

PhD by Submission of a Portfolio of Published Works: Timothy Edward Glencross

Introductory Section: ‘Barbarians, Hoffer and Post-Waugh Style’

The purpose of this Introductory Section is to situate *Barbarians*¹ and *Hoffer*² in the context of existing literature and to establish these novels’ original contribution to knowledge. To that end, I will examine as they relate to *Barbarians* and *Hoffer* the tradition of (1) English literary satire,³ focusing notably on the early works of Evelyn Waugh as well as contemporary writer Alan Hollinghurst, and (2) the transatlantic thriller novel. From its investigation of ‘manners’ in Lionel Trilling’s sense of the term, *Barbarians* offers fresh insights into the political and media elites of the 2010s. *Hoffer* investigates an even more rarefied social milieu via a new ‘post-Waugh style’ that is especially suited to portraying the oligarchic excess and spiritual hollowness of London’s 21st century super-rich.

London the heart of global capitalism

Barbarians and *Hoffer* are investigations of amoral elites located in (respectively) Westminster and Mayfair. Before exploring the suitability of fiction for such endeavours compared with nonfiction, some general background is helpful on the present concentration of social and economic power among the UK capital’s ruling class.

¹ Tim Glencross, *Barbarians* (London: John Murray Press, 2014).

² Tim Glencross, *Hoffer* (London: John Murray Press, 2017).

³ Both *The Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* describe *Barbarians* as a ‘satire’,³ and *Hoffer* is compared in its *Daily Telegraph* review to the writings of P.G. Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh. See Kate Saunders, ‘In short’, *The Times*, 14 June 2014, p.17; Martin Halter, ‘Das Leben ist eine Champagnerparty’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 December 2015, <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/tim-glencross-hat-eine-grandiose-satire-ueber-londons-bessere-kreise-verfasst-13957298.html>> [accessed on 25 February 2021]; and Jake Kerridge, ‘I Spy a Corpse Among the Objets d’Art’, *The Daily Telegraph*, April 1 2017, p.29.

In the twenty-first century, the City of London maintains its rivalry with New York for the status of world's top financial centre.⁴ Writing in *Forbes*, Professor of Urban Studies Joel Kotkin explains London's 'one-percenter' allure:

A preferred domicile for the global rich, London is not only the historic capital of the English language, which contributes to its status as a powerful media hub and major advertising centre, but it's also the birthplace of the cultural, legal and business practices that define global capitalism.⁵

This 'exalted' position at the heart of twenty-first century globalism makes the capital (and by extension the wider United Kingdom) particularly vulnerable to an international banking crisis, such as that of 2008-9, as well as to more diffuse threats linked to the vast inflows of 'dirty money' into Britain, which have a degrading influence on the nation's social and democratic compact.⁶

The direct cost of a financial crisis can be measured. To take one figure, the support that the UK government provided in 2009 to British banks directly or indirectly triggered by their exposure to U.S. subprime mortgage-backed securities peaked at almost £1000 billion.⁷ Though the calculation is more nuanced and multifaceted, there are also ways of assessing individual and institutional harms of a multigenerational political consensus that supports so-called casino capitalism. The Equality Trust notes that the UK has very high level of income

⁴ Saloni Sardana, 'London Has Almost Caught Up With New York As the World's Number 1 Financial Centre, Survey Finds', *Business Insider*, 25 September 2020, <<https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/biggest-financial-centers-london-nears-new-york-2020-9-1029622179>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

⁵ Joel Kotkin, 'The World's Most Influential Cities', *Forbes*, 14 August 2014, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2014/08/14/the-most-influential-cities-in-the-world/?sh=250c97827ad0>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

⁶ See Tom Burgis, *Kleptopia: How Dirty Money is Conquering the World* (London: William Collins, 2020), p. 337: 'The Brits [...] continue their long fade from imperial power to global network of financial secrecy connected to the City of London and servicing new, private empires. Their new populist rulers take money and inspiration from the Ur of Kleptopia, post-Soviet Moscow.'

⁷ National Audit Office press release, 'Maintaining the financial stability of UK banks: Update on the support schemes', December 15 2010 <<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/maintaining-the-financial-stability-of-uk-banks-update-on-the-support-schemes/>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

inequality compared to other developed countries; that the share of income earned by the top 1% in the UK has generally been rising since 1980; and that wealth, which is unevenly spread across Great Britain, is even more unequally divided than income.⁸

One can also consider anecdotal data on social mobility. In 2014—the year when *Barbarians* was published and the action of *Hoffer* set—the Prime Minister and his Chancellor (like the Leader of the Opposition and his Shadow Chancellor) were fortysomething ex-special-advisor males who read Politics, Philosophy and Economics at the University of Oxford. To the extent that he attended Cambridge and previously worked as a special advisor at the European Commission, the fortysomething male leader of the Liberal Democrats diverged from this narrow cadre.

The effect of successive Conservative and Labour governments' embrace of unfettered global capitalism on the nation's unwritten social codes and democratic traditions, including the rule of law, is likewise amenable to qualitative and quantitative analysis. We know that in 2014, for example, London was home to more 'Ultra High Net Worth Individuals' than any other global metropolis.⁹ The following year the head of the UK's National Crime Agency warned that 'the London property market has been skewed by laundered money. Prices are being artificially driven up by overseas criminals who want to sequester their assets here in the UK'.¹⁰

⁸ The Equality Trust, 'The Scale of Economic Inequality in the UK' <<https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/scale-economic-inequality-uk>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

⁹ Julia Kollewe, 'London retains crown as favourite city of world's ultra-rich', *Guardian*, 5 March 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/mar/05/london-favourite-city-world-ultra-rich-new-york-asia>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

¹⁰ Damien Gayle, 'Foreign Criminals Use London Housing Market to Launder Billions of Pounds', *Guardian*, 25 July 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/25/london-housing-market-launder-offshore-tax-havens>> [accessed 1 February 2021]

Novels, knowledge creation, and the drama of consciousness

The preceding paragraphs suggest, albeit in briefly sketched fashion, that it is possible to investigate the unhappy operation of political, social, and economic power by the twenty-first century London social elite via nonfictional means. This returns us to why a writer would choose the creative form of the novel over investigative journalism or academic research.

After all, prose fiction holds a diminished status in contemporary culture. Don DeLillo has noted the ‘reduced context’ of the social novel,¹¹ while Philip Roth spoke of the ‘cultic’ audience of literary fiction, which cannot ‘compete with the screen’.¹² Against this backdrop it is perhaps unsurprising that press reviewers of *Barbarians* and *Hoffer* remarked on the comparative rarity of modern British novels set among London’s political and economic elite. Susanna Rustin of the *Guardian*, for example, wrote of *Barbarians* that fiction dealing ‘directly with contemporary politics is rare enough to be welcome’.¹³ In the *Times Literary Supplement*, Paul Genders writes that the novel’s portrayal of the eponymous ‘Hoffer’s circle, its convoluted codes and catty manners, makes you wonder how [Glencross] ever gained close enough access to this beau monde to conduct his research’.¹⁴

How can a work of fiction be thought of as a research output capable of making a significant contribution to knowledge? How does a novel, as a drama of consciousness, ‘know’

¹¹ Jonathan Franzen, ‘Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels,’ *Harper’s* magazine, April 1996, p.54.

¹² Alison Flood, ‘Philip Roth predicts novel will be minority cult within 25 years’, *Guardian*, 26 October 2009 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/oct/26/philip-roth-novel-minority-cult#:~:text=%22The%20book%20can't%20compete.couldn't%20measure%20up.%22>> [accessed 2 April 2021]. More bluntly still, Jonathan Franzen, writing in January 1999, opined that just as ‘the camera drove a stake through the heart of serious portraiture and landscape painting, television has killed the novel of social reportage’. See Jonathan Franzen, *Harper’s* magazine, April 1996, p.42.

¹³ Susanna Rustin, ‘Barbarians by Tim Glencross – Unrequited Love Under New Labour’, *Guardian*, 14 June 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jun/14/barbarians-tim-glencross-unrequited-love-new-labour>> [accessed 2 February 2021].

¹⁴ Paul Genders, ‘An American in Kensington’, *Times Literary Supplement* <<https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/globalized-thriller/>> [accessed 2 February 2021].

something about Westminster politics or nefarious London-based Russian oligarchs that journalistic analyses or academic reports could not?

Some clarification is required about fiction as a drama of consciousness. Here it may be useful to refer to Auerbach's distinction between two styles that exercised a 'determining influence upon the representation of reality in European literature'.¹⁵ On the one hand, there is the 'narrated "reality"'¹⁶ of the Homeric style, a 'uniformly objective' present¹⁷ in which the description of characters and events is 'fully externalised' and meanings are 'unmistakeable'.¹⁸ We see 'battles and passions, adventures and perils', but Homeric poems are 'comparatively simple in their picture of human beings'.¹⁹

On the other hand, Old Testament characters possess a rich form of interiority, and their thoughts and motives must be inferred or interpreted. 'The Jewish writers,' Auerbach writes, 'are able to express the simultaneous existence of various layers of consciousness and the conflict between them'.²⁰ A scriptural example is that of Abraham and Isaac. Unlike Homer's expository use of direct speech, intended to maximally illuminate the thoughts of his characters,²¹ the dialogue between Abraham and his son on Mount Moriah is laden with silence and subtext,²² hinting at those unexpressed depths we associate with Hemingway's iceberg.²³ These two stylistic traditions, Homeric and biblical, reflect respectively a reportorial 'expressed

¹⁵ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 4th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 23.

¹⁶ *Mimesis*, p. 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Auerbach refers to 'thoughts and feelings [of characters] completely expressed' as a key feature of the Homeric style.

²² Auerbach highlights the repetition of the line in Genesis, Chapter 22 (versus 6-8), 'And they both went on together', which itself accentuates the silence between Abraham and Isaac and the unvoiced thoughts of each. See *Mimesis*, p. 11.

²³ Hemingway: 'If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.' See Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner's, 1932), p. 192.

reality' associated with nonfiction (the world of rhetoric) and fiction's suggestive, subjective drama of consciousness.

These two traditions within the humanities could be said to reflect a duality within science: namely, the 'expressed reality' of the realm of matter versus the subjective condition of consciousness. Traditionally, the former has been understood as fundamental and the latter derivative and even difficult even to define.²⁴ Neurosurgeon Henry Marsh concedes: 'we don't even begin to explain how electrochemistry and nerve cells generate thought and feeling.'²⁵ Study of quantum mechanics, however, has led some scientists to suggest that consciousness may turn out to be the universe's basic constitutive property, 'the creator and governor of the realm of matter'.²⁶

The novel, which takes consciousness as its primary subject, may represent reality more completely than more objective and analytic modes of writing.²⁷ At the heart of the novelistic drama—and of fiction's distinctive contribution to Knowledge—is the question of manners. In a 1947 lecture at Kenyon College, Lionel Trilling spoke of the novel as a 'perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as an indication of the directions of man's soul'.²⁸ It is in this more metaphysical sense of 'research' that *Barbarians* investigates the interlocking worlds of politics, media, and finance from the onset of the Great Recession to the years of David

²⁴ The philosopher Thomas Nagel suggests that the 'most important and characteristic feature of conscious mental phenomena is very poorly understood... But fundamentally an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism.' See Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (Oct., 1974), pp. 435-450 (p. 436).

²⁵ Tim Adam, 'Henry Marsh: "The mind-matter problem is not a problem for me – mind is matter"', *Guardian*, 16 July 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2017/jul/16/henry-marsh-mind-matter-not-a-problem-interview-neurosurgeon-admissions>> [accessed 24 October, 2021].

²⁶ Sir James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 137.

²⁷ Noam Chomsky: 'It is quite possible...that we will always learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology.' See David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), p. 10.

²⁸ Lionel Trilling, 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel', *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1948), 11-27 (p.17).

Cameron's Coalition government through the prism of the Howes, a well-connected North London family.

If *Barbarians*' examination of manners extends beyond the Homeric realm of the uniformly objective, the context is primarily domestic. Like Old Testament stories, the human drama (the 'sublime, tragic and problematic')²⁹ of this novel is located in familial conflict. Sherard Howe is a magazine proprietor, modern art collector, and closeted homosexual; his wife Daphne Dupree is a Second Wave feminist and well-known cultural commentator. Their ambitious adopted daughter Afua is a Treasury special advisor with ministerial ambitions. Into this rarefied world comes aspiring poet Elizabeth 'Buzzy' Price, ashamed and resentful of her suburban parents and beguiled not so much by the Howes as Afua's corporate lawyer boyfriend Marcel, the son of a powerful Brussels politician. Of the plot dynamics, the *Guardian* review of *Barbarians* notes: 'As in the social realist classics that are Glencross's model, some [of these characters] are swept up by the wheel of fortune, others come crashing down.'³⁰

Unlike *Barbarians*' an expansive nineteenth-century mode, *Hoffer* is a relatively compressed,³¹ first-person narrative. The eponymous antihero is a fixer to Mayfair-dwelling Russian expatriates and other Ultra High Net Worth individuals whose wealth is of illicit origin. The service that William Hoffer provides his clients involves reputation as well as money laundering. Hoffer introduces foreign criminals to members of the capital's financial and social Establishment, who in Faustian manner offer their services or good reputations in exchange for personal enrichment.

²⁹ *Mimesis*, p. 22: '[...] domestic realism, the representation of daily life, remains in Homer in the peaceful realm of the idyllic, whereas, from the very first, in the Old Testament stories, the sublime, tragic and problematic take shape precisely in the domestic and commonplace [...] scenes such as those between Cain and Abel, between Noah and his sons, between Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar [...] and so on.'

³⁰ Susanna Rustin, *Guardian*.

³¹ *Hoffer* is approx. 54000 words compared with approx. 108000 for *Barbarians*.

There is a ‘Gatsbyesque’³² quality to *Hoffer*’s protagonist: a Midwesterner with criminal connections, William Hoffer has a taste for the high life and an opaque past. The Fitzgerald echo has a double aspect. Along with the historical parallels between the New York of the Roaring Twenties and the London of the 2010s as loci of libertine super-wealth, the novels debt to *The Great Gatsby* deepens the idea of inauthenticity as intrinsic to the post-Waugh style. Hoffer himself is not only a fictional construct (in the fundamental sense of novel protagonist, and then of protagonist who is a blue-collar American pretending to be upper-class English)³³ of a fictional construct (the fast-vanishing English aristocracy). As an updated Gatsby facsimile, Hoffer can be seen as a fictional construct (character in a novel; American pretending to be English) made out of a fictional construct (antecedent Fitzgerald novel) passing himself off as a fictional construct (bygone English ruling aristocrat).³⁴

Resuming the subject matter and style of the novels, however, does not fully address my creative intentions in relation to *Barbarians* and *Hoffer*. For that it is necessary to state more fully the case for (1) what the novel (as opposed to nonfiction) can do, before going on to examine (2) what a *satirical* novel can do, and (3) why the possibilities of the (satirical) novel remain applicable in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary fiction and post-Jamesian style

To write that the contemporary novel is preoccupied by the drama of consciousness, in an Auerbachian sense of exploring characters’ ‘problematic psychological situation’,³⁵ is to make an argument rather than state a fact. It is, moreover, an argument implicitly disputed by literary practitioners and commissioning editors in major British and American publishing

³² Paul Genders, *TLS*.

³³ A blue-blooded character says to Hoffer: ‘I think what really surprises everyone is how a farmhand from Ohio ended up so refined. What did it cost you to acquire that accent? [...] What did it cost someone else?’ See *Hoffer*, p. 57.

³⁴ The fantastical and inauthentic nature of Hoffer’s world is underlined by a reference to his oligarch employer’s country estate resembling a ‘filmset fantasy of aristocratic grandeur’. See *Hoffer*, p. 109.

³⁵ *Mimesis*, p. 12.

houses. In his influential turn-of-the-century review of *White Teeth*, which in its appraisal of Zadie Smith's novel also heralded a 'new genre' of hysterical realism, James Wood claims that:

some of the more impressive novelistic minds of our age do not think that language and the representation of consciousness are the novelist's quarries any more. Information has become the new character. It is this, and the use made of Dickens, that connects DeLillo and the reportorial Tom Wolfe, despite the literary distinction of the former and the cinematic vulgarity of the latter.³⁶

Wood's accusation here—since he does not endorse this swerve from 'character' to 'information', sensibility to sense—is that late-twentieth-century novelists either mistake the nature of literary knowledge or lack the writerly resources to make effective use of it. Writers like Rushdie, Pynchon, DeLillo and now Smith have taken Dickens' propensity for caricature without the mitigating emotional resonance of his storytelling. The result is that it is 'now customary to read 700-page novels, to spend hours and hours within a fictional world, without experiencing anything really affecting, sublime, or beautiful'.³⁷

In compensation for the emotional insufficiency of these flat characters, the reader is provided with a surplus of data. Wood cites Smith's contention in an interview that it is not the writer's job 'to tell us how somebody felt about something; it's to tell us how the world works'.³⁸ In the same interview Smith lauds authors like David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers for their omnivorous knowledge of 'macro-microeconomics, the way the Internet works, math, philosophy [...]'.³⁹

³⁶ James Wood, 'Human, All To Human', *The New Republic*, 24 July 2000 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman>>, [accessed 2 November 2021].

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The counterpoint to the ‘glittering liveliness’ of the Dickensian mode of caricature, onto which modern novelists have grafted a glut of information, is for Wood exemplified by the ‘recessed and deferred complexities of, say, Henry James’s character-making’.⁴⁰ We will return to analyse the merits of the knowledge-as-character approach to novel-writing—as well as the Jamesian approach to narrative point of view—in the context of *Barbarians* and *Hoffer*. First it is worth completing this short tour d’horizon of the contemporary literary novel by noting a twenty-first century movement that succeeded ‘hysterical realism’, namely autofiction.

A comprehensive assessment of autofiction is outside the scope of this Introductory Section. For our purposes, however, autofiction may be summarised, in Joanna Biggs’s phrase, as the ‘hip blend of fiction and memoir associated with writers like Knausgaard, Ben Lerner or Sheila Heti’.⁴¹ More precisely, autofiction books ‘invite readers to imagine they might be reading something like a diary, where the transit from real life to the page has been more or less direct [...] the artifice is in service of creating the sensation that there’s no artifice’.⁴²

Compared with hysterical realism, autofiction is radically internal. At first glance it seems that the latter genre is antithetical to the former’s external, empirical preoccupations as well as its superficial, unfelt characterisations. We have gone from knowing about macroeconomics to the minutiae of teenage alcohol rituals.⁴³

What hysterical realism and autofiction share, however, is an aversion to—perhaps an active repudiation of—the Jamesian ambition to represent a *foreign* consciousness on the page. That is, a constructed character who is more than merely a simulacrum of the author, and who

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Joanna Biggs, ‘She Wore Isabel Marant’, *London Review of Books*, 2 August 2018 <<https://www-lrb-co-uk.proxy.library.nyu.edu/the-paper/v40/n15/joanna-biggs/she-wore-isabel-marant>> [accessed 8 February 2021]

⁴² Christian Lorentzen, ‘Sheila Heti, Ben Lerner, Tao Lin: How “Auto” Is “Autofiction”?’ *Vulture*, 11 May 2018 <<https://www.vulture.com/2018/05/how-auto-is-autofiction.html>> [accessed 2 November 2021].

⁴³ See for example Karl Ove Knausgaard, *A Death in the Family* (Vintage, 2014), p. 77: ‘Drinking was good for me; it set things in motion. And I was thrust into something, a feeling of... not infinity exactly, but of, well, something unlimited...’

is revealed via an imaginary plot⁴⁴ with sufficient subtlety and verisimilitude to engage readerly passions. As the autofiction writer Sheila Heti puts it: '[it] seems so tiresome to make up a fake person and put them through the paces of a fake story.'⁴⁵

Barbarians makes implicitly Jamesian claims: that the most telling observations about the way we live come not from a vertiginous range of external data points, or from an intentionally unsculpted, diary-like chronicles of an author stand-in, but from within the consciousness of an invented character moving through an invented story. Specifically, as in works by James's friend and contemporary Edith Wharton, *Barbarians* tracks the declining fortunes of a female protagonist (Buzzy Price) brought low⁴⁶ by romantic misadventure and resulting social opprobrium, where the hypocrisies of those casting judgment are satirised.⁴⁷

For its part, *Hoffer* shares some of autofiction's self-consciousness about literary artifice. But this self-consciousness is 'buried' under a surface of psychological fiction. The post-Waugh style is thus both postmodern and not, both drama and metadrama of consciousness. On one hand, a realist (antiheroic) character⁴⁸ is represented on the page: I, Timothy Glencross, share no biographical similarities with William Hoffer. Yet the sense of Hoffer as a fake person in a fake story is pervasive both 'outside' the text (his obvious Gatsbyesque, book-made-out-books⁴⁹ forebears) and 'within' it (his assumed accent and

⁴⁴ James himself saw plot and character as fundamentally entangled: '(What is character but the determination of incident?' James himself argues. 'What is incident but the illustration of character?' See Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', *Longman's Magazine* 4 (September 1884)

<<https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/artfiction.html>> [accessed 16 February 2021].

⁴⁵ Sheila Heti, 'An Interview with Dave Hickey', *The Believer*, 1 November 2007 <<https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-dave-hickey/>> [accessed 12 February 2021].

⁴⁶ Buzzy is described as a 'home-wrecker' by a British tabloid. See *Barbarians*, p. 319.

⁴⁷ *Barbarians*, p. 24: '[Is Buzzy] becoming a scandalous woman, like Countess Olenska?'

⁴⁸ Auerbach notes the 'distinct stamp of individuality' that Biblical characters possess relative to their Homeric counterparts—an individuality that's tragic or 'fallible, subject to misfortune and humiliation'. See Auerbach, p. 18.

⁴⁹ 'The ugly fact,' Cormac McCarthy observed in a rare press interview, 'is that books are made out of books.' See Richard B. Woodward, 'Cormac McCarthy's Venomous Fiction', *New York Times*, 19 April 1992

<<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/19/magazine/cormac-mccarthy-s-venomous-fiction.html#:~:text=%22The%20ugly%20fact%20is%20books.of%20books%2C%22%20he%20says%20>> [accessed 15 June, 2021].

nationality, his lifetime metier of playing a role—rich English aristocrat—that is more nostalgic re-enactment than reflective of real 21st century London society).⁵⁰ If *Hoffer* aims to preserve the readerly pleasure of encountering made-up people in a made-up story, it acknowledges that fiction has evolved since the original Jamesian style and that the nature of (elite) contemporary identity is fragmented, illusory, improvised.

Manners as a category of knowledge

Novels generate knowledge based not on objective representation and analysis, as in nonfiction, but through representation of a character's subjective consciousness. In a postmodern context that investigation is self-aware. In my novels the drama of consciousness is social and, at least in *Barbarians*, domestic. They investigate manners. In the following sections I set out a Trilling-inspired notion of 'manners' as both fictional subject and satirical mode, first in relation to *Barbarians* and then the particular postmodern style of *Hoffer*. In both cases the influence of Evelyn Waugh is explored since, briefly put, *Barbarians* (2014) has a Bridesheadian atmosphere and narrative structure, while *Hoffer* is in conversation with the dry dark violence (the Hobbesian 'nasty, British and short' element, as Greenberg puts it)⁵¹ of early Waugh.

Through the comedy of manners, literature can become moral philosophy,⁵² an Aristotelian education of the emotions. 'Manners are of more importance than laws,' the philosopher Edmund Burke writes. He adds: 'The law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarise or refine

⁵⁰ Eagleton: 'to write [in the modernist tradition] is to falsify [...]. The only authentic literary work, then, would be one which is conscious of this falsification, and which tries to tell its tale in a way that takes this into account. That is to say that all narratives must be ironic. They must deliver their accounts while taking their own limitations in mind.' See Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 107.

⁵¹Jonathan Greenberg, "'Was Anyone Hurt?': The Ends of Satire in *A Handful of Dust*", *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 36 (2003), 351-373 (p. 351).

⁵² Zadie Smith makes this argument in a 'Bookworm' podcast interview with Michael Silverblatt, 9 November 2006 <<https://www.kcrw.com/culture/shows/bookworm/zadie-smith-1>> [accessed 24 February 2021].

us [...] They give their whole form and colour to our lives.⁵³ If the literature aspires to be news that stays news,⁵⁴ it is because manners in the Burkean sense reflect subtle aspects of the human spirit that escape the relatively remote common law.

In his lecture 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel', Trilling defines manners as the part of a culture which is not art, nor religion, nor morals, nor politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. It is modified by them; it modifies them; it is generated by them; it generates them. In this part of culture assumption rules, which is often so much stronger than reason.⁵⁵

Manners represent a particular and nuanced category of knowledge, a knowledge of emotion as much as objectivity and rationality.⁵⁶ They are adjacent to and illuminate questions of morals. Trilling goes on to argue that the great novelists 'knew that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint'.⁵⁷

Looking at twenty-first century fiction, we find an echo of Trilling's claim in a minor moment from Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*. During one of the novel's party scenes the protagonist, Nick Guest, listens to a conversation on the unwelcome smell of cigars and concurringly reflects that, for him, their 'dry lavatorial stench [...] signified the inexplicable

⁵³ Edmund Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace: Letters I. and II.* (G.Bell, 1893), p.66.

⁵⁴ Ezra Pound, *The ABC of Reading* (New Directions, 2010), p.29.

⁵⁵ Lionel Trilling, *The Kenyon Review*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁶ One might equally consider Raymond Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling': a 'pattern of impulses, restraints, tones [...]' that links even seemingly disparate literary works of a period. The term 'feeling', like 'manners', is purposefully elusive, existing alongside (or between) more official modes of thought and discourse. See Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 159.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17. On the following page (p.18) Trilling observes: 'In the 19th century, Henry James was alone [among American writers] in knowing that to scale the moral and aesthetic heights in the novel one had to use the ladder of social observation.'

confidence of other men's tastes and habits, and their readiness to impose them on their fellows'.⁵⁸

Hollinghurst here records an observation about bad manners. In the nineteen eighties, when the novel is set, there is no question of a cigar-smoker breaching the law. Nevertheless, the protagonist's precisely recorded feeling touches on the politics and culture (the assertive power of the cigar-wafer, the gender and sexuality dynamics inherent in the association between cigars and hetero-masculinity) and even aesthetics ('tastes and habits') of the Thatcher years.

Nor is the observation's psychological truth confined to its temporal era. Hollinghurst uses an impression flitting through the mind of Nick Guest to convey a certain kind of impressionistic knowledge about both the testosterone-fuelled boorishness of the eighties and male chauvinists (not to mention their sensitive observers) more broadly.

What makes this small unit of literary knowledge or news something more than a simple act of noticing, deriving from the Jamesian injunction for an author to be 'one of the people on whom nothing is lost',⁵⁹ is the attention that Hollinghurst pays to language. The comment on cigar etiquette is a thrilling and poetic arrangement of the best words in the best order, from the double modifier of 'dry lavatorial' (with its hint of gay Nick's secret sexual life) to the faux egalitarianism of 'fellows'. For readers, the stylised writing wittily sharpens the reflection and imprints it in their consciousness.

Linguistic shaping and draping; invented, morally ambivalent characters; the 'fake and embarrassing'⁶⁰ artifice of synthesised, Aristotelian beginning-middle-and-ending plots: these

⁵⁸ Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty* (Picador, 2005), p.76.

⁵⁹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction'.

⁶⁰ From a 2014 interview with Rachel Cusk: 'More and more – like Karl Ove Knausgård, whom she cites – she felt fiction was "fake and embarrassing. Once you have suffered sufficiently, the idea of making up John and Jane and having them do things together seems utterly ridiculous..."' See Kate Kellaway, 'Rachel Cusk: "Aftermath was creative death. I was heading into total silence"', *Guardian*, 24 August 2014

are fiction's traditional powers. They are also its forms of knowledge, which arguably run deeper in the cultural imagination than the output of journalists and historians. What we 'know' in the popular imagination of nineteenth century English politics and society comes in large part from inter alia Trollope and Austen; of the Roaring Twenties on both sides of the Atlantic from Waugh's *Vile Bodies* and Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*; of London's AIDs epidemic in the Thatcher years from Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*,⁶¹ of its Windrush generation from Andrea Levy and its increasingly multicultural modern suburbia from Hanif Kureishi and central boroughs from Zadie Smith and Monica Ali.

The novel can represent the density of conscious experience in a way that historiography cannot.⁶² Jonathan Franzen writes:

It had always been a prejudice of mine that putting a novel's characters in a dynamic social setting enriched the story that was being told; that the glory of the genre consisted of its spanning the expanse between private experience and public context [...] Whether they think about it or not, novelists are preserving a tradition of precise, expressive language; a habit of looking past surfaces into interiors; maybe an understanding of private experience and public context as distinct but interpenetrating; maybe mystery, maybe manners.⁶³

Barbarians aims to 'take the temperature of the times'.⁶⁴ The narrative, which includes replica news articles and comment pieces,⁶⁵ is an effort to represent a public context (the

<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/24/rachel-cusk-interview-aftermath-outline>> [accessed 19 February 2021].

⁶¹ The cultural pre-eminence of television is such that this 'knowledge' may now be superseded by Russell T. Davies' much-lauded series *It's a Sin!* (2021).

⁶² David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel*, pp. 13-14.

⁶³ Jonathan Franzen, *Harpers*, p. 40 and p. 52.

⁶⁴ Andrew Holgate, 'Morals in a Maze: Love, politics and betrayal intertwine in an ambitious debut', *Sunday Times*, 25 May 2014. Holgate writes: with its 'references to *Middlemarch*, *Can You Forgive Her?* and other all-embracing novels of Victorian society, *Barbarians* aims to take the temperature of the times.'

⁶⁵ See inter alia chapter four, which takes the form of a *Daily Telegraph* article; chapter sixteen, a *Private Eye* piece; and chapter twenty-five, a *Guardian* column written by Daphne Depree.

financial crisis; a narrow and nepotistic political culture) through the private consciousness of an array of actors with greater or lesser prominence in the public sphere. Here is the novel's imperious publisher and art collector, Sherard Howe, dining in Barcelona with a younger female gallerist:

Sherard, who is less than pleased to discover her admiration of his place in the art world is qualified, finds even her confessing little laugh objectionable, a way of disguising her bad manners as some sort of joke.⁶⁶

If Franzen is right that fiction's 'response to the sting of poor manners [...] is to render them comic',⁶⁷ the true 'joke' in this line is directed at Sherard's condescending behaviour toward his dining companion, as well as at his egotistical reflections. It is a private moment that reflects at least two 'isms'—chauvinism and narcissism—of a quasi-public character insofar as Sherard Howe is the proprietor of influential (made-up) journal *The New Review*. Such a brief internal reflection represents a fragment of the novel's loose 'thesis', which is alluded to in its title: the true 'barbarians' in this work of fiction are those of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*,⁶⁸ the out-of-touch ruling elite.⁶⁹

One way in which New Labour's political rulers were said to have lost touch with the public resulted, paradoxically, from these politicians' preoccupation with popular appeal. This fixation on media management showed itself in the influence of Alastair Campbell and other unelected communications and strategy advisors with the power to overrule civil servants,⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Tim Glencross, *Barbarians*, p.39.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Franzen, *Harpers*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ 'I thought Matthew Arnold divided society between barbarians, philistines and the populace,' says Afua on p. 313 of *Barbarians*. She is referring to Chapter III of *Culture and Anarchy*: see Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, eBook edn (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2003) <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4212/pg4212.html>> [accessed 23 June 2021].

⁶⁹ See Andrew Holgate, *Sunday Times*.

⁷⁰ See paragraphs 3 and 4 of Memorandum by Professor Stuart Weir of the Democratic Audit research unit, University of Essex, presented to the House of Commons Public Audit Committee, February 2002: 'Alastair Campbell possesses unprecedented powers for an unelected party political adviser... He may give orders to civil

and whose presentational priorities were infamously exemplified when a Department of Transport press officer, Jo Moore, called the September 11th attacks of 2001 a ‘good day to bury bad news’.⁷¹

Barbarians features a character named Alec Merton, a youngish Treasury minister who read PPE at Oxford before working as a financier in the City. When Afua Nelson, his Cambridge-educated ‘SpAd’,⁷² points out that *Vanity Fair* includes a character sharing a name (George Osborne) with the then Shadow Chancellor who is ‘conceited and bad with money’, Merton replies that there would be no political ‘mileage in quoting Thackeray’.⁷³ A little later in the novel, the poet Elizabeth ‘Buzzy’ Price reads a quotation of Merton’s in the *Evening Standard* about the government response to the unfolding financial crisis. She feels reassured by the confident tone of the statement, its smooth presentation of reality, before remembering that it was likely written by her friend Afua, whom Buzzy knows ‘has never learned economics or worked in a business’.⁷⁴

Manners in Trilling’s capacious sense represent human psychology in a cultural context. They include matters of custom and etiquette, but they are more broadly understood as a modifying and generative element of politics, art, religion, and morals. As such, their purview includes Sherard’s rudeness to a female dining companion, Merton’s instantaneous assessment of the public relations value of Thackeray, and Buzzy’s discomfiting inkling of government run by spin doctor.

servants...’ <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpubadm/303/2022810.htm>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

⁷¹ See David Heneke, ‘Blair Strengthens Powers of Advisers’, *Guardian*, 20 July 2005 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jul/20/uk.Whitehall>> [accessed 1 March 2021].

⁷² Westminster argot for special advisor.

⁷³ Tim Glencross, *Barbarians*, p. 88.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.117.

The above examples suggest that attention to manners, at least when they are awry, gives rise to comic effects in fiction. Here we come up against the somewhat contested province of satire. Alan Hollinghurst notes the ‘observations of feeling and motive, and ... sharp, and often unsparing, analyses of human vanity’ in *Barbarians*.⁷⁵ Given our fallen nature, a novel examining characters’ feelings and motives—which is to say, any realist work following the Jamesian tradition—will inevitably locate ironies and opportunities for humour. Is satire, then, a separate category to the comedy of manners?

The distinction seems to matter to Hollinghurst and Waugh alike: both writers have explicitly denied producing satire.⁷⁶ Below I set out the (intentional, conscious) stylistic and structural influences of *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Line of Beauty* on *Barbarians* along with why, despite these influences and Waugh’s and Hollinghurst’s resistance to the term ‘satire’, I consider *Barbarians* a satirical work.⁷⁷

The ugly anxiety of beautiful influence: narrative point-of-view in *Brideshead*, *Line of Beauty* and *Barbarians*

Perhaps the ‘ugliness’,⁷⁸ in Cormac McCarthy’s own assessment, of his observation that books are made from books owes to its anti-Romantic perspective on the creative process. Novels are not freestanding emanations of an individual creator; they are the result of an artistic dialogue with preceding works, akin to what Harold Bloom calls the ‘dialectical relationship’

⁷⁵ Email dated 28 December 2013 from Alan Hollinghurst to Tim Glencross.

⁷⁶ Evelyn Waugh, quoted by Frederick Stopp in *Evelyn Waugh, Portrait of an Artist* (London, 1958), pp. 194-5; Letter by Alan Hollinghurst, included in ‘*The Stranger’s Child*: An Exchange’, *New York Review of Books*, 12 January 2012 issue <<https://www-nybooks-com.proxy.library.nyu.edu/articles/2012/01/12/strangers-child-exchange/>> [accessed 4 March 2021].

⁷⁷ Both *The Times* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reviews identified *Barbarians* as satirical. See Kate Saunders, ‘In short’, *The Times*, 14 June 2014, p.17; Martin Halter, ‘Das Leben ist eine Champagnerparty’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 December 2015 <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/tim-glencross-hat-eine-grandiose-satire-ueber-londons-bessere-kreise-verfasst-13957298.html>> [accessed on 23 February 2021].

⁷⁸ ‘Cormac McCarthy’s Venomous Fiction’, *New York Times*.

in which every poet is caught up with other poets.⁷⁹ In this sense, *Barbarians* is certainly ‘made out of’ *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Line of Beauty*, but it synthesises these influences into a distinct artefact.

A summary of the literary debt owed by *Barbarians* to *The Line of Beauty* is described in the former novel’s *Times Literary Supplement* review:

In *Barbarians*, Tim Glencross sets out to do for the New Labour elite what Alan Hollinghurst did for Thatcher’s inner circle in *The Line of Beauty* (2004). Many of that novel’s distinguishing features are reproduced here: cameos from real-life luminaries, sweaty scenes of drug-taking among the youthful super-rich, a narrative structure in which time elapses between parts, even a crawling arriviste with literary ambitions as the central character.⁸⁰

These ‘features’, with minor modifications in some cases, also apply to an antecedent novel: Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited*. In *Brideshead* the relevant vice of the youthful super-rich is alcohol rather than drugs, and Charles Ryder might be described as a ‘crawling arriviste’ of the painterly rather than pen-wielding sort. Other characteristics of the Waugh text are straightforwardly evident. Both *Brideshead* and *Barbarians* glancingly incorporate real-life artistic and intellectual ‘luminaries’ into the narrative: Anthony Blanche, who we learn has ‘dined with Proust and Gide’, informs Ryder that he has spoken of him with Jean Cocteau;⁸¹ Sherard Howe possesses fictitious Hirst and Emin artworks and supposedly commissions, for an expensive prank against an *Independent* columnist, an elephant dung piece from Chris Ofili.⁸² Meanwhile Sherard’s wife, Daphne Depree, has publicly fallen out with Germaine

⁷⁹ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 91.

⁸⁰ Edmund Gordon, ‘The Customs of His Tribe’, *Times Literary Supplement*, Issue 5805 (2014), p. 19.

⁸¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (Penguin Classics, 2000), p.47 and p.52.

⁸² Tim Glencross, *Barbarians*, p.5 and p.11.

Greer.⁸³ The intermixing of true and imaginary figures helps implicate the broader (high) culture of the relevant period in the foibles and fallibilities of the novels' fictional characters.

Structurally, as the *TLS* review notes, *Barbarians* also borrows from *The Line of Beauty*'s use of temporal ellipses between its various sections to heighten dramatic ambiguity and suspense. The year of each of the three parts of *The Line of Beauty* is provided in italics along with the section-title,⁸⁴ and during the intervals between these sections key events (Nick's dawning romantic relationship with Wani Ouradi, later Wani's HIV diagnosis) occur off the narrative stage. In the three-year gap between Part One and Two of *Barbarians*, the shifting status and circumstances of the characters during this interval—Afua Nelson's transition from Treasury advisor to elected Islington MP, as well as her marriage and motherhood—is gradually and indirectly revealed to the reader. For completeness it may be added that Hollinghurst's approach itself emulates that of Waugh in *Brideshead*. Almost 'ten dead years'⁸⁵ elapse between the end of 'Brideshead Deserted' and the resumption of the narrative in 'A Twitch Upon the Thread', during which time Charles Ryder has married and become a father. The identity of his wife is at first withheld from the reader.⁸⁶

Beyond these stylistic commonalities, there is perhaps a key formal distinction between *The Line of Beauty* and *Barbarians* and a key element of thematic unity. In Hollinghurst's work, as Robert Macfarlane observes, 'Nick [Guest] is the character on whom the [book's] free indirect style is focalised throughout; it is his consciousness that we occupy without ceasing during the novel'.⁸⁷ Such a sustained use of a close third perspective contrasts with the narrative

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁸⁴ *The Love-Chord* (1983), 'To Whom Do You Beautifully Belong?' (1986), and *The End of the Street* (1987).

⁸⁵ *Brideshead Revisited*, p. 215.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁸⁷ Robert Macfarlane, 'Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*' in *The Good of the Novel*, ed. by Liam McIlvanney and Ray Ryan (Faber & Faber, 2011), pp. 170-185 (pp. 173-174).

point-of-view in *Barbarians*, which rotates between six characters.⁸⁸ No two consecutive chapters are seen from the POV of the same consciousness. Aside from the opportunities for irony, a benefit of this viewpoint rotation is that the reader ‘sees’ characters from more than one perspective. This technique allows for what Evelyn Waugh called the ‘illusion of depth’,⁸⁹ by which a character may take on a life-like aura of psychological complexity.

The divergent use of point-of-view can be understood as *Barbarians*’ ‘synthesised’ response to Hollinghurst’s novel. Here *The Line of Beauty* represents a strong creative influence or ‘thesis’. The limitations of a consistent close-third narrative viewpoint represent an ‘antithesis’. It is also a constraint recognised by Henry James, if we follow, as does John Gardner in the following quotation, the logic of James’s objection to the novelistic first-person narrator:

‘In any long fiction, Henry James remarked, use of first-person is barbaric [...] First person locks us in one character’s mind, locks us to one kind of diction throughout, locks out possibilities of going deeply into various characters’ minds’.⁹⁰

Gardner goes on to add that the “‘third-person-limited point of view” has some of the same drawbacks for a long piece of fiction’.⁹¹ Where Gardner argues for either the traditional (Jamesian) ‘authorial omniscient point of view’ or what he terms the ‘essayist-omniscient

⁸⁸ The narrative point of view in *Barbarians* alternates between suburban poet Buzzy Price, journalist and cultural commentator Daphne Depree, magazine publisher/art collector Sherard Howe, Treasury minister Alec Merton, special-advisor-turned-Labour-MP Afua Nelson, and the Howes’ timorous twentysomething son Henry.

⁸⁹ Waugh: ‘A writer can give an illusion of depth by giving an apparently stereoscopic view of a character—seeing him from two vantage point; all a writer can do is give more or less information about a character, not information of a different order.’ See ‘Evelyn Waugh The Art of Fiction No.30: Interviewed by Julian Jebb, *Paris Review*, Issue 30 Summer-Fall 1963, p. 110.

⁹⁰ John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers* (Vintage Books Edition, 1991), p. 75-76.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

voice',⁹² *Barbarians* resolves the problem of locking the reader into a single character's consciousness by alternating between various close-third narrative viewpoints.

The process of making books out of books involves—like dramatic fiction itself—an element of (dialectical) conflict. Where *Barbarians* certainly follows *Line of Beauty*, however, is in its preoccupation with 'the ways in which people think about money, and the ways in which having money makes people think'.⁹³ During an intimidating conversation with Anatole Moreau, the former Belgian government minister and father of her love-interest Marcel, lower-middle-class and heavily indebted Buzzy Price agrees with Anatole that the English

are very immoral and greedy. It's almost as if we've been encouraged to behave like children who must have whatever we want. I mean, I can't remember how many credit cards I own and I'm definitely not rich. To be honest, I'm not even *poor*: that would imply there was a small amount of actual money to my name.⁹⁴

Buzzy makes the comments as a misguided attempt at politeness: she simply wishes to show agreement with her host's negative opinion of 'Anglo-Saxon' mores. The rich and well-bred Anatole, meanwhile, is aghast at the vulgarity of one who would 'lay out [her] indigence for comic effect'.⁹⁵

Aspects of satire: addressing the stigma and limitation of 'militant' didacticism

Here we return to the satirical status of *Barbarians*. In the paragraphs above, we have traced some ways in which *Barbarians* is both influenced by and (in Bloomian terms) creatively misreads *Brideshead Revisited* and *The Line of Beauty*. We have also noted that

⁹² Ibid., pp. 157 and 159 respectively. Unlike the more impartial and featureless 'authorial-omniscient', the 'essayist-omniscient' requires the writer to 'invent a character with [...] particular speech patterns' who is narrating the text. Gardner argues that Austen creates such a distinctive 'personal voice' for her narrators (159).

⁹³ Robert Macfarlane, 'Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*', p. 173.

⁹⁴ Tim Glencross, *Barbarians*, pp. 159-160.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 160.

Barbarians was received by critics in the British and German newspapers of record as a satirical work.⁹⁶

Waugh, however, believed that satire was a ‘matter of [temporal] period’, requiring a stable society with homogenous moral standards. And since those conditions did not, in Waugh’s estimation, apply to his own epoch, he could not be called a satirist.⁹⁷ Furthermore, in an exchange of letters with Daniel Mendelsohn in *The New York Review of Books*, Hollinghurst writes:

I have never thought of *The Line of Beauty* as primarily a satire—much less, as Mendelsohn does, “a work of biting social and political satire.” To me (if I may be forgiven for speaking so pompously about my own book) it is a tragicomic social novel.⁹⁸

On its face, Waugh’s objection to the term ‘satire’ regarding his literary output is ethical rather than (as with Hollinghurst) formal, part of a broader Catholic-moralist indictment of a ‘disintegrated society’ in which ‘vice no longer pays lip service to virtue’.⁹⁹ One may speculate nevertheless that both Waugh and Hollinghurst are similarly and perhaps unconsciously tempted to distance their work from satire because of the genre’s perceived literary inferiority.

Like Hollinghurst, Waugh characterises his artistic practice as a fusion of the tragic and comic.¹⁰⁰ For the Ancient Greeks, a satyr play offered a middle ground between comedy and tragedy.¹⁰¹ But the modern tragicomic mode is seemingly distinguished from satire because,

⁹⁶ See footnote 3.

⁹⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Portrait of an Artist* (London, 1958), pp. 194-5.

⁹⁸ ‘*The Stranger’s Child: An Exchange*’, *New York Review of Books*.

⁹⁹ Evelyn Waugh, *Portrait of an Artist*, p.195.

¹⁰⁰ Waugh: ‘My problem has been to distil comedy and sometimes tragedy from the knockabout farce of people’s outward behaviour.’ See Robert Murray Davis, ‘Evelyn Waugh on the art of fiction.’ *Papers on Language and Literature* (Summer 1966) pp. 243-252 (p. 244).

¹⁰¹ Mark Griffith, ‘Sophocles’ Satyr-plays and the Language of Romance’, in *Sophocles and the Greek Language*, ed. by Albert Rijksbaron and Irene de Jong (Brill, 2006), pp. 51-72 (p.51).

along with scholars like Eagleton and Wilson,¹⁰² there is evidence that novelists themselves deem it a lesser form of fiction.

Beyond his alarming prognostication about its practitioners' personal fortunes—'satirists seldom end well'—Gore Vidal refers to satire as an 'irritable art'.¹⁰³ In this view, satirists are not in full emotional control of their work. Their opinions, often political or ideological, easily overwhelm the material. Hence for Adam Mars-Jones satire is a 'form more likely to reach for the bludgeon than the blowpipe and poison dart';¹⁰⁴ it is a crudely didactic mode, a 'lesson' in Vladimir Nabokov's term.¹⁰⁵ Mendelsohn's prefacing word 'biting' often accompanies the satiric label, and the connotation of a rabid beast may explain Hollinghurst's unenthusiasm for its application to *The Line of Beauty*.

For still other writers and artists, the politics of satire are not so much unrestrained or doctrinaire as objectionably mild. The charge that satire is 'complicit with what it exposes',¹⁰⁶ as psychotherapist Adam Phillips puts it—that satire exults in the representation of the vice and folly it excoriates—¹⁰⁷ is not recent.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Eagleton and Wilson specifically critique Waugh's satirical novels compared to his more accomplished later work. See Terry Eagleton, 'Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-class Novel' in *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (Chatto & Windus Ltd, 1970), 33-70. Eagleton writes on p. 53: 'It is worth turning at this point from Waugh's two early satires to a more "serious" novel, *A Handful of Dust*.' See also Edmund Wilson, 'Splendors and Miseries of Evelyn Waugh' in *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1950), Chapter 6, Section 35, paragraph two [Kindle DX version]: '...[Waugh's] creative imagination, accustomed in his satirical fiction to work partly in two-dimensional caricature but now called upon [in *Brideshead Revisited*] for passions and motives, produces more romantic fantasy.'

¹⁰³ Gore Vidal, 'The satiric world of Evelyn Waugh', *New York Times Book Review*, 7 January 1962 <<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/04/reviews/waugh-battle.html>> [accessed 9 March 2021].

¹⁰⁴ Adam Mars-Jones, 'More Pain, Better Sentences', *London Review of Books*, 36. 9 (8 May 2014) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk.proxy.library.nyu.edu/the-paper/v36/n09/adam-mars-jones/more-pain-better-sentences>> [accessed 9 March 2021].

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Vladimir Nabokov, *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, vol. VIII, no. 2, spring 1967 <http://lib.ru/NABOKOW/Inter06.txt_with-big-pictures.html> [accessed 9 March 2021].

¹⁰⁶ Adam Phillips, 'Cloud Cover', *London Review of Books*, 19.20 (16 October 1997) <<https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v19/n20/adam-phillips/cloud-cover>>

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Greenberg, "'Was Anyone Hurt?'"', p.351.

¹⁰⁸ In 1875 the poet William Cowper wrote: 'Yet what can satire, whether grave or gay? [...]/What vice has it subdued? whose heart reclaimed/By rigour, or whom laughed into reform?/Alas! Leviathan is not so tamed.' See William Cowper, from 'The Task, Book II: The Time-Piece'. See Poetry Foundation <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44036/the-task-book-ii-the-time-piece>>, [accessed 9 March 2021].

Representing ‘vice and folly’, particularly where a text encourages empathy between reader and antiheroic protagonist(s), can induce a discomfortingly cosy sense of conspiracy. To mitigate this problem of the satirical form, *Barbarians*’ rotating close-third viewpoint seeks to emphasise the narcissistic moral failings of the characters. When Sherard Howe, for example, reflects on his attempted sexual assault of a Saudi teenager (‘He hardly even touched the boy’),¹⁰⁹ the reader already understands that the scandal is worse than Sherard’s trivialising self-justification. Here is Buzzy Price, ten pages earlier, preparing to recount the incident (for a second time) to Philip Devereux, her corporate-lawyer boyfriend: ‘Philip has surely not forgotten, since she remembers him enjoying it a great deal, the story of Daphne arriving home to find Sherard foisting himself on his son’s pupil [...]’.¹¹⁰ Sherard’s pathetic self-delusion is heightened by seeing it from both inside the (close third) consciousness of the character and outside him.

In other words it remains true that, *within* the relevant close-third perspective, a degree of ‘complicity’ exists between reader and *Barbarians* character. There is no mediating narrator or authorial persona to create ironic distance. But any readerly complicity is sooner or later compromised by dramatic ironies that accumulate *between* chapters, as protagonists and events are depicted from multiple viewpoints.

The advantage of the rotating close third is therefore that it allows the characters to hang themselves by their own rope. Their all-too-human hypocrisies emerge by a process of juxtaposition: one character’s POV succeeded by another in the next chapter, and so on. Close interiority pertaining to multiple protagonists removes the need for explicit didacticism in the sense of Nabokov’s imparted lesson from on high. The narrative voice may shift perspective, but it exists at the same level as the characters. Satire in this form can therefore aspire to a

¹⁰⁹ *Barbarians*, p. 246.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.236.

humanist investigation of bad manners, one which does not involve the crude or lofty dispensing of judgment that has the effect of lessening artistic perceptions of the genre's merit.¹¹¹

To summarise the satirical status of *Barbarians*: it is possible to acknowledge at the same time the perhaps snobbish resistance of Waugh and Hollinghurst to the satirical label; the influence of those novelists' work on *Barbarians*; and, finally, the conformity of *Barbarians* to a particular kind of militant irony that works by a process of POV shift and juxtaposition.¹¹²

Recapitulating further: in this Introduction I have set out to explain what the novel in general and the satirical novel in particular can offer, namely an illumination of manners, which remains an equally telling form of Knowledge, despite fiction's diminished cultural import, as it did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I have also sought to set *Barbarians* and *Hoffer* in their social and political context of London's cultural elite in the years following the financial crisis. Finally, I have examined the literary tradition in which *Barbarians* may be situated as a novel aspiring to the complexities, in James Wood's phrase, of Jamesian character-making, and whose satiric mode can be understood as social tragicomedy, which is to say an ironic investigation of manners that seeks to avoid heavy-handed moral didacticism.

In the remainder of the Introduction, I look in more depth at Waugh's technical and philosophical approach, and then how *Hoffer* reflects and—to a greater extent than *Barbarians*—diverges from it.¹¹³ In short, I elaborate on what I have called in this essay a post-Waugh style.

¹¹¹ In his *New York Times Book Review* article on Waugh, Gore Vidal quotes Aldous Huxley as referring to the 'mere satirist'.

¹¹² 'Satire is militant irony,' Northrup Frye writes, See *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 15th edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 223.

¹¹³ *Hoffer* is written more directly in relation to the early work of Evelyn Waugh than *Barbarians* (whose more immediate influence is *The Line of Beauty*, which is itself in conversation with *Brideshead Revisited*). The relationship, however, is complex. To Joyce Carol Oates, *Hoffer* reads like reads like a collaboration by the young Evelyn Waugh, Patricia Highsmith, and Martin Amis: see cover quotation for hardback publication of

Nasty, brutish, and short – Waugh’s early style

The early Waugh novels are slim portraits of the Jazz Age social elite. They feature dissolute Mayfair types and scenes of lurid violence.¹¹⁴ In the case of *Vile Bodies* and *Decline and Fall*, aristocratic characters are involved in illicit activities or associate with members of the criminal underworld.¹¹⁵ *Hoffer* is a short novel about a twenty-first century ‘fixer’ living among Mayfair’s aristocrats and super-rich; the latter’s wealth is frequently of criminal origin.

Despite these loose plot resemblances, the neutral tone of *Hoffer*¹¹⁶ is distinct from Waugh’s ‘barbed’¹¹⁷ works. The moral position of Waugh has both a technical and aesthetic as well as a religious aspect. ‘I regard writing not as an investigation of character,’ Waugh told the *Paris Review*, ‘but as an exercise in language, and with this I am obsessed. I have no ... psychological interest’.¹¹⁸ And it is certainly the case that his early satires (though Waugh, as we have noted, denied that he wrote satire) use a modernist influenced, ‘external’ method. Like Hemingway, whom Waugh admired,¹¹⁹ his focus in a work like *Decline and Fall* is on the

Tim Glencross, *Hoffer* (John Murray Press, 2017). Whereas the *Telegraph* book critic interprets the Waugh-ishness of *Hoffer* as more ambivalent, noting that, while the novel ‘nods in the direction of satire’, there is ‘little evidence of that mixture of love and loathing for the thoughtlessly privileged that put the poison into the barbs of Evelyn Waugh’. See Jake Kerridge, ‘I Spy a Corpse Among the Objets d’Art’, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 2017, p.29.

¹¹⁴ In *Black Mischief*, for example, Basil Seal unwittingly participates in the cannibalistic consumption of his innamorata Prudence Courtenay. See Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief*, 7th edn (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 230.

¹¹⁵ The Honourable Margot Beste-Chetwynde (later Margot Metroland) features in numerous Waugh novels, including *Decline and Fall* as well as *Vile Bodies*; she is an international white slave trader with a chain of brothels in South America. Sir Solomon Philbrick in *Decline and Fall* is a retired burglar.

¹¹⁶ The amorality of *Hoffer* is summarised by crime author Mick Herron’s description of the novel as ‘cynical, dry, and as sharp as a skewer’. See John Murray Limited, *Hoffer*, <<https://www.johnmurraypress.co.uk/titles/tim-glencross/hoffer/9781444797596/>> [accessed 17 March 2021].

¹¹⁷ See Kerridge article.

¹¹⁸ *Paris Review*, p. 110. For whatever reason, perhaps simple English discomfort with acknowledging ‘feelings’, Waugh’s self-assessment seems an incomplete account of his later style: *Brideshead Revisited*, to say nothing of *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, are richly observant of human psychology.

¹¹⁹ Waugh’s diary entry on 15 July 1961: ‘Hemingway’s suicide has made me reread *Fiesta*. It was a revelation to me when it first came out – the drunk conversations rather than the fishing and bullfighting. Rereading I was still impressed by the writing.’ See Waugh, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Michael Davie (London: Phoenix, 2009), p. 822.

cinematic surface of events. The ‘camera’s eye’, Waugh writes apropos of Greene’s *Heart of the Matter*, represents ‘the modern way of telling a story’.¹²⁰

The emotional texture of even the most terrible misfortunes visited on *Decline and Fall*’s Paul Pennyfeather is deliberately thin. Pennyfeather’s feelings on receiving a sentence of ‘seven years’ penal servitude’ for crimes he was not aware of committing are dealt with in three words: ‘rather a blow’.¹²¹ Incongruity between his protagonists’ sentimental blankness and ‘grotesque and nightmarish events’ is part of the young Waugh’s comic technique.¹²²

But this blankness or depthlessness of character also reflects Waugh’s early-period interest in the ‘aesthetic problem of representation in fiction’.¹²³ For all his belief in the artist as reactionary,¹²⁴ his youthful experiments in dialogue are avant-garde. Like in Hemingway’s minimalist early stories, Waugh makes bold use of direct speech to compensate for the absence of interiority. *Vile Bodies* not only contains a non-realist chorus of ‘Bright Young Things’,¹²⁵ the author himself noted with a dash of pride that it was the first English novel to feature telephone conversations.¹²⁶ In chapter three of *Black Mischief*, Waugh provides a sequence of short, dialogue-only scenes that read like excerpts from a screenplay. In some of these scenes the speakers are not identified; instead, the reader understands them to represent nameless archetypes.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Evelyn Waugh, ‘Felix Culpa’, in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 360-365 (p.362).

¹²¹ Evelyn Waugh, *Decline and Fall*, revised edn (London: Penguin Books, 2017), p. 216.

¹²² Terry Eagleton, ‘Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-class Novel’, p.46-47: ‘The humour of Waugh’s early satire works, in general, by a bland externality which reduces violent, grotesque, and nightmarish events to the status of casual asides.’

¹²³ Evelyn Waugh, ‘Ronald Firbank’, in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. by Donat Gallagher (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 56-59 (p.57).

¹²⁴ *Paris Review*, p. 113.

¹²⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, reprinted edn (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965)

<<https://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/waughe-vilebodies/waughe-vilebodies-00-h.html>> [accessed 22 March 2021].

¹²⁶ See author preface to Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies*: ‘I think I can claim that this was the first English novel in which dialogue on the telephone plays a large part.’ Chapter 11 of *Vile Bodies* is presented almost exclusively as a ‘read-out’ of a phone call.

¹²⁷ Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief*, reprinted edn (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p.65.

Such formal innovation leads Alan Massie to claim that Waugh's early novels are, more than satires, primarily 'exercises in style'.¹²⁸ His use of unidentified, generic speakers highlights Waugh's preference in the early novels for 'manageable abstractions' in lieu of fully-sketched characters.¹²⁹ Adam Fenwick-Symes of *Vile Bodies* is not a fictional representation of an idiosyncratic personality. He looks 'exactly as young men like him do look'.¹³⁰ As Robert Murray Davis notes, the reader is given only the most generalised information about Fenwick-Symes' past and present situation.¹³¹

There is another reason for Waugh's preference for characters who are not fully rounded, one which goes beyond matters of stylistic experiment.¹³² Protagonists who exist in outline, if the authorial intention is not a Cusk-like ambition to theatrically cede the stage to soliloquy-offering secondary characters,¹³³ become representations of social types. Waugh's defence of his 'outrageous'¹³⁴ early plots and 'immoral'¹³⁵ characters is that, working in an ironic key, his aim is to condemn the social degeneracy exemplified by his archetypes.

Early Waugh, in other words, is a moralist, and depthless characters suit his fictional purposes. When a writer for *The Tablet* designated *Black Mischief* 'a disgrace to anyone

¹²⁸ Allan Massie, 'Life & Letters | 4 July 2009: The novelties of Ronald Firbank', *The Spectator* <<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/life-letters-4-july-2009>> [accessed 22 March 2021].

¹²⁹ In his short story 'Work Suspended', Waugh's first-person novelist-narrator John Plant states: 'The (...) classical expedient is to take the whole man and reduce him to a manageable abstraction (...) It is, anyway, in the classical way that I have striven to write [fiction].' Waugh cut the passage to which this quotation belongs in later editions of the story. See Jeffrey Heath, *Picturesque Prison: Evelyn Waugh and his Writing* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982), p. 141.

¹³⁰ Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* <<https://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/waughe-vilebodies/waughe-vilebodies-00-h.html>> [accessed 24 March 2021].

¹³¹ Robert Murray Davis, p. 245.

¹³² *Paris Review*, p. 110. Waugh tells his interviewer that 'all fictional characters are flat', which suggests that ever the contrarian, Waugh did not subscribe to Forster's flat-versus-round dialectic.

¹³³ Lorrie Moore: 'Perhaps we go to fiction for the solitary inner life of one character and her actions against the confining tenets and structures of her society [...] rather than for everything surrounding her—in [the case of Rachel Cusk's *Outline* trilogy], linked and paraphrased soliloquies of secondary, even tertiary, characters upstaging and downstaging the ostensible protagonist.' See Moore, 'The Queen of Rue: The Coolly Abstracted Consciousness of Rachel Cusk's Stories', *New York Review of Books*, 16 August 2018 issue <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/08/16/rachel-cusk-queen-of-rue/>> [accessed 20 August 2021].

¹³⁴ Jonathan Greenberg, 'Cannibals and Catholics: Reading the Reading of Evelyn Waugh's *Black Mischief*', in *Modernist Cultures* Vol. 13, Issue 1 (February, 2018) 115-137 (p. 120).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

professing the Catholic name’ on the basis inter alia of a farcical scene in which characters promote birth control, Waugh counters that the same scene is ‘an attempt, however ineffectual, to prosper the cause which [Catholics] all have so closely at heart’.¹³⁶ In Jonathan Greenberg’s view, this defence against *Tablet* outrage situates Waugh—contra the latter’s belief that the moral depravity of his age placed it beyond satire—not only as a practising satirist but in a ‘tradition that views satire as a fundamentally conservative and moralistic mode, ridiculing folly and vice with the aim of moral correction’.¹³⁷

The ‘children of Adam’, Waugh the critic pronounces, ‘are aboriginally corrupt’.¹³⁸ Lapses into Catholic moralism represent for a number of scholars and novelists a (priggish, mawkish, snobbish) weakness of Waugh’s novels, including his psychologically richer later work. Waugh himself might have admired the laconic brutality of George Orwell’s note for an unfinished review of *Brideshead Revisited*: ‘One cannot really be Catholic and grown-up.’¹³⁹ For Gore Vidal, Waugh’s commitment to prospering a doctrinal cause undermines his prose, which grows ‘solemn and hollow when [Waugh] tries to celebrate goodness and love and right action’.¹⁴⁰ Eagleton’s critique is ideological as much as aesthetic. He sees Waugh’s use of Catholicism in *Brideshead* as an empty way of ‘glamourising’ the Marchmain family, which in turn is part of Waugh’s broader ‘need to defend ... an English upper-class which [his novels] also satirised’.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Evelyn Waugh, ‘Felix Culpa’, p. 361.

¹³⁹ Orwell’s judgment vis-à-vis Waugh is endorsed by Christopher Hitchens. See Hitchens, ‘The Permanent Adolescent’, *The Atlantic*, May 2003, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2003/05/the-permanent-adolescent/302717/>> [accessed 25 March 2021]

¹⁴⁰ Gore Vidal, *New York Times Book Review*.

¹⁴¹ Terry Eagleton, ‘Evelyn Waugh and the Upper-class Novel’, p. 67-68.

Style and morality, Eagleton contends regarding the awkward representation of Sebastian Flyte's Catholic commitments,¹⁴² do not mix. It is a maxim at the heart of *Hoffer's* amoral post-Waugh style.

The criminal element of post-Waugh style

Hoffer takes the Mayfair milieu, the juxtaposing of comedy and violence, a certain blankness of affect on the part of the protagonist—and fuses these early-Waugh elements with the American thriller novel. Waugh's Hemingway-ish and Catholic-inflected experiments in modernism give way to an amoral postmodern mode that is both self-aware and preoccupied by the fantasy of essential selfhood.

The eponymous protagonist—notably his background, manners (in the broad sense), and narrative reliability—exemplifies *Hoffer's* style. The circumstances of William Hoffer's upbringing are nebulous: information is provided elliptically and at times duplicitously by the first-person narrator. Nevertheless, as noted previously in this Introduction, the similarities to Jay Gatsby are clear and intentional. Like Fitzgerald's slippery faux 'Oggsford man'¹⁴³ socialite, Hoffer's origins are modest and Midwestern. Such wealth as he now owns is derived from either his or associates' criminal practices.¹⁴⁴

There is likewise a debt to Tom Ripley.¹⁴⁵ 'Hoffer, born in Ohio but repurposed as a raffish, art-fancying scrounger', writes Declan Hughes in the *Irish Times*, 'is by Graham

¹⁴² Ibid., p.67.

¹⁴³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, eBook edn (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2021) <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/64317/64317-h/64317-h.htm>> [accessed 27 March 2021]. In Fitzgerald's novel the underworld gangster Meyer Wolfsheim calls Gatsby an 'Oggsford man'.

¹⁴⁴ Tim Glencross, *Hoffer*. For references to Hoffer's accent see p. 4, his 'malign' charm p. 210, his Midwestern origins p. 4 and p. 152, his dubious sources of income pp. 81-83 and pp. 239-242.

¹⁴⁵ Hoffer's skills as a social chameleon and his possibly sociopathic amorality also draw on Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr Ripley*, which is itself a loose thriller-ish retelling of a nineteenth-century realist novel, Henry James's *The Ambassadors*. Highsmith's publisher, W.W. Norton & Company, describes *Ripley* as a 'dark reworking of Henry James's *The Ambassadors*'. See: <https://www.wwnorton.co.uk/books/9780393332148-the-talented-mr-ripley> [accessed 4 February 2021].

Greene out of Patricia Highsmith'.¹⁴⁶ Unlike *Hoffer*'s first-person viewpoint, *The Talented Mr Ripley* is narrated using the close third. However, the scheming, intensely psychosexual interiority¹⁴⁷ of the Ripley novels is certainly present in William Hoffer's narrative.¹⁴⁸

Another American thriller influence on *Hoffer*, compared with which Highsmith's work seems positively sentimental, is Dorothy B. Hughes' *In a Lonely Place*. Where Tom Ripley is 'unreliable' only insofar as his moral code is out of kilter with that of the reader, Hughes' protagonist, Dix Steele, withholds his murderous tendencies from the reader: specifically, that he *is* the mysterious strangler preying on Californian women in the novel.¹⁴⁹ William Hoffer is likewise coy about his violent actions, to the extent that discrepancies emerge between his account (to the reader) of certain events and rival information from other sources, such as the intelligence services.¹⁵⁰

First-person narrator and postmodern fakeness

Waugh's Mayfair world, with its mix of horrifying events and comic framing, is updated in *Hoffer*. In pace of modernist exteriority is a self-consciously thriller-ish first-person

¹⁴⁶ Declan Hughes, 'Meet Maevie Kerrigan my new favourite detective: Crime round-up: "Let the Dead Speak", "Every Man a Menace", "Hoffer", "Summary Justice" and "What Remains of Us"', *Irish Times*, 25 March 2017 <<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/meet-maevie-kerrigan-my-new-favourite-detective-1.3008705>> [accessed 27 March 2021].

¹⁴⁷ 'A crazy emotion of hate, of affection, of impatience and frustration was swelling in [Ripley], hampering his breathing. He wanted to kill Dickie [...]' See Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley*, reprinted edn (London: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 87.

¹⁴⁸ The Ripley-ish sense of repressed sexuality in the act of murder is echoed in William Hoffer's struggle with and murder of the Mexican cartel antagonist, Hector Comala: 'We were pressed against each other. I felt his hot animal breath [...]' "William..." [Comala] rasped almost tenderly. His face seemed to have been reimagined in some sort of awful Francis Bacon homage, and when he tried to get his words out it was from behind a curtain of gore [...]' See *Hoffer*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴⁹ Dorothy B. Hughes, *In a Lonely Place*, reprinted edn (London: Penguin Books, 2010). Steele's guilt is initially concealed from the reader, who has only partial access to Steele's thoughts ('It took imagination to think of a man, sane as you and I, who killed', p. 44) since Steele is both dissembling and a 'stranger [to] himself' (p. 90). As the narrative progresses Steele's homicidal past is revealed elliptically ('Brub said, "She was murdered."' [Steele] could show shock because he was shocked. He had never expected to hear it said. It was so long ago', p. 103).

¹⁵⁰ The reader learns from an MI5 agent then the protagonist-narrator's real name is not William but Dwight, and the Omega watch that the William Hoffer previously claimed to have inherited from his father is in fact a family heirloom of his mysteriously deceased West Point roommate. See *Hoffer*, p. 224.

narrative that closely follows the murderous thoughts of its not-quite-to-be-trusted protagonist. And this first-person voice of *Hoffer*, quite different to the rotating close-third viewpoint of *Barbarians*, is intrinsic to the post-Waugh style.

William Hoffer facilitates his clients' entry to a British establishment increasingly awash with blood-soaked foreign capital. It's a role he plays so thoroughly that the antiheroic narrator does not break character even in the privacy of his thoughts, as they unspool in the first-person narrative.¹⁵¹ The point is not merely that the protagonist does not take an ethical position on his own or other characters' greed or murderous misdeeds.¹⁵² In the post-Waugh style there is no obvious effort to satirically 'prosper a [moral] cause', Catholic or otherwise.

More than *Barbarians*, *Hoffer* risks accusations of complicity with the vices and follies of its protagonist. In this respect, the text's viewpoint is influenced by *Lolita*, a crime-thriller-satire whose mordant unreliable narrator¹⁵³ operates outside of conventional morality. As with the Nabokov novel, *Hoffer* risks the un-Jamesian 'barbarity' of an extended 'I' narrator, locking the reader into the mind of William Hoffer for the duration of the story.

The embrace of influence—whether of Nabokov, Waugh, Fitzgerald, or American thrillers—is a further key to the twenty-first century style of *Hoffer*. Like the practitioners of autofiction, hyper-conscious of the embarrassing fakeness of made-up characters and plots, this

¹⁵¹ Even minor Americanisms are mentally corrected. See *Hoffer*, p. 9: 'Despite the heat, I was looking forward to a bath and the glass of Mouton Rothschild I'd pour myself once the coffin-sized lift (less endearing to my mostly absent Emirati and Uzbek neighbours) deposited me at my fifth floor apartment. *Flat*, rather. I tried to be disciplined with my language: it was "shed-yool" never "skej-ool"; "anglicise" never "anglicize".'

¹⁵² Here is William Hoffer reflecting on his oligarch patron's business calculations involving a Mexican drug cartel and how these impinge on his (Hoffer's) professional responsibilities: 'Of relevance to the Russian was the hundred billion or so barrels' worth of untapped shale oil and gas in Mexico, together with the recent legislative reforms opening up the state oil monopoly. The cartels – their extreme violence and propensity to siphon off millions of barrels of oil from existing state pipelines – were an impediment to what would otherwise be a gold rush for international investors. Put simply, Nikolai wanted to do business with people who wanted to do business with the Ortega organisation [...] if one of my roles was to think of Nikolai's reputation it wasn't helpful if my own name could be linked, however tangentially, with a Latin drug gang.' See *Hoffer*, p. 28.

¹⁵³ Humbert Humbert describes himself as a 'murderer with a sensational but incomplete and unorthodox memory'. See Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 217.

book ‘knows’ that the reader knows that books are made out of books. William Hoffer exists in (inevitable, dialectical) relation to fictional forebears. If *Hoffer* reflects, in other words, a secular and self-conscious age that does not use fiction to reaffirm Judaeo-Christian doctrine, it is deeply interested in the artifice of identity and even of the text itself.

Both the amorality of *Hoffer* and its preoccupation with the endlessly unstable nature of selfhood bear further reflection. Concerning the former, Waugh thought the object of satire was to ‘expose polite cruelty’.¹⁵⁴ The cruelty, in other words, has a point: on some level the reader is being educated. But the *nature* of the satirised cruelty is also significant. Waugh’s notion of cruel ‘politeness’ holds an implicit sense of bourgeois norms as the primary object of social comedy.

But the traditional targets of satire—the hypocritical middle-classes—have lost ground in *Hoffer*, where the social milieu is even more rarefied than *Barbarians*. Although both novels take place in wealthier areas of London in the 2010s, it is not the upper-middle-class politicians, journalists and corporate lawyers of *Barbarians* who represent the very highest social class. *Hoffer*’s international elite of oligarchs and their vassals are as liberated from fealty to bourgeois norms of ‘politeness’ as they are the rule of law.

In this way, the London-domiciled criminal super-rich are less amenable to a traditional or conservative mode of satire. Despite the risk of cynicism, as with Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert, as with Easton Ellis’s Patrick Bateman,¹⁵⁵ one method of satirising terminally amoral characters without lapsing into didacticism is to take the reader into the unfiltered mind of the beast: to trust the reader to interpret the discrepancy between the value system of the first-person narrator and the man on the Clapham omnibus (in the old common law phrase) as

¹⁵⁵ Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage, 1991).

anything but an endorsement of the novel's antihero. The militant irony does not arise from *Barbarians*' juxtaposition of close-third narrative viewpoints but of the narrator's and reader's moral sensibility.

The first-person mode has a further application in *Hoffer*. In this novel the diction into which readers find themselves 'locked' is not excessively limiting, per the concerns of Henry James and John Gardner, in the sense that this tightly regulated diction—William Hoffer's moment-by-moment self-invention as an English aristocrat—represents the novel's central (meta)drama of consciousness.

The notion of artifice at the heart of the William Hoffer's identity connects to the novel's fixation with surfaces, simulacra and pastiche. Neither cruelty nor any other aspect of the *Hoffer*'s characters can be fully 'exposed' in Waugh's meaning, because they are fictional in more than a literal sense: fabulist self-creations copying the manners of an aristocratic England that itself no longer exists. In the permanent elusiveness of its subjects, the style of *Hoffer* is post-satirical.

Examples of such character 'meta-constructs' abound in the text. Of the socialite Ingrid Vowles, William notes that her upper-class persona is a façade: 'Despite the U accent and great friendship with Lady Antonia Highclere I would have bet my savings, if I had any, that she came from a long line of Stockholm merchants'. Similarly inauthentic is Gianni Bardoni, the Italian auctioneer, who likes to 'create comic identities for his friends' and whose droll speech is imitative of a certain sort of clubbable, public school Englishman.¹⁵⁶ Not to mention the Earl Grey-sipping Harold Highclere, with his Barbour shirt and interest in fifteenth-century English market crosses,¹⁵⁷ who is described by Hoffer as

¹⁵⁶ *Hoffer*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32 and 86.

one of the last really rich locals. Or not quite local: his father was a South African who'd made a fortune in diamonds. Ingrid Vowles ... once told me Harold's real surname: it was something Afrikaans-sounding.¹⁵⁸

And of course there is William Hoffer himself, whose fake English accent and word choices ensure his language is not his own.¹⁵⁹ Even a little verbal tic like the phrase 'tell me' has been 'unwittingly' appropriated, Hoffer realises at one point, from his Spanish American housekeeper.¹⁶⁰ As for surfaces and simulacra: the oligarch Nikolai's library at his English country estate has been 'painstakingly assembled'—but by the narrator and not its nominal Russian owner. Hoffer doubts that Nikolai has ever 'so much as glanced' at the books on his own shelves.¹⁶¹

In *Hoffer's* fictional world there is no authentic 'there' there.¹⁶² Perhaps the only fictional character not herself playing a character is Antonia, an impoverished aristocrat whose brother, 'the 6th Earl of Denzil', sold the family Buckinghamshire family manor in a fruitless attempt to pay off his gambling debts.¹⁶³ The last of her family line,¹⁶⁴ and with a famously parsimonious husband,¹⁶⁵ Antonia is driven from economic desperation and moral flexibility to collude with unsavoury people like the narrator. Despite Antonia's social bona fides, her disreputable behaviour ensures that the high-born English respectability that the criminals think they're buying into slips from view. Antonia herself seems the ghost of a real presence. Towards the end of the novel, Hoffer observes that the décor of the Kensington townhouse she

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 24 and 113.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁶² Gertrude Stein's famous line about Oakland, California: "What was the use of my having come from Oakland it was not natural to have come from there yes write about it if I like or anything if I like but not there, there is no there there." See Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 298.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Antonia's financially holed-under brother 'quite sensibly drank himself to death'.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

shares with her South African husband bears Antonia's 'strangely distinctive yet absent mark'.¹⁶⁶

Hoffer, then, tells a conventional made-up story in the Jamesian sense. But the story is obsessed by fakeness. Insofar as the novel winkingly refers back to the literary material from which it has been constructed, there is an aspect of postmodern pastiche. There is also, however, another way in which the theme of inauthenticity represents a sincere commentary on (elite) insincerity: a West London where a global amoral cadre play out variously empty or fantasy lives as members of the yesteryear English aristocracy. Post-satirical is not post-political: the point is made by collapsing the idea of satire as an act of moral *exposure*.

Barbarians and Hoffer: consciousness dramas for twenty-first century London

The novel is a particular form of knowledge. It is one thing to make the argument, following the recent Pandora Papers data leak, that the City of London is the 'main nerve centre of the darker global offshore system that hides and guards the world's stolen wealth'.¹⁶⁷ It is another to vivify via Alec Merton MP in *Barbarians* and Nikolai Nikolaevich in *Hoffer* the corruptions of a decades-long political-economic culture. The method of literature is as much analogical as logical. Its preoccupation is not objective analysis but 'only connecting' through metaphor and manners—the latter as interesting to the spy writer John le Carré as the social satirist Jane Austen.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 203-4.

¹⁶⁷ Nicholas Shaxson, 'The City of London is Hiding the World's Stolen Money', *The New York Times*, 11 October 2021 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/11/opinion/pandora-papers-britain-london.html>> [accessed on 11 October 2021].

¹⁶⁸ *The Night Manager* screenwriter, David Farr, notes that le Carré had 'that very English obsession with manners, how manners hide corruption...' See Jake Kerridge, 'The Night Manager writer David Farr: "Le Carré was a ruthlessly honest person"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 October 2021, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/authors/basically-paranoid-person-david-farr-anxiety-jewish-heritage/>> [accessed on 11 October 2021].

A novelist is perhaps too *parti pris* to determine the authority of fiction relative to (academic, scientific, journalistic) nonfiction. What is certain is that literature can offer truths that are both hard-won and difficult to grasp when stated in plain, ‘external’ fashion: truths that the reader comes to know through a form of lived experience, where the living consists of on-the-page dramatisation of ‘psychological phenomena [...] made concrete in the sensible matter of life’.¹⁶⁹ While what Auerbach termed the representation of reality in Western literature is now a distant and irony-saturated relation to the Jamesian (let alone Old Testament) style, a fragile link persists. Even an ironist like David Foster Wallace understood that literary truth is, in the final analysis, subjective and sentimental.¹⁷⁰

The subjectivity of fiction, its ability to record and evoke ‘qualia’, may prove resilient even in secular and empirical twenty-first century culture. At the quantum level, physicists have discovered that an observing consciousness determines the ‘superposition’ of two states.¹⁷¹ Consciousness may not prove a mere epiphenomenon of electric chemistry in the brain; it may be more fundamental than physical matter.¹⁷² The novel,’ David Lodge writes, ‘is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time.’¹⁷³ When it comes to consciousness—or at least the recording of it—fiction is king.

And the fictive drama of consciousness concerns the smallest and largest of human intentions. What Edmund White elegantly describes as ‘deeply informed social satire from

¹⁶⁹ Auerbach, p. 14.

¹⁷⁰ Wallace: ‘Really good work probably comes out of a willingness to disclose yourself, open yourself up in spiritual and emotional ways that risk making you really feel something.’ See *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. by Stephen Burn (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), p. 50.

¹⁷¹ Joint Quantum Institute website <<https://jqj.umd.edu/glossary/quantum-superposition>> [accessed 11 October 2021].

¹⁷² Nobel-prize winning physicist Max Planck: ‘I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative from consciousness.’ See Bernardo Kastrup, Henry P. Stapp, Menas C. Kafatos, ‘Coming to Grips with the Implications of Quantum Mechanics’, *Scientific American*, 29 May 2018, <<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/coming-to-grips-with-the-implications-of-quantum-mechanics/>> [accessed 24 October, 2021].

¹⁷³ David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), p. 10.

within'¹⁷⁴ can be understood as an investigation of manners that is always alert to the seriocomic. Often the focus of this form of satire is on the gap between how we perceive ourselves and how we appear to others. That ironic space can be represented between characters (*Barbarians*) or between reader and first-person narrator (*Hoffer*). In the case of *Hoffer*, one may consider the radically fugitive first-person a form of post-satire, where the target to be exposed slips eternally from sight.

Both novels depict the higher echelons of 21st century London society; both are influenced by the writing of Evelyn Waugh. In the case of *Barbarians*, the influence of *Brideshead Revisited* is felt indirectly through Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*. *Hoffer*'s 'post-Waugh style', by contrast, is in conversation with Waugh's early satires, as well as elements of American crime thrillers and *The Great Gatsby*.

Alan Massie's characterisation of Waugh's early novels as primarily exercises in style has been noted. *Hoffer*, focusing on privileged Mayfair a century after *Vile Bodies*, replaces Waugh's interest in (moralising) modernist exteriority for (amoral) postmodernist first-person interiority. In each case the protagonist is fundamentally evading. Where Adam Fenwick-Symes is a deliberately depthless archetype whose thoughts and feelings are minimally investigated, William Hoffer's consciousness is on constant display as narrator of the text.

Nevertheless, Hoffer is lost in his constructed identity: to the reader, he is in some sense inseparable from his literary predecessors and at the same time un-glimpsable beneath his English-gentleman playboy mask. Understood in this light, he is a Waugh-ish 'manageable abstraction' for the roaring twenty-first century.

¹⁷⁴ White describes Hollinghurst as writing 'harsh but deeply informed social satire from within, just as Proust did. He writes the best prose we have today.' See Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, *The Line of Beauty: A Novel*, <<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/the-line-of-beauty-9781582346106/>> [accessed 11 March 2021].

PhD by Submission of a Portfolio of Published Works – note on research method

While novel-writing is an artistic rather than academic process, composing both *Barbarians* and *Hoffer* involved a wide range of reading and research. The former text is in conversation with the nineteenth-century social novel (Eliot, Thackeray, Trollope, Austen, James) as well as Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*. Matthew Arnold's work of social criticism *Culture and Anarchy* is also explicitly discussed in *Barbarians*.¹⁷⁵ This novel also includes fictional articles from (and therefore researched investigation into) contemporary newspapers and journals, specifically *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, and *Private Eye*. For its part, *Hoffer* is 'made out of' the early novels of Evelyn Waugh, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Highsmith's *The Talented Mr Ripley*.

A second rigorous research process has been required in relation to producing this Introductory Section. The foregoing pages reflect utilisation of academic research skills. Specifically, the research involves:

- Contextual political analysis of London including its role as a global financial centre. In drafting this material, I have drawn on my research skills as a qualified (non-practising) solicitor in England and Wales, an instructor at NYU Stern School of Business, and a former senior researcher in the House of Commons.
- Analysis of representations of realism in European literature, situating the idea of fiction as a drama of consciousness in the context of Auerbach's *Mimesis* argument about the Biblical versus Homeric style.
- Critical analysis of *Barbarians* and *Hoffer*, along with reviews of these novels in newspapers and literary journals.

¹⁷⁵ *Barbarians*, pp. 313-314.

- Critical analysis of the principal authors under discussion in this Introductory Section, with a particular emphasis on the early novels of Evelyn Waugh. The latter involves engagement with academic research papers by prominent scholars of Waugh, such as Jonathan Greenberg and Robert Murray Davis; Waugh's own essays and reviews on the craft of fiction; and less sympathetic perspectives on Waugh's novels from Terry Eagleton, Gore Vidal, Christopher Hitchens, and Martin Amis.
- Practitioner analysis of technical aspects of novel-writing, notably narrative point-of-view, building on nonfiction work by John Gardner (*The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*), Henry James ('The Art of Fiction'), and Jonathan Franzen ('Perchance to Dream').
- Literary theory of Harold Bloom (anxiety of influence) and literary criticism of Lionel Trilling (novel as investigation of manners) and David Lodge (consciousness and the novel).
- Email correspondence with Alan Hollinghurst in relation to *Barbarians* and with Joyce Carol Oates in relation to the style of early Waugh.

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