought to pub-life will persist and that young people, including young women, will become a permanent feature of the British pub. (FR 1611, 8)

Mass-Observation, in its role as recorder of sociological data, does not analyze why or how these war-time changes in women's pub-going occurred. Their general remarks have some bearing, but they don't explicitly address the new position of women. Hamilton, however, takes this task on, and examines not only what changes occurred, but why they did and how people like Miss Roach felt about them. Hamilton's novels, in fact, both reflect and reveal changes over time, showing the subtly transforming relationships his female characters have to pubs. In the mid-1930s, Hamilton gave readers Ella and Jenny in the *Midnight Bell*; the end of that decade frames Netta in the pubs of Earl's Court; finally,

during the war years, Miss Roach's relation to the River Sun and the Dragon (a country inn which provides black-market steaks and other illicit goodies) explores the changes wrought by wartime.

Pub-going is an important part of Miss Roach's wartime relationship with Lt. Pike, and the influence of alcohol is established openly. In taking her to the River Sun, the lieutenant gains an advantage, for his personal charms-- "gorgeous American teeth in a warm, broad American grin"-- operate in "occult collusion with the gin and french" he buys her (29, 35). Unusually for a Hamilton novel, the heavy drinker is not the protagonist but an alien; instead of a sympathetic Bob or Bone, it is Lt. Pike who drinks excessively and addictively. Arriving home after work, Miss Roach is bemused by Lt. Pike's invitation to the River Sun. She accepts, but subsequently notes several markers of his heavy drinking. Initially, these are inconclusive; they may be signs of alcoholism, but perhaps are not. Miss Roach is aware, for instance, "that the man, without being drunk, had been drinking during the afternoon" and when she observes him in the Saloon Lounge, she sees not just the gorgeous teeth and the friendly smile but that "his eyes were slightly bloodshot, and at moments she thought that this was due to the cold, and at moments she thought that this was due to his drinking alcohol regularly and heavily" (29). The matter is left for future determination, as Miss Roach ceases to be critical: "soon enough her heart, in occult

collusion with the gin and french inside her, began to warm towards him" (29). Of course, even on their first visit to the pub, Pike sends out many warning signals concerning alcohol. Miss Roach orders a small drink, but he brings her a large. She tries to refuse a second drink, but is instead given another large.

The novel is more interested, however, in exploring the changed and still-changing relation of women to the pub, and Hamilton's commentary on women's pub experience bears out Mass-Observation's research on the same subject. It is the war, and not Lt. Pike, which has made Miss Roach, along with many other women, a pub-goer:

It was not, as might be thought, the Lieutenant who had introduced Miss Roach to the River Sun or to the habit of meeting and drinking in bars. The blitz in London, with its attendant misery, peril, chaos and informality, had already introduced Miss Roach to this habit. (47)

Hamilton explains the phenomenon in The Slaves of Solitude, carefully establishing Miss Roach's new behavior as characteristic of a whole class:

yet another small population . . . of which Miss Roach was a member--of respectable middle-class girls and women, normally timid, home-going and home-staying, who had come to learn of the potency of this brief means of escape in the evening from war-thought and war-endeavour. (47)

The appeal of pub-going is complex, and the novel tries to identify the main constituents of that appeal for the pubs' newest patrons: "the company, the lights, the conversation, the novelty or humour of the experience" and, most important of all, "the drink itself" (47). The experience is novel, but gradually becomes more accepted by these women; their attitude is changed through their experience of pub culture and drinking.

Significant about the change, as explained by both Hamilton's novel and Mass-Observation's research, is its complexity. Old habits are not cast off lightly, and the ambivalence of those affected is established. The women, like Miss Roach, who discover pub going, are "originally half-scandalised by the notion of drinking in public or of drinking at all" but eventually come to a limited acceptance of their new habit: Miss Roach "had no longer any fear of entering public-houses, and would, if necessary, and provided she was known in the place, enter one unaccompanied" (47). Clearly Miss Roach's relation to pubs, while new and noteworthy, is fraught with difficulties not faced by her male counterparts. Valerie Hey's remarks about pubs being male domains, where women are sometimes permitted on sufferance, are apt. She asserts that "the public house is a political institution expressive of deeply held gender ideologies" (72), and complains that even those interested in charting the social waters of pub life have not explained why this is so:

In concluding this chapter, I hope I have made it clear that "public" houses have never really been public for women, and that claims to have studied them as social institutions, as living "social organisms," or whatever, that fail to explain why women have been prevented or discouraged from securing access to them are totally inadequate. (59)

As the phrase "social organisms" is Mass-Observation's, Hey thus finds their study to be inadequate, in spite of her praise for its original and valuable approach to pubs as social organisms rather than problems. It should be noted that Hamilton makes no effort to explain this either; The Slaves of Solitude is interested in examining the process of change without scrutinizing the reasons for women's prior exclusion from pubs. Both Mass-Observation and Hamilton's novel, however, provide a way to view a relationship in flux; that they choose not to conduct their analysis from a feminist perspective does not render their portraits useless, or even inadequate.

THE SLAVES OF SOLITUDE AS WARTIME NOVEL

I have already noted that wartime novels are a recognized instance of the sociological functions of fiction. The Slaves of Solitude ought to be examined for its contribution to that category. One of its most valuable features is the ways in which Hamilton has made personalities reflect larger political beliefs; the novel,

like Hangover Square before it, politicizes the personal qualities of characters. This technique brings abstract political concepts down to a more material level, where their implications can be examined.⁷

The Slaves of Solitude represents an unusual achievement. Munton's study accords it high praise, but underestimates some of its potential. Munton quotes from Nella Last's Mass-Observation diary, noting that "I know of no war fiction which recognizes women's subjectivity as existing in the way described here" (31). He goes on to argue for the importance of the subject, and its lack of representation in fiction. This lack of representation, Munton believes, is a serious flaw in the novels of World War II:

This passage shows her being defined by others, or by a popular culture that can be appropriated for her to play her part. Such a crisis ought to be the content of war fiction, making accessible the otherwise withheld experience of women. Narrative fiction would privilege and legitimize events and feelings which as diary entries are soon overwhelmed by the banal chaos of passing time. Such fictions have not been written, perhaps because realistic writing lacks the technical resources to engage with difficult mental states. Modernism, always ready to welcome the disturbed subject, had broken up by 1939. (31)

Munton, in asking for the privileging of both events and

feelings along with the unveiling of "difficult mental states" appeals to the modernist thread of fiction, the main segment attended to by academics interested in twentieth-century literature.

The novel of individual consciousness, often stressing subjectivity rather than "mere" plot-- the form as practiced by writers such as Henry James and Virginia Woolf, to name a pair of examples much admired by academics--is the strain of novelistic philosophy Hamilton eschewed from the start. While Bowen, in The Hotel, was concerning herself primarily with the consciousness of the elect, interesting few, Hamilton, in Monday Morning, addressed himself to the details of their unrecorded lifestyle and revealed the depths of their external self-consciousness and prescribed ways of thinking.

Searching self-analysis is rarely found in Hamilton's characters, and when they do indulge in introspection, the result often obfuscates rather than clarifies. Miss Roach, trying to understand her mixed relief and pleasure when Vicki initially minimizes her own pub dates, goes to great lengths to explain away the obvious, understandable, and true interpretation of her reaction. Miss Roach initially hits on the best explanation--she wants to keep dates with Americans as her own achievement--but goes through a complicated series of unconvincing rationales. Finally, she decides

it was not a question of envy: it was a question of

fear of having been mistaken in a specific type of person [Vicki].

Miss Roach, glad thus to have explained this feeling to her entire satisfaction, was destined, however, to receive something of a shock in Vicki's next remark. (55)

The effort of introspection, because it is designed to delude herself, is completely wasted. Reality will force itself upon Miss Roach's tenuous self-exploration.

When she does understand something significant about herself, it is in passing and quickly suppressed. Her annoyance with Vicki troubles her; if she heeded her feelings, she would save herself much trouble, but instead, she is determined to suppress her intuition. Miss Roach was, she saw, always having thoughts for which she rebuked herself. It then flashed across her mind that the thoughts for which she rebuked herself seldom turned out to be other than shrewd and fruitful thoughts: and she rebuked herself for this as well.

(61)

The restrictions of Hamilton's characters are not only external, but internal as well. Introspection is a waste of time, because these subjects are so hemmed in they can only rationalize away the truth. Miss Roach's emotional life is so controlled that, after Mr. Thwaites' death, she wonders "was she to be haunted by the fear, until her dying day, that she, in the one moment of real fury she had ever

allowed herself in her life, had caused a death?" (219).⁸ People who can allow themselves only one moment of powerful emotion are not likely candidates for fruitful introspection.

Even at the end of the novel, when the nightmare at the Rosamund Tea Rooms is over, Miss Roach is still deceiving herself. Having learned of Lt. Pike's habit of proposing to all and sundry, she still chooses to believe "that the Lieutenant probably liked her better than all the others, and she could probably have had the Laundry if she had really tried" (239). Communication with others, like introspection, is always partial, incorrect, unJamesian. Throughout their relationship, Miss Roach tries to interpret Lt. Pike's remarks, but of course she is never able to read him at all, and Vicki poses a real problem of interpretation for Miss Roach.

These two approaches--the profound psychological explorations of the modernist writers and the sociological depths of Hamilton's fiction--are not alternatives demanding a choice. Both methods, in the hands of gifted writers, can produce enormous insights. For Hamilton's people, their way of life is what makes them "disturbed subjects"; the lasting record he created constitutes an important legacy. Moreover, I would argue, The Slaves of Solitude does perform the task Munton describes; it does "privilege and legitimize events and feelings which as diary entries are soon overwhelmed by the banal chaos of passing time" (31).

AFTER THE SLAVES OF SOLITUDE: RALPH ERNEST GORSE

Hamilton's only published works after The Slaves of Solitude were the three Gorse novels. These, which were planned as a series of four novels, examined a sociopathic criminal, Ralph Ernest Gorse. The novels, unlike Hamilton's other fiction, are set retrospectively, in the interwar period. Throughout the novels are allusions, characteristic of true-crime writing, to Gorse's murderous career and eventual end on the gallows. The first novel, The West Pier (1951), portrayed Gorse's early career. His criminal tendencies are evident even while a schoolboy, and the central crime in this novel is the defrauding of Esther Downes, a young working-class girl. One of the novel's assets is its portrait of Brighton, a place Hamilton knew well and used effectively as a counterbalance to London in his earlier novels. No less an authority than Graham Greene called The West Pier "the best novel written about Brighton."⁹

Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse (1953) has Gorse switching his territory to Reading and his criminal attentions to Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce, a Colonel's widow. Once again, in spite of much doom-laden foreshadowing, Gorse's crimes consist only of swindling Mrs. Plumleigh-Bruce of £500, although Mr. Stimpson tries to foil Gorse's efforts. Hamilton's long-time publisher, Michael Sadleir, did not care for the novel, complaining that all of its characters are unpleasant, but it was favorably reviewed upon publication.

Unknown Assailant (1955), Hamilton's least substantial novel in every respect, showed Gorse swindling a naive barmaid, Ivy Barton, of her savings, assisted greatly--if unintentionally--by Ivy's snobbish father, who loses £200 of his own money in the bargain. It was the last published work of his career, and makes clear the huge gap between Gorse's actions and the dramatic commentary of the three novels. These novels retain a certain interest, through Hamilton's depiction of local atmosphere, snobbery, and the sociopathic personality, but are not his best work and certainly do not live up to the plan he had conceived for them.

For these reasons, the Gorse trilogy does not merit a full chapter in the present study, although under a different focus it could be examined at more length. In turning to crime as his subject, Hamilton addresses a different kind of sociology than previously; from the everyday and ordinary, he has turned to the pathological. In many ways, this decision reflects the post-war world and was foreshadowed by the criminal psychosis of George Harvey Bone during the phony war period of Hangover Square. Nonetheless, the Gorse books lack the kind of painstakingly assembled sociological detail that make his earlier books so rewarding.

Part of the perceived weakness of the Gorse novels results from the heavy rhetoric Hamilton employed. There is general agreement that Ralph Ernest Gorse is modelled after

Neville Heath, a comparison the two surnames suggest. It is also one of the comparisons sought by the novels themselves. Early in Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse, Gorse is compared to a long list of notorious criminals:

He had a touch of Burke and Hare of Edinburgh (though he was never a heavy drinker); he had a touch of Dr Pritchard of Glasgow; a touch of the multitudinously poisoning Palmer; of the strangely acquitted Miss Madeleine Smith; of Neal Creame [sic], the Lambeth harlot-poisoner; of George Smith, the bath-murderer; of Frederick Bywaters, Ronald True, Sydney Fox, Frederick Mahon, Neville Heath and George Haigh. (285)

There is also general agreement that, in spite of all the doom-laden reference of things to come typical of most true-crime writing, Gorse actually does very little. To get Gorse to the gallows as promised, a great deal would have to have happened in that never-written fourth volume. As the series stands, the gap between the rhetorical flourishes and the actual events creates the impression of a spoof of true-crime writing.

However, it is fitting that Hamilton should turn his attention to a sociopathic criminal, and his underlying conception of criminals like Heath being indifferent, empty people is well ahead of his time. The TLS review of The West Pier reveals not only how much Hamilton's work was part of common knowledge, but how appropriate a subject Gorse was for Hamilton to take up:

By the year 1946 Mr. Hamilton had established his claim to certain areas of the urban wilderness sufficiently strongly for it to be remarked that the flagellant murderer George Neville Heath had obviously belonged to the Hangover Square crowd. It was as if a creature of Mr. Hamilton's brain had broken from the lines of type and run amok in the real world, without the constraint which that author laid upon his meanest villains.¹⁰

NOTES

1. (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), 54. Subsequent references cited in text.
2. Miss Roach inherits £500 from her aunt, the same amount Ella and her mother would have received had Mr. Prosser died in The Plains of Cement.
3. The first two reports are from FR 1611, the third from FR 1635, and the final report from FR 1835. These reports are cited in the text; typographical and other minor errors have been silently corrected.
4. Draft report, based on June directives. File Report 808, page 3.
5. Mass-Observation used a scale of four lettered classes. D is working class, C is artisan class (or skilled working class), B is middle class, and A (found very infrequently) is upper class. For convenience, I am using the labels rather than the alphabetic designations.
6. US no. 12, 19 April 1940 (File Report 80), pages 117 and 118.
7. See Munton for a discussion of Hamilton's intertwining of the personalities of Vicki Kugelman and Mr. Thwaites with the political persuasions they embody.

8. Hamilton, ever kindly towards his characters, has the doctor make clear to Miss Roach that her push was not responsible for Mr. Thwaites' death.
9. Jacket blurb on Viking/Penguin edition of The West Pier.
10. "Patrick Hamilton's Novels," TLS 7 September 1951, 564.

CONCLUSION:
A LITERARY SOCIOLOGY OF THE ORDINARY

The fiction of Patrick Hamilton provides an unequalled opportunity to learn about the world Doris Lessing characterized as "Britain as its worst." His novels are so rich a recreation of a particular fictional milieu that the most natural approach to them is sociological. Curiously, however, the two predominant approaches before this study have been biographical and political. All commentators have noted the detailed and nuanced presentation of Hamilton's chosen milieu, even the majority who mention it only to put it aside in pursuit of a different task.

The present study, finding that the novels amply reward a sociological examination, focuses on that milieu and its recreation in the novels. In so doing, the novels themselves are given precedence over biography, literary theories, and politics. Their value is thus given proper weight. As René Girard, a theorist who understands that literature deserves to be more than mere corroboration of someone's theory, describes the relation between text and theory,

My own work has convinced me that the most
perspicacious texts from the standpoint of human

relations are the great texts of Western literature. They do not have to be studied from a Marxist or a Freudian point of view to yield what they have to yield; indeed, they must counterattack.¹

English fiction of World War II, as noted in the previous chapter, is a recognized instance of the sociological value of literary texts. These texts are seen to have consequences outside the realm of literature and literary criticism.

Hamilton's novels, taken as a whole, provide that kind of sociological record for a milieu over time--from the 1920s through the second World War. Mass-Observation makes an apt counterpart to Hamilton's work, for their record and Hamilton's reveal similar values and interests. In 1951, a TLS reviewer made the link explicit:

Long before Mr. Tom Harrisson trained an eye, sharpened in Malekula, on the natives of Bolton, Mr. Hamilton was exploring the jungles of Earls Court, Soho and Bayswater with the field note-book of an anthropologist, noting drinking and sexual rituals, class-courtships and the role of the scapegoat in urban cliques. Hangover Square . . . is a brilliant anthropological study of the 'lumpenbourgeoisie' on the eve of the late war.²

The founders of Mass-Observation believed that too little serious attention was paid to the ordinary; they set out to remedy that lack. Hamilton, as the TLS reviewer notes, was

already on the job. Hamilton's novels create a literary sociology of the ordinary, much as Mass-Observation, in their published works and archival materials, constructed a sociological record of the same subject.

Notable too, considering the specificity of his fictional world, is that aspects of it are surprisingly unchanged over the last fifty or sixty years. In most instances where a contemporary parallel can be drawn, it is a question of an unchanged basic structure with a dramatic surface change. Visiting the Courtfield, one of Hamilton's regular Earl's Court pubs, it is easy to imagine George Harvey Bone and his drinking circle there--only the clothing fashions have changed.

Or, as Doris Lessing observes, "Hamilton's people are still around. We have all known Bob and Ella , and it wasn't so long ago I met fatally lovely and dishonest Jenny. She died of an overdose, and that is the difference between now and then: no drugs here, it is all the Demon Drink" (23). While the absence of drugs surely dates a work like Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, Lessing is right to note the profounder social truths that remain constant, even under such a striking surface difference.³

Hamilton's London is still there, and is ever-labile to crop up, even in such unlikely venues as an academic e-mail discussion group. Someone seeking information about housing in London that is both cheap and "tolerable" received (among other suggestions) a recommendation for Hamilton's favourite

Earl's Court residential hotel, the White House. The Fauconberg, described in such detail in Monday Morning and later revisited as Bone's residence in Hangover Square, is in fact the White House.⁴ The White House is recommended in terms that evoke those very qualities that most distinguish Hamilton's London of the twenties and thirties:

It all depends on your definition of 'tolerable'. My personal favourite, which would probably be on the low end of acceptability for anyone over 25, is the White House Hotel, at 12 Earl's Court Square. 373-5903. As of last May, for 15 quid a night you get a private room with sink (shared bath down the hall), linens, closet, and small TV. The beds are decent if you don't have a bad back. A pretty minimal continental breakfast is included. There's a small communal fridge, a pay phone in the lobby, and laundry in the basement. The breakfast/communal room is a gorgeous Victorian ballroom, the hotel is right across the street from a pretty little park, and you're about 2 blocks from the Earl's Court Tube stop. The management was also extremely nice. If you don't like the White House, or if they don't have a room free, the Earl's Court area is loaded with cheapie housing of a similar type, although not quite as nice.⁵

The precarious balance achieved by the White House between cheapness and acceptability testifies to Hamilton's unerring judgment in such matters. Allowance need only be made for

inflation and television's new ubiquity. Hamilton's fictional milieu is a fascinating recreation of a time past, yet tantalizingly submerged in 1990s London.

In concentrating on the milieu, and on what the novels themselves present, I have deliberately eschewed those approaches which belittle Hamilton's work by casually pigeonholing it or faulting it for inconsistent adherence to a principle esteemed by the critic. His subject is ordinary yet unfamiliar; as the TLS reviewer notes, the contexts in which Hamilton's characters act out their dismal lives are

built up in exactly the same way, with careful elaboration and repetition of detail so that the reader becomes as familiar with the sights, smells and routine of the place as if he himself was an inmate. There is the same technique of initiation as into a primitive secret society, the same involvement of the reader in the niceties of tribal etiquettes. (564)

While Hamilton's chosen settings--pubs, boarding houses, cheap residential hotels, Lyons' and ABCs--may seem too mundane and everyday to merit the attention he lavishes upon them, their very ordinariness is what precludes our full understanding of them. Hamilton recognized that a superficial familiarity masked a deeper ignorance of these common institutions; that is why he had to create readers' full familiarity with these venues, "initiate" us into their mores and rituals.

Hamilton's novels ought to be read by anyone interested

in twentieth-century English literature. While many writers avowed their interest in the documentary form, as I discussed in Chapter One, few achieved the creation of a lasting record as successfully as did Hamilton. His novels, Mass-Observation's sociological reports, and the photographs of Bill Brandt provide a detailed picture of life in England during the 1930s and 1940s not to be found elsewhere.

NOTES

1. "Theory and Its Terrors." The Limits of Theory, ed. Thomas M. Kavanagh (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 253.
2. "Patrick Hamilton's Novels," review of The West Pier, TLS 7 September 1951, 564.
3. This is reminiscent of Woody Allen's film Hannah and Her Sisters, when the mother, recovering from a hangover and musing on the characters of her children, identifies herself as a clear precursor for her daughter Holly, a reformed cocaine addict. " 'I would have made a great dope addict,' " she proclaims, thinking of her long, difficult, and still-ongoing relationship with alcohol. Her alcohol problems and Holly's cocaine addiction are seen in the film as generational differences which lie over the barely-concealed basic similarities.
4. Jones, 104. Jones is uninterested in the material element of this, however, contenting himself with a footnote identification of the Fauconberg as the White House that reads in its entirety: "The hotel is still in existence" (388, note 10).
5. Ruth Feingold, VICTORIA: The Electronic Conference for Victorian Studies [Online], July 5-6, 1994. I would like to

thank Ms. Feingold for her permission to cite this post on
the White House Hotel.

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