Historicising Neoliberal Britain:

Remembering the End of History

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Abstract

This thesis argues that a range of twenty-first-century British historical fictions historicise contemporary neoliberal politics, economics and subject-formation through a return to the Thatcherite past. These texts, in their very different ways, enact and interrogate the status of the 1980s within British cultural production as a decisive and determining End of History, which continues to define the futures available to contemporary subjects and collectives. The thesis focuses on contemporary forms of historicity – understood not just as a text’s narration or representation of the past but its specific figuration of history as a process. It evaluates the extent to which contemporary historicisations of neoliberal Britain present the early years of British neoliberalism as a futureless past, and the ways in which models of subjectivity and agency are posited and circumscribed within these historical fictions.

Chapter One analyses the status of the 1984-85 miners’ strike as an overdetermined ‘End of History’, through a close analysis of David Peace’s GB84. I argue that the text is defined by critically significant contradictions: it presents the miners’ defeat as a futureless ‘Year Zero’ but historicises that ending, and historicises the conflict through a paradoxically dehistoricised thousand-year longue durée of violence. I close by suggesting that this novel articulates a sense of historicity without futurity but is nevertheless rich in critical potential.

Chapter Two explores the ways in which neoliberal financialisation is figured through the futureless queer male body. It argues that Alan Hollinghurst’s The Line of Beauty juxtaposes financial crisis and the AIDS crisis to present an economic atmosphere haunted by the spectre of its own imminent dissolution. The unproductive and unreproductive signification of cocaine and queer sex function as metaphors for an economic dispensation that sits uneasily with the heteronormative futures of the Conservative elite.

Chapters Three and Four explore the figuration of Thatcher’s Children in twenty-first-century historical fictions and outline the dialectical relationship between accounts of childhood that emphasise its determining power and those that see it as an origin myth perpetually being rewritten to suit the needs of the present. Chapter Three analyses nostalgic narratives of neoliberal adolescence and explores the ways in which materialistic and apolitical retro-memory of the 1980s is both enacted and interrogated in David Mitchell’s Black Swan Green. It also argues that the adolescent point-of-view is used to denaturalise ideological change but that the infantilised models of the subject that it produces are politically problematic. Chapter Four analyses the ways in which the Thatcherite 1980s, and its relationship to the neoliberal present, are figured through metaphors of child sexual abuse. Through readings of Denise Mina’s The Field of Blood and Peace’s Nineteen Eighty Three, this chapter argues that while these narratives can offer a stark vehicle for criticism of neoliberal economics, they can also act to elide complex historical and political relationships, and often present deterministic models of subjectivity that circumscribe contemporary agency and historicity.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Introduction
Remembering the End of History

‘[T]he eighties fixation in our current culture and politics may not really be a resurrection at all. [...] Our 1980s fetish may actually be the intensification of an ethos that never really went extinct, in part because no epochal force ever intervened to kill it.’

David Sirotta

What Thatcherism poses, in its radical way, is not ‘what can we go back to?’ but rather, ‘along which route are we to go forward?’ In front of us is the historic choice: capitulate to the Thatcherite future or find another way of imagining it.

Stuart Hall

Historicising neoliberal Britain

In twenty-first century British culture, the 1980s signify in many different ways. It is the brutal period of rampant capitalism and selfishness that dismantled the post-war consensus and laid the foundations for neoliberal now. It is a period of hard choices that tackled the socio-economic crises of the 1970s. It is the root of the global financial crisis that has shattered neoliberal ‘sureties’ since 2008.3 It is an object of nostalgic desire; an alluring, simpler time that offers a retreat from the complexities of contemporary life. It represents a period of violent political opposition that was violently repressed. It represents a valorised period of ideological conflict – of tangible political oppositions and options – that vanished in the bland centrism of the 1990s and seems vibrant by contemporary standards. It is a period of national resurgence; or of resurgent nationalism. And it is a ten-year stretch of time that a majority of the British population lived through: it is rooted deeply in our personal memories and subjective stories of change-over-time.

1 David Sirotta, Back to Our Future: How the 1980s explain the world we live in now – our culture, our politics, our everything (New York: Ballatine Books, 2011), xx
3 I use ‘sureties’ here in the double-sense of certainty and an agreement to guarantee a debt.

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Perhaps the most successful twenty-first-century films exploring the 1980s are the exploration of the miners' strike and competing forms of masculinity in *Billy Elliot* (2000), the exploration of Far Right politics and youth subcultures in *This is England* (2006), Meryl Streep's Oscar-winning impersonation of Thatcher in the biopic *The Iron Lady* (2012) and *Pride* (2014), which traces the intersectional activism of gay rights campaigners and striking miners. Television drama includes a sympathetic view of Thatcher in *The Falklands Play* (BBC, 2002); the retro-nostalgia of *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008–2010); Thatcher biopics *The Long Walk to Finchley* (BBC, 2008) and *Margaret* (BBC, 2009); *Worried About the Boy* (BBC, 2010), with its nostalgic exploration of the New Romantics; literary adaptations *The Line of Beauty* (BBC, 2006), *Money* (BBC, 2010), *Red Riding Trilogy* (Channel 4, 2009) and *The Field of Blood* (BBC, 2011); *Royal Wedding* (BBC, 2010), *This is England '86* (Channel 4, 2010) and *This is England '88* (Channel 4, 2011) explore working class-life under Thatcher. Documentaries include the highly nostalgic *I Love the 1980s* (BBC, 2001), *Wales in the Eighties* (BBC, 2016), *Alba 1980s* (BBC, 2016), and *Tory! Tory! Tory!* (BBC, 2007). Two high-profile pieces of visual/performance art are Jeremy Deller's re-enactment of *The Battle*

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10 *Billy Elliot*, dir. Stephen Daldry (BBC Films/Working Title, 2000); *This is England*, dir. by Shane Meadows (Film Four, 2006); *The Iron Lady*, dir. by Phyllida Lloyd (Pathé, 2012); *Pride*, dir. by Matthew Warchus (BBC Films, 2014).
11 For an account of its cancellation by the BBC in 1983 due to concerns about the corporation’s impartiality during the election campaign, see Ian Curteis, *The Falklands Play* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 9-52.

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of Orgreave (Catcliffe: Artangel, 2001) and Marcus Harvey's White Riot (London: White Cube Hoxton, 2009). Some notable plays include Beth Steel’s GB84-inspired miners’ strike narrative Wonderland (Hampstead Theatre, London, 2014); also exploring the strike is Ron Rose’s verbatim theatre-inspired The Enemies Within (originally performed at the Bolton Octagon in 1985; revived there in 2009), and Billy Elliot the Musical (Victoria Palace Theatre, London, 2005–2016). David Eldridge playfully engages with Thatcherite economics in Market Boy (National Theatre, London 2006); the experiences of Black Britons in the era are explored in Roy Williams’ Sucker Punch (Royal Court, London, 2010); while both Moira Buffini’s Handbagged (Tricyle, London, 2013) and Peter Morgan’s The Audience (Gielgud Theatre, London, 2013) tease out the relationship between Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth II. Ironic, playful presentations of the former Prime Minister’s life story are found in Thatcher - The Musical! (Foursight Theatre Company, 2006) and Margaret Thatcher: Queen of Soho! (Various, 2013). Her death and public reactions to it were imagined before the fact in The Death of Margaret Thatcher (Courtyard Theatre, 2008). There is also an enormous range of print media retrospectives and special issues, not to mention the enormous volume of media coverage following the former Prime Minister’s death in April 2013.

These texts (a long but far from exhaustive list) can be situated within a wider cultural context of retrospection. Critic Simon Reynolds notes that ‘[i]nstead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the ‘Re’ decade [...] revivals, reissues, remakes, re-enactments. Endless retrospection.’ However, this thesis will argue that there is something qualitatively different about the persistent twenty-

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12 Some of these playtexts have been published: Jon Brittain and Matt Tedford, Margaret Thatcher: Queen of Soho (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), David Eldridge, Market Boy (London: Methuen, 2006), Peter Morgan, The Audience (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), Roy Williams, Sucker Punch (London: Methuen, 2010).

13 See for example the Guardian Review ‘The Thatcher Years’ issue, Guardian, 11 April 2009), the New Statesman ‘Thatcher special’ issue of New Statesman, 26 February 2009, and freesheet The Stylist’s engagement with Thatcher’s relation with (and the legacies bequeathed by her premiership to) feminism (27 October 2010).

first-century British cultural attention paid to the 1980s. The historical processes that structure contemporary social and economic life – the expansion of financialisation and hyper-consumption, the legacies of deindustrialisation, widening social inequality, globalisation, the homogenisation of national and regional cultures, and the digital technological revolution – are products, at least in part, of that decade’s neoliberal politics. David Sirotta’s analysis of the American pop-cultural obsession with the decade argues that its lingering appeal is that its ‘ethos’ continues to determine the parameters of contemporary life: ‘the eighties fixation in our current culture and politics may not really be a resurrection at all. [...] [O]ur 1980s fetish may actually be the intensification of an ethos that never really went extinct, in part because no epochal force ever intervened to kill it.’

Historical narratives are always, inextricably, ‘histories of the present’, even if they do not explicitly engage with a particular past’s contemporary legacies, because the text’s epistemic approach, ideological perspective and form are products of its discursive and historical context. This dynamic is further heightened within twenty-first-century histories of neoliberalism because it is a socio-economic formation that is being ‘seen and evaluated as a historical phenomenon even while it exists.’ Neoliberalism is still unfolding, being formed and felt, as it is being historicised.

This thesis analyses a range of twenty-first-century British historical fictions that represent the 1980s and the economic and socio-political project that both dominates collective memory of that decade and functions as a synecdoche for it: Thatcherism. Through very different figurations of apocalyptic conflict, collapsing bodies, pathological nostalgia,

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15 Sirotta, Back to Our Future, xx.
18 Thatcherism was a political formation that incorporated and advanced neoliberal social, political and economic ideas, but is not reducible to it. Later in this introduction, I will tease out the relationship between Thatcherism and neoliberalism more comprehensively.
arrested development and abused children, these texts explore, enact and interrogate the period’s metaphorical status as a decisive and determining End of History, and the kinds of futures that are imaginable beyond the horizons of the Thatcherite 1980s. Stuart Hall, writing in 1987 after Thatcher's third general election victory, starkly positions futurity as the terrain for oppositional or alternative politics: 'What Thatcherism poses, in its radical way, is not “what can we go back to?” but rather, “along which route are we to go forward?” In front of us is the historic choice: capitulate to the Thatcherite future or find another way of imagining it.'

Fredric Jameson argues that the futures that subjects and collectives can imagine are the limits beyond which they cannot think, and 'one of the great indispensable functions of ideological analysis [is] to show [these] contradictions in which we are ourselves imprisoned.' Through a reading of David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Jameson argues that late capitalist cultural imaginary has a depleted repertoire of imaginable futures, which evince the:

farthest points our own thought can reach, namely dystopia and regression, world dictatorship and barbarism. [...] These alternatives are today and for the moment the only ways in which we can imagine our future, the future of late capitalism; and it is only by shattering their twin dominion that we might conceivably be able again to think productively, to envisage a genuine revolutionary difference, to begin once again to think Utopia.

This thesis uses Jameson’s insights to analyse the extent to which the ‘Thatcherite future’ still determines political and historical possibilities in twenty-first-century Britain. I will explore the critical and historical potential of contemporary texts that return to the 1980s both to ‘excavat[e] [...] the foundations of the present,’ exploring the *material* transformations and ongoing legacies of the period, and to historicise the conflicts,

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21 Ibid.
22 Joseph Brooker, ‘Orgreave Revisited: David Peace’s *GB84* and the return to the 1980s’, *Radical Philosophy* 133 (September/October 2005), 39-51, (p. 49.)
processes and transformations that reshaped the ideological terrain so that neoliberalism, in Mark Fisher’s formulation, ‘seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable.’

Many of the primary texts that I analyse in this thesis have been the focus of compelling scholarly readings, with which I engage throughout. However, there has been no attempt made so far by critics to look synoptically at the range of specifically historical fictions that engage with Thatcherism and the 1980s, and this will be my thesis’s specific intervention. Joseph Brooker’s readings of what he terms ‘neo-1980s’ novels provide a useful starting point for this analysis, in their attentiveness to the relationship between formal strategies and historical contexts. Louisa Hadley and Elizabeth Ho’s edited collection Thatcher and After: Margaret Thatcher and Her Afterlife in Contemporary Culture, which tends to conflate Thatcher and Thatcherism, is relevant in its selected primary texts, but organised quite narrowly around concepts of historical trauma and trauma theory. Colin Hutchinson’s analysis of fictional responses to neoliberalism in Reaganism, Thatcherism and the Social Novel does not distinguish sufficiently between Reaganism and Thatcherism, and makes a virtue of its focus on realist texts and white, middle-class male authors. Neither of these books address the specifically historical dimensions of twenty-first-century retrospective engagements with Thatcherism and the 1980s. This project analyses not only the ways in which historical fictions articulate specific narratives about the past, but how they articulate understandings of history as an unfolding process. Indeed, analysing the interplay between representations of the past and culturally specific conceptions of history as a process is one of the distinctive elements of my approach here. I closely analyse formal and aesthetic

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strategies of historicisation and the forms of historicity that they produce, while contextualising these interventions within wider cultural narratives, genres and modes of relating to the past. Before I move on to unpack further the key theoretical frameworks for this thesis – *the end of history* and *textual forms of historicisation* – I will explore the relationship between its central and interrelated historical and periodising concepts: the 1980s, Thatcher, Thatcherism and Neoliberalism.

‘Maggie’, periodisation and collective memory of the 1980s

In 2009, Marcus Harvey premiered his exhibition ‘White Riot’ at the Hoxton White Cube gallery. Its centrepiece was a 4.5 x 3.5 metre portrait called ‘Maggie’. At first glance, it seems like a flat single image, a huge photograph of Margaret Thatcher mounted on the exhibition space’s back wall. But approaching the piece, it becomes apparent that it is in fact a collage of thousands of different objects: pieces of coal, fruit, vegetables, guns, ammunition, sex toys, handbags, Thatcher masks, Blair masks, piles of money, army helmets, skulls – objects that Harvey considered significant to or, put another way, *constitutive of*, Thatcher’s public image. Harvey is most famous for his 1995 portrait ‘Myra’, a collage portrait comprised of babies’ handprints. In the words of Gordon Burn, these tiny hands are ‘simultaneously clawing and constructing, obliterating and making’ the iconic police mug shot of the Moors Murderer Myra Hindley. What constitutes Hindley, in British culture, are the traces and associations of absent, murdered children. Harvey’s work clearly has an interest in exploring women who are figured in neatly, problematically ‘monstrous’ terms; its deconstructive formal strategies strip the mass-media image back to its constituent parts. The image of Thatcher, staring straight ahead, steely-eyed and in her pomp during the 1987 election campaign, is disaggregated. The cumulative, chaotic, sometimes contradictory images, objects and ideas that make up the signifiers ‘Thatcher’,

‘Thatcherism’, and ‘the 1980s’ are foregrounded, and the metonymic slippage between these three concepts – the elision of woman, political programme, and heterogeneous ten-year stretch of time – is explored. ‘Maggie’ emphasises the *cultural work* that the over-determined metonym of Margaret Thatcher does – it uncovers the ways in which the image and idea of the Iron Lady *shapes* the historical raw material of the 1980s and beyond into a meaningful form. Approaching the piece, moving around it or viewing it from a different angle, the viewer finds that Thatcher warps or loses focus. Particular juxtapositions and formations of these 15,000 objects catch the eye, and patterns or relationships between them can be traced and constructed. Step backwards again and this excess of disparate historical stuff becomes organised and *meaningful* as a whole again through the image of Thatcher. Yet, crucially, the individual components become indistinct, homogeneous – the relationships or disjunctions between them become impossible to trace. In many ways, there is a very Thatcherite tension between the individual and the collective when interacting with this portrait. Above all, ‘Maggie’ prompts the viewer to reflect critically on Margaret Thatcher’s function as an organising principle within contemporary British culture – a way of shaping a messy excess of historical material, events and narratives into something neatly explicable through the figure of one woman.

‘Maggie’ performs critical manoeuvres that have informed this thesis’s approach to historicising the 1980s, Thatcher and Thatcherism: through its formal interrogation of the figure of Thatcher, and the ways in which it embodies the possibilities and problems of periodisation and the workings of collective memory. There is a crucial disjunction in the treatment of Thatcher by recent academic histories of the 1980s on one hand, and popular histories and forms of cultural production on the other. The historian of conservatism E.H.H.

29 Jackie Stacey argues that ‘[a] close encounter with the serious face of political certainty swiftly witnesses its dissolution into the fragments of free-association which blend with some of the more literal symbols of her vision.’ See Stacey, ‘Ravishing Maggie: Marcus Harvey and Thatcher Thirty Years On’, *New Formations* 70 (2011), 132-151, (p. 134).
Green acknowledges that Thatcherism was a ‘hegemonic project’ that ‘overturned assumptions with regard to the accepted norms of governance’, but argues that Margaret Thatcher, while a significant political actor, was very much a ‘creature of her time, not the creator of it.’ Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders argue that understandings of the 1980s and Thatcherism often hang on three assumptions that need to be challenged: ‘an extraordinary emphasis on Thatcher as an individual; a preoccupation with the ideological claims asserted for her ministries; and a conviction that her governments had unusual historical significance.’ These scholars and many more acknowledge the impact and effectiveness of Thatcher as a politician but caution against any neat metonymic conflation of ‘Thatcher’ with ‘Thatcherism’, and of either with ‘the 1980s’ more generally – a heterogeneous decade after all, and one which was shaped by diverse and wide-ranging historical forces that weren’t inaugurated in 1979. As Jackson and Saunders argue, ‘for all the power of “Thatcherism” as an idea, it should not be made an explanatory tool for every social development’ in the period and in the intervening years. However, if these historians are increasingly seeking to complicate readings of both the 1980s and Thatcherism through the prism of one eponymous woman, the opposite idea often lingers in contemporary popular culture. Graham Stewart's popular history of the decade opens with the supposedly ‘uncontentious’ quasi-Hegelian claim that Thatcher was the ‘personification’ of the ‘guiding spirit of the age.’ Alwyn Turner also argues that it was ‘ultimately her decade’:

31 Green, Thatcher, p. 196.
34 Jackson and Saunders, ‘Varieties of Thatcherism’, p. 16.
The immediate associations conjured up by the mention of any other post-war decade do not centre on political figures, but the 1980s remain the Thatcher decade, for those who idolized her as the greatest leader since Winston Churchill, for those in whom she inspired an undying hatred, and for the millions who saw her as either a mixed blessing or a necessary evil.\textsuperscript{36}

Thatcher’s soundbites title one volume of popular or cultural history after another: \textit{No Such Thing as Society, Rejoice! Rejoice!; The Enemy Within}.\textsuperscript{37} And this process only accelerated in the wake of her death in 2013, as the long-prepared front pages and obituaries rolled out. Despite the differing political inflections, there was an ironic degree of consensus about her transformative significance: whether she personally ‘saved’ or irreparably ‘divided’ the nation, she was undoubtedly ‘The Woman who changed Britain’: ‘Thatcher – the great transformer.’\textsuperscript{38} Ian McEwan, in his much-cited description of the ‘extravagant fixations’ that Thatcher provoked, suggested that while ‘[o]pponents and supporters of Margaret Thatcher will never agree about the value of her legacy, […] as for her importance, her hypnotic hold on us, they are bound to find common ground.’\textsuperscript{39} However, as Andy Beckett argues in \textit{Promised You A Miracle}, historicising the political and ideological battles of that decade along the lines of Thatcher-personality politics is highly reductive: ‘when she died in 2013, and the dam opened to release reservoirs of memory that had been building up for a third of a century, the heroism or malignancy of “Maggie” – a whole society’s metamorphosis reduced to your view of a single person – was the only aspect of the early 1980s up for public

\textsuperscript{39} Ian McEwan, ‘We disliked her and we loved it’, \textit{The Guardian} 9\textsuperscript{th} April 2013 http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/09/margaret-thatcher-ian-mcewan [accessed 23 November 2015]
This thesis will analyse cultural investments in the figure of Thatcher and the kinds of origin myths enacted through this figure, rather than present her as the sole lens through which this formative period of neoliberalisation can be understood. D.J. Taylor argues there is a lack of substantive engagement with Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism in contemporary fiction:

If her achievement was, as McEwan puts it, "to make politics matter, both for those who loved her and those who opposed her", then there is a feeling among those interested in her creatively that most of the existing representations of her are merely provisional, faint outlines of a portrait still waiting to be completed. [...] If social historians are just beginning to get to grips with the grocer’s daughter from Grantham and the extraordinary reconfigurations of the national fabric that she brought about, then the general feeling seems to be that novelists still lag far behind.

A quarter of a century after she left Downing Street, though the fuel lies stacked up on all sides, one of the house of fiction's most promising bonfires awaits its authenticating spark.

By contrast, this thesis argues that there certainly is a sustained cultural focus on the ‘extraordinary reconfigurations of the national fabric’ in this period, and the claim that Thatcher ‘brought [these transformations] about’ is historically highly questionable. However, Taylor is more correct to suggest that there are few sustained fictional ‘portraits’ of Thatcher herself. She is a shadowy presence onto whom fantasies of violence are projected in Hilary Mantel’s 2015 short story ‘The Assassination of Margaret Thatcher;’ a mediated television presence ‘as sure of her truth as the blue of her eyes’ in Mitchell’s Black

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Swan Green; glimpsed in her senescence in Gordon Burn’s *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel* (2003) a frail ‘carrier of large, significant, exciting events’, whose hand persistently seeks to adjust the slipping strap of a handbag that is no longer there, a metaphor for the lonely afterlife of the powerful.43 In Hollinghurst’s *Line of Beauty* she is a deconstructed figure at a party, a profoundly contradictory ‘fine but improbable fusion of the Vorticist and the Baroque’, and a site for fantasy, representing ‘a lack that was waiting to be filled.’44 The fact that these literary ‘faint outlines of a portrait’ are not ‘fleshed out and finished off’ is not a symptom of a lack of attention, but a register of Thatcher’s status as just such a slippery locus for fantasy, for ‘extravagant fixations.’45 This project explores these fixations, and the ways in which twenty-first-century cultural production historicises the present through Thatcher. In Chapter One, I will explore the apocalyptic fantasies of Thatcher as a nightmarish, masturbating progenitor of the End of History in *GB84*; in Chapters Three and Four, I will explore the conception of contemporary subjects as Thatcher’s children.

Harvey’s deconstruction of the historical material that structures the metonym of ‘Maggie’ also formally enacts and problematises the ways in which periodisation functions. Jameson forcefully argues that periodisation is historically and politically vital. Without it, and without analyses of a ‘cultural dominant, [...] we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference’.46 He suggests that a “periord” [be] understood not as some omnipresent and uniform way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of a common objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative

45 McEwan, ‘We disliked her and we loved it’. Thatcher’s life has even become a bed-time story for children, one of the feminist ‘Rebel Stories for Girls’: ‘Once upon a time, in Great Britain, there was a girl who did not care what others thought of her. She believed in doing what she thought was right. [...] When she took free milk away from primary school children, the people disliked her. When she won the war against Argentina in the Falkland Islands, people admired her for her strength and determination.’ Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo, *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* (London: Particular Books, 2017).
innovations is then possible, but always within that situation’s structural limits.\footnote{Fredric Jameson, ‘Periodizing the 60s’, \textit{Social Text} 9/10 (Spring-Summer 1984), 178-209, (p. 178). It is important to note that Jameson has been critiqued for just these kinds of homogenising historical narratives. For an example of this criticism, and an interrogation of decadal logic, see Lawrence Besserman, ‘The Challenge of Periodization: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives’, in \textit{The Challenge of Periodization: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives}, ed. by Lawrence Besserman (ed.) (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 3-27. For a historicisation and cultural history of decadal logic, see Jason Scott Smith, ‘The Strange History of the Decade: Modernity, Nostalgia and the Perils of Periodisation’, \textit{Journal of Social History} 33.2 (Winter 1998), 265-285, (pp. 275-278).} Jameson’s model is convincing in its focus on periodisation less as the \textit{homogenising} imposition of an overarching historical narrative that elides complexity, difference and dissonant subjective experiences, and more as the analysis of the ‘structural limits’ that constitute a shared historical experience. However, periodisation is also always a selective and retrospective act of historical narration, as Graham Thompson argues:

> The meaning of a particular period proceeds from understanding the relationship between contiguous events, usually arranged temporally, and each of the events is made significant because it is also metonymically part of, or associated with, the larger entity – the decade, or period, or era – being evoked. [...] But in his treatment of Roman Jakobson’s linguistic understanding of metaphor and metonymy, David Lodge makes one striking point relevant to periodization: metonymy, according to Lodge, a linguistic figure that substitutes terms based on contiguity, also works linguistically only by way of deletion. [...] [L]inguistic processes are replicated at the level of culture – just as the metonymic figure deletes words, so cultural periodisation, which relies on events, works all too fluently by way of deletion. And it works imperfectly as a result. The 1980s, which emerges from the available political and cultural histories, is a decade whose character, while not unconvincing, is dominated by certain events and figures.\footnote{Graham Thompson, ‘Periodising the ’80s: ’The Differential of History’ in Nicholson Baker’s \textit{The Mezzanine}, \textit{MFS Modern Fiction Studies}, 57.2 (Summer 2011), p. 301.}

As in Thompson’s account, Harvey’s ‘Maggie’ foregrounds the ways in which diverse, sometimes contradictory historical material is corralled into, and made meaningful
through, a ‘dominant’ figure or narrative. Dominant events include the Falklands Wars, the 1984-85 miners’ strike, Big Bang and Black Monday, Thatcher on the steps of Downing Street quoting St. Francis and eleven-and-a-half years later exiting Number 10; oft-invoked images include yuppies and urban riots, New Romantics and football violence, manic activity on the trading floors juxtaposed with abandoned factories. As Thompson argues, this kind of periodisation, with its clip-show historicism, is not ‘unconvincing’ so much as it is essentially reductive. Jameson and Thompson’s opposing conceptualisations represent the dialectic of periodisation: it is simultaneously a politically and historically vital process but also a politicised, interpretive act of memorialisation that should be subject to critique and contestation.

But how meaningful is it to talk, as I have here, about cultures collectively remembering the past? How is it possible to have a collective memory of anything at all, let alone a heterogeneous ten-year stretch of time? Peter Middleton and Tim Woods argue that in the wake of postmodern historiography, and following the memory ‘wars’ of the 1990s and the rise of digital mnemo-technologies, memory rather than historical discourse is simultaneously considered to be the ‘super-highway to the past’ – with that metaphor’s resonance of time-space compression – and understood to be highly contingent and subject to constant revision.49 They contend that cultural texts like historical fictions help to construct our shared understandings of the past – what we commonly term collective or social memory – while also critically reflecting upon the paradigms of ‘memory’ and ‘history’ that govern this process. Similarly, Kate Mitchell argues that rather than focusing on whether a text represents the past accurately or reflexively problematises such historical representation (as with Linda Hutcheon’s influential definition of postmodern

historiographic metafiction, it is productive to consider historical fictions as ‘memory-texts’ that ‘emerge from and participate in [other] contemporary memorial practices’ and which foreground the ‘always unfinished process of remembering.’

Historian Dan Stone also theorises remembering as a cultural process, but focuses more on its political potential to expose, challenge and contest ‘how narratives and stories about the past structure societies in the present.’

These perspectives are useful in their focus on the historical novel and other cultural production as part of – and reflexively engaging with – the workings of a broader memorial culture. Collective memory is best understood not as a social analogue for individual memory: either as a kind of abstract collective unconscious or an aggregate or median of individual memories. Nor is it necessarily predicated on trauma or deterministic models of traumatic memory and subjectivity. While memory studies is not a central focus of this thesis, I do employ an understanding of collective memory that focuses on remembering as a dynamic, politicised process (rather than accessing extant and/or accurate pre-existing memories), and which foregrounds the ways in which the meanings of past events are always in flux: continually reconstructed and contested through contemporary culture. The twenty-first-century cultural production that I analyse is part of this dynamic cultural process, and, in the case of texts like Mitchell’s Black Swan Green, which is the focus of Chapter Three, reflexively engage with hegemonic modes of collective memory, such as materialistic nostalgia for the 1980s, which I term ‘retro memory.’

Thatcherism and Neoliberalism

Two crucial key concepts that I deploy throughout this thesis are Thatcherism and Neoliberalism, and while my arguments about them are primarily advanced through

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51 Kate Mitchell, History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 29, p. 32.

analyses of primary texts and historical/theoretical sources in the chapters that follow, it is important to set out briefly the specific ways in which I understand and deploy these terms. The provenance of the term 'Thatcherism' is disputed; and defining it is in many ways no less contentious. I understand it as political response to the crises of Western capitalism in the 1970s, in which a period of economic stagnation, high inflation and rising unemployment followed the post-war Trente Glorieuses, which led to the structural necessity for socio-economic change, and the opportunity for a radical socio-economic interpretation of the crisis and the framing of a 'solution' to it. The policies of the Thatcher governments dramatically accelerated processes of deindustrialisation in Britain, and led to extremely high levels of recorded unemployment, as I will explore in relation to the 1984-85 miners' strike in Chapter One; its policies of financial deregulation and denationalisation fundamentally transformed the British economy, as I will explore through readings of The Line of Beauty and the metaphorical association between finance and fatality in Chapter 2. Stuart Hall, one of the earliest and most lucid theorists of Thatcherite ideology, described it as a political project structured by contradictions: 'regressive modernisation', with a twin orientation towards radical economic transformation and reactionary, nostalgic and retrogressive conceptions of class and race relations. Raphael Samuel argued that Thatcherism's strength was that it could 'thus appear simultaneously as a fierce iconoclast and dedicated restorationist, an avatar of the future, pointing the way forward, and a voice from the past, calling on the British people to return to its traditional ways.

53 For a summary of the debates, see Richard Vinen, Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the Thatcher era (London: Pocket Books, 2010), p. 5
55 Hall, Hard Road to Renewal, p. 164.
56 Raphael Samuel, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain, Theatres of Memory Volume 2 (London: Verso, 1998), p. 343. Hall argues that these contradictions are not fatal flaws, the revelation of which will make a ideological-political formation crumble. Rather, contradiction is constitutive of ideological formations: Ideology is always contradictory. [...] Ideology works best by suturing together contradictory lines of argument and emotional investments [...] Contradiction is its metier.'
understands Thatcherism as a nationally-specific ideological-political formation that fused neoliberal capitalism with authoritarian, socially conservative and nationalistic politics. It was a political programme which generated significant opposition and sustained contestation as it was being implemented. And its effects were experienced in markedly different ways depending on class, race, gender, sexuality and geographical location: 'to ask “What is Thatcherism?” or “What is the Thatcher legacy?” evokes a further series of questions: where? when? and for whom?" Green claims that it saw ‘Socialism banished and Conservatism redefined,’ even if her governments ‘accelerated rather than inaugurated many of the changes that took place in the last quarter of the twentieth-century.’ Jackson and Saunders concur with this analysis, once again figuring the period as a purging of the available political language: ‘By the time the Labour Party returned to office in 1997, it had accepted large parts of the Thatcher legacy. As for “socialism”, the word all but disappeared from British politics.’ This conception of Thatcherism as a force that removed the possibility for alternative politics also underpins the ‘end of history’ narrative that I argue structures many contemporary cultural accounts of the period.

If Thatcherism is an early British iteration of a neoliberal political formation, how can we conceptualise neoliberalism? Jamie Peck suggests that while there are comparatively few explicit discussions of neoliberalism within the political and economic institutions that might be characterised as neoliberal, the ‘development of the term neoliberalism in academic discourse has become commonplace, especially in the critical social sciences during the last decade’, but ‘the manner of this usage remains confusing and inconsistent.’

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58 Green, Thatcher, p. 193, p. 196.
Pierre Bourdieu argues that 'the essence of neoliberalism' is a global political 'programme for destroying collective structures which may impede the pure market logic', a logic that became increasingly hegemonic from the late 1970s onwards. In this account, neoliberalism is the sometimes destructive penetration of market logics and ideologies into hitherto uncapitalised spheres of human experience. Peck, amongst others, has persuasively historicised neoliberalism, unpacking both its intellectual genealogies and its institutional emergence from the 1930s onwards, and arguing that neoliberal ideologies and practices manifest themselves differently according to prevailing conditions in each geographical and historical environment, and need to be seen 'not as some automatic system, but as an earthly process, realized through political action and institutional reinvention.'

David Harvey similarly sees neoliberalism as a 'political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites.' Wendy Brown critiques what she sees as Harvey's overly economistic and Marxist analysis, which she argues risks 'reduc[ing] neoliberalism to a bundle of economic policies with inadvertent political and social consequences, [failing] to address the political rationality that both organizes these policies and reaches beyond the market.' Brown's Foucauldian-inflected analysis of neoliberalism views it as a mode of political rationality that produces '[t]he market [as] the organizing and regulative principle of the state and society', but produces a version of the subject too as an entrepreneurial, individualistic actor...

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2017] The authors, while suggesting that there is 'much to cheer' about privatisation and increased foreign investment, conclude that freer flows of capital across national boundaries and austerity economics 'have not delivered' as expected. (p. 38)


62 See Peck, *The Construction of Neoliberal Reason*, p. 33. For a highly persuasive example of these kind of historical accounts, see Ben Jackson, 'At the Origins of Neoliberalism: The Free Economy and the Strong State 1930-1947', *The Historical Journal* 53.1 (2010), 129-151. Jackson argues that too often there is a tendency to characterise early iterations of neoliberalism as 'systematic and self-confident at a time when [they were] in fact incomplete and uncertain.' (p. 130)


in all situations and interactions. Brown’s conception of the production of neoliberal subjectivity is important for this thesis, notably in Chapters Three and Four which examine the ways in which processes of socialisation and determinism are figured through narratives of childhood, both nostalgic and traumatic. The totalising explanatory power of neoliberalism as a concept has been criticised, however – for example by Lauren Berlant:

Critics interested in the ways structural forces materialize locally often turn the heuristic “neoliberalism” into a world-homogenizing sovereign with coherent intentions that produces subjects who serve its interests, such that their singular actions only seem personal, effective, and freely intentional, while really being effects of powerful, impersonal forces.

Berlant critiques neoliberalism as a concept so diffuse and imbued with so much agency that it risks endorsing a model of cultural and political life in which subjects are utterly duped and determined, devoid of any meaningful agency. It is of course important to make precise, historicised claims about neoliberalism, heeding Jackson and Saunders’ warning about Thatcherism not being used as ‘an explanatory tool for every social development.’ However, as William Davies argues, part of neoliberalism’s power comes from its expansiveness, a constitutive mutability:

The reason “neoliberalism” appears to defy easy definition [...] is that it refers to a necessarily interdisciplinary, colonising process. It is not about the use of markets or competition to solve narrowly economic problems, but extending them to address fundamental problems of modernity [...]. For the same reasons, it remains endlessly incomplete, pushing the boundaries of economic rationality into more and more new territories.

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65 Wendy Brown, Edgework, p. 38.
67 Jackson and Saunders, ‘Varieties of Thatcherism’, p. 16.
This thesis similarly understands neoliberalism as an ongoing, unfolding process. There are important continuities as ‘the long march of neoliberalism continues’, but also transformations and crucial alterations in the social, economic and political terrain.\(^{69}\) Furthermore, I pay particular attention to the ways in which neoliberal ideological claims are historicised and/or naturalised through both narratives about the Thatcherite past and conceptions of history as a process. A crucial example of this, and a recurrent focus of this thesis, is the narrative of the End of History.

**The End of History**

A recent psychological study into self-perception found that subjects (with only minor variations in terms of age and gender), despite understanding that they have changed dramatically in the past, consistently ‘underestimate the magnitude of future change’, and believe that the present is a ‘watershed moment at which they will have finally become the person they will be for the rest of their lives.’\(^{70}\) The authors termed this phenomenon ‘The End of History illusion’ and concluded that ‘History, it seems is always ending today.’\(^{71}\) This study shows the cultural transmissibility of concepts of the ‘end of history’ and their association with a myopic understanding of the present as an unchangeable status quo. Suggestively for my analysis, it also roots the concept of the end of history in the inability to conceptualise changed or alternative futures. The authors suggest that there may be a cognitive root to this ‘illusion’:

> [T]here is at least one important difference between the cognitive processes that allow people to look forward and backward in time [...]. Prospection is a constructive process, retrospection is a reconstructive process, and constructing new things is typically more difficult than reconstructing old ones. [...] The reason

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\(^{69}\) Hall, 'The neoliberal revolution', p. 9.

\(^{70}\) Jordi Quoidbach, Daniel T. Gilbert and Timothy D. Wilson, 'The End of History Illusion', *Science* 339 (January 2013), 96 – 98. (p. 96)

\(^{71}\) Quoidbach et al, 'The End of History Illusion, p. 98.
this matters is that people often draw inferences from the ease with which they can remember or imagine [...]. If people find it difficult to imagine the ways in which their traits, values, or preferences may change in the future, they may assume that such changes are unlikely. In short, people may confuse the difficulty of imagining personal change with the unlikelihood of change itself.72

The capacity to imagine futures rooted in the possibility of transformation involves conceptual, cognitive difficulty. As Wittgenstein argues, often, ‘[w]hen we speak of the world’s future, we always mean the direction it will reach if it keeps on going in the direction we see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.’73 Ideology further circumscribes the futures that are imaginable at any given moment.74 And the End of History is a, perhaps the, constitutive ideology of the neoliberal era.

The late-twentieth century iteration of the ‘end of history’ came from Francis Fukuyama in 1989. His article ‘The End of History?’, published in the American foreign policy periodical The National Interest, argued that with revolutions in Eastern Europe, the economic liberalization of China, perestroika and glasnost in the Soviet Union, and the increasingly global penetration of Western consumerism, the triumph of ‘liberal democracy’ (interchangeable in his account with American-style capitalism) in the 1980s marked not so much a historical turning-point as a historical terminus:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end

74 Yuval Noah Harari argues this point in doomy, deterministic terms: ‘The cold hand of the past emerges from the graves of our ancestors, grips us by the neck and directs our gaze towards a single future. We have felt that grip from the moment we were born, so we assume that it is a natural part of who we are.’ Yuval Noah Harari, Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow (London, Harvill Secker, 2016), p. 59.
point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.\textsuperscript{75}

The end of history represents more than the defeat of specific political formations: it signifies the extinguishing of any systemic alternatives to what we retrospectively see as neoliberalism. The 'history' that Fukuyama sounds a death knell for is not history as a sequence of events or synonym for the past, but rather the concept of history as a process connecting past, present and future.\textsuperscript{76} In a postmodern era that Lyotard defines through its 'incredulity towards metanarratives', Fukuyama is reworking the teleological 'universal' philosophies of history advanced by Hegel and developed in a materialist form by Marx, which conceptualise history as a dialectical process that will end when the contradictory forces that drive historical change are finally resolved.\textsuperscript{77} Their ends were very different – for Hegel, the ideals of freedom were actualised within the liberal state, while Marx saw the end of History (or the end of 'pre-history') in the inevitable future triumph of a communism that would resolve the destructive contradictions of capitalism – but what they shared was the faith that the end of history would bring about human emancipation on a global scale. Fukuyama inverted Marx's teleology: in the 1980s, it was not communism that emerged triumphant from the ashes of capitalism, but the other way round. Despite the article's triumphant tone, Fukuyama did not look at the world and see liberal utopia either in existence or on the horizon. He acknowledged the likelihood of future violence and conflict and the existence of increasing inequality, even if he mystifyingly argued that its causes were not structural but 'cultural.'\textsuperscript{78} His conclusion was even oddly mournful:

\textsuperscript{75} Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?' \textit{The National Interest} 16 (Summer 1989), 3-18, (p. 4).
\textsuperscript{76} See footnote 20.
\textsuperscript{78} '[T]he root causes of economic inequality do not have to do with the underlying legal and social structure of our society, which remains fundamentally egalitarian and moderately redistributionist, so much as with the cultural and social characteristics of the groups that make it up, which are in turn the historical legacy of pre-modern conditions. Thus black poverty in the United States is not the inherent product of liberalism, but is rather the "legacy of slavery and racism" which persisted long after the formal abolition of slavery.' Fukuyama also makes the unsubstantiated and tendentious argument that 'the class issue has actually been resolved in the West. As Kojève (amongst others)
The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed.  

This prognosis of a post-historical world defined by atomised consumerism, as well as cultural stasis, stagnation and nostalgia, is highly reminiscent of Jameson’s analysis of postmodernism as the ‘cultural logic of late capitalism.’ However, despite these ambivalences, Fukuyama argues that while political problems may persist because of the imperfect or uneven application of ‘liberal’ ideals in existing societies, those ideals remain triumphant and unsurpassed: ‘the triumph [...] of the Western idea is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of systematic alternatives to Western liberalism.’ A year after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama’s thesis was expanded in his monograph *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), with seemingly no need for a qualifying question mark any longer. It significantly complicated the philosophical frameworks of his argument but the central tenet of his ‘Universal history of Mankind’ remained the same. Gregory Elliott pithily summarises Fukuyama’s logic: ‘the end of communism = the end of socialism = the end of history.’

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79 Noted, the egalitarianism of modern America represents the essential achievement of the classless society envisioned by Marx. Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, p. 9.
81 Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, p. 3.
Fukuyama’s thesis was widely criticised on a number of fronts: for resurrecting the suspect metanarrative of an evolutionary ‘Universal history’; for misusing or misunderstanding Hegel, Marx, and/or Kojève; for representing ‘a classic expression of American hubris – an inability to notice political alternatives mixed with a determination to see the conflicts and injustices produced in its own society as mere imperfections that will be ironed out in due course.’ However, despite the eccentricities of his approach and the triumphalism of his tone, he was not a lone outlier in positioning the events of the 1980s as representing the extinguishing of imaginable alternative futures. As Elliot notes, ‘the final decades of the twentieth century witnessed numerous sightings of a certain “end of history” or the end of a certain history’, an experience and articulation of historicity that he links to unprecedented neoliberal hegemony: ‘In the aftermath of the neoliberal offensive of the 1980s, it is that optimism about the future which has been lost. To put it no higher, the problems of the organisation, agency, strategy and goal of a systemic alternative remain unsolved.’ Perry Anderson, writing in a relaunched *New Left Review* in 2001, was uncompromising in his description of the scale of the neoliberal new world order:

> For the first time since the Reformation, there are no longer any significant oppositions – that is, systemic rival outlooks – within the thought-world of the West; and scarcely any on a world scale, either, if we discount religious doctrines as largely

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85 Colin Harrison, *American Culture of the 1990s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p10. Harrison uses the ‘End of History’ thesis to characterise the 1990s as a complacent ‘Gilded Age; a ‘roaring’ hubristic boom that was shattered by the 9/11 terror attacks: ‘a relative lull between the fall of communism and the rise of a new adversary in anti-American terrorism – between the end of history and its resumption, we might say.’ The notion of 9/11 as representing a ‘return to history’ misrepresents Fukuyama’s distinction between History as a process and series of events. Even more worryingly, Harrison also mirrors the neoconservative rhetoric that opportunistically conflated the threat of a small and diffuse terror network with a Cold War superpower, and in doing so justified the expansionist wars that the author earlier associates with Fukuyama’s ‘legitimating,’ ‘triumphalist’ thesis.


inoperative archaism [...]. Whatever limitations persist to its practice, neoliberalism is a set of principles and rules undivided across the globe: the most successful ideology in world history.\textsuperscript{88}

Yet, as Anderson argued persuasively as early as 1992 (in terms that foreshadow the crisis of neoliberalism following the 2008 financial crash), neoliberalism does not represent a solution to ‘the underlying structural malaise of advanced capitalism, revealed in the seventies’ – modest profitability (primarily concentrated in the hands of elites) is ‘sustained at this level only by massive credit expansion, postponing the day of reckoning.’\textsuperscript{89} Mark Fisher argues that Fukuyama’s thesis may have been ‘widely derided’ on publication, but ‘is accepted, even assumed, at the level of the cultural unconscious.’\textsuperscript{90} Thatcher’s favourite dictum that \textit{there is no alternative} is internalized as hegemonic ‘common sense’: a pervasive twenty-first-century ‘structure of feeling’. Fisher further argues that the dissonance and sterility of inhabiting a futureless present has been heightened by the 2008 crisis, after which neoliberalism’s ‘assumptions continue to dominate political economy, but no longer as part of an ideological project that has a confident forward momentum, but as inertial, undead defaults.’\textsuperscript{91} In the 1980s, one British popular history suggests, ‘[p]eople no longer talked about capitalism and or its alternatives, because they expected the capitalist system to last forever.’\textsuperscript{92} That confidence in capitalism’s sustainability may be less widespread, but the crisis in alternative futures still structures the cultural imaginary.\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{89} Anderson, \textit{A Zone of Engagement}, p. 375.

\textsuperscript{90} Fisher, \textit{Capitalist Realism}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{91} Fisher, \textit{Capitalist Realism}, p. 78.

\textsuperscript{92} Andy McSmith, \textit{No Such Thing as Society} (London: Constable and Robinson, 2010), p.301.

The twenty-first-century texts that I analyse in this thesis explore the 1980s, in markedly different ways, through the prism of the end of history: from apocalyptic fantasy to embodied crises of futurity, from children who don’t want to leave the 1980s behind, to children unable to progress beyond it. After expanding upon and contextualising cultural engagements with the End of History in Chapter One, I will analyse the extent to which these historical fictions critique these deterministic, futureless figurations of the recent past. How far do they consolidate the idea there may have been alternative futures and politics then but there is no alternative now? What are the political ramifications of these narratives? And, reworking Jameson’s question about utopia to dystopian figurations of the past: 'how [can] works that posit the end of history [...] offer any usable historical impulses?'

Considering this question, and the ways in which texts can produce articulations of history as a process, politically usable or otherwise, brings me to the second major theoretical focus of this project: concepts of historicisation and historicity.

**Historical fictions, historicisation and historicity**

To historicise means to make something historical, and the word is often used as a synonym for contextualising concepts, assumptions or events – to suggest that they are historically determined or contingent, that they are not a ‘natural’ occurrence but are produced by specific historical forces and conjunctures. My thesis explores a related but subtly different sense of the term: the ways in which cultural texts, through their figurations of the recent past, historicise the present, articulating a sense of historicity. The ‘classical’ nineteenth-century historical novel, according to its most cogent critic Georg Lukács, did

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94 Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xiv

95 See for instance Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London and New York: Verso, 2002). ‘[The] historicizing operation can follow two distinct paths […] the historical origins of the things themselves and the more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand those things. […] In the field of culture […] we are thus confronted with a choice between study of the nature of the “objective” structures of a given cultural text (the historicity of its forms and of its content, the historical moment of emergence of its linguistic possibilities, the situation-specific function of its aesthetic) and something rather different which would instead foreground the interpretive codes through which we read and received the text in question.’ (xi)
just that, producing 'a clear understanding of history as a process, of history as the concrete precondition of the present.'

96 Lukács argues that Walter Scott's historical fictions offer 'the concrete possibilities for men to comprehend their own existence as something historically conditioned, for them to see in history something which deeply affects their daily lives and immediately concerns them.'

97 Berlant parses Lukács's analysis in pithy terms:

[F]or Scott and his heirs the point of the historical novel was a paradoxical one: to become embedded in the affective life of a past moment that might have been the run-up to the future that was now a present, and to create distances from the present moment of writing whose own shared contours one can only intuit.

Historicisation here implies a double understanding of the present as both the product of historical forces and as itself structured by ongoing historical processes and contradictions that will shape the future in turn.

Analysing the ways in which historical fictions historicise the present means teasing out not just their representations of the past, but their specific figurations of past-present-future relations, and the versions of society, politics and subjectivity that these figurations make plausible or possible. To do this, following Jameson, I will employ the heuristic of historicity. Jameson argues, in an important passage worth quoting at length, that historicity is precisely the capacity to apprehend the present as 'historical':

Only by means of a violent formal and narrative dislocation could a narrative apparatus come into being capable of restoring life and feeling to this only intermittently functioning organ that is our capacity to organise and live time historically. [...] Historicity is, in fact, neither a representation of the past nor a

98 Berlant, Cruel Optimism, p. 66.
99 Raymond Williams argues that a sense in which 'past events are not seen as specific histories but as a continuous and connected process [...] connected not only to the present but also to the future' emerges in the eighteenth century. Williams, Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), pp. 143-144. Williams points out that '[in] German, there is a verbal distinction that makes this clearer: Historie refers mainly to the past, while Geschichte (and the associated Geschichtsphilosophie) can refer to a process including past, present and future.'
representation of the future (although its various forms use such representations):
it can first and foremost be defined as the perception of the present as history; that
is a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarises it and allows that
distance from immediacy which is at length characterised as a historical
perspective.

Jameson positions historicity not as an act of representation but as a perception produced
by a text of the present’s relationship to pasts and futures. To reformulate his description
of the Science Fiction genre, historical fictions have the capacity to transform our own
present both into the determinate future of a past and the determining past of a future.100
There are flaws in Jameson’s analysis – the description of historicity as a failing organ
naturalises and privileges a particular progressive Marxist model of history that emerged
from the specific contexts of modernity.101 It is not historicity that is waning here then, but,
to reformulate Jacques Derrida’s objection to the end of history thesis, a ‘certain concept’
of historicity (suggesting both a particular understanding of history and one that defines it
as a predictable or, in its crudest variants, predetermined process).102 I do not share
Jameson’s view that contemporary historical fiction is a ‘symbolic compensation’ for
‘present-day enfeeblement in historical consciousness and a sense of the past.’103 As Peter
Boxall argues, ‘the emerging historiographical fiction of the new century’ often explores and
enacts the interplay between ‘the political desire for historical realism and the self-reflexive

100 Jameson’s original quotation about the SF genre is that it ‘transforms our own present into the
determinate past of something yet to come.’ Fredric Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future (London
101 For the argument that realism is the ‘implicit’ subject of somewhat nostalgic valorisation in
Jameson’s work, generating a cumulative ‘story of progressive loss’ across his theoretical
interventions, see David Cunningham, ‘The contingency of cheese: On Fredric Jameson’s The
p.17.
103 This quotation is taken from the essay ‘The Historical Novel Today, Or, Is It Still Possible?’ My
answer to that question is no, not in its previous realist form, because historical consciousness has
been altered by the conditions of late capitalism (amongst other things), with the emphasis on
alteration rather than being forever/fatally undermined. Fredric Jameson, Antinomies of Realism
aesthetic engagement with the limits of narrative in capturing experience.' Contemporar
y figurations of history are more varied, politically engaged and formally reflexive than
Jameson acknowledges. Rather than conceptualising historicity as an apprehension that is
‘waning’ or lost, it is vital to attend to the specific and often contradictory forms of historicity
circulating in a collective or culture, whether or not they fit existing progressive political
paradigms. Through close textual analysis, critics can analyse the ways in which historical
fictions dynamically engage with – rather than just symptomatically or mimetically
represent – both hegemonic concepts of past-present-future relations and the ‘freedoms’
and agency possessed by subjects or collectives within the structural constraints of a
historical situation. My analysis of contemporary British fictions that return to the 1980s
represents a case study in examining the kinds of historicity that circulate in twenty-first-
century culture, engaging with the legacies of the End of History.

**Thesis structure**

Chapter One examines the cultural afterlife of 1984-85 miners’ strike and argues that it is
often figured as a highly overdetermined End of History: a stark origin-myth for neoliberal
Britain. The locus of my analysis will be Peace’s *GB84*, a text that I argue is defined by
significant and suggestive contradictions. On the one hand, it critiques and historicises the
‘inevitability’ of neoliberalism by figuring its triumph and hegemony as the product of
sustained and violent struggle. On the other, the historical trajectories and articulations of
history-as-a-process within which neoliberalism is situated are presented as a depoliticized
and even predetermined continuum of violence. These competing, sometimes contradictory
impulses define the novel’s historicity and its formal politics. *GB84* offers a distinctive
literary case study for both the complexities that lie behind any neat political injunction to

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‘undo the inevitability or givenness of the present’ through strategies of historicisation, and the forms of historicity produced by discourses of the End of History.105

Chapter Two shifts focus from narratives of deindustrialisation to figurations of finance. It explores the complex and uneasy metaphorical relation between bodily systems and socio-economic systems in Hollinghurst’s The Line of Beauty; the ways in which finance is suggested to be an unsustainable means of forestalling and evading knowledge of a terminal situation; and how hedonistic consumption has apparently inevitable future costs. This chapter argues that the novel narrates and historicises the Thatcherite 1980s and the emergence of British financial neoliberalism through queer bodies that experience and signify a profound crisis of futurity. The Line of Beauty does not seek to represent realistically the complex political and institutional mechanics of financial neoliberalism; nor does the novel reflexively problematize the possibility of such representation through metafictional or other experimental forms. Instead, it figures economic processes such as financialisation and the proliferation of hyper-consumption through bodily sensation, pleasure, consumption and crisis. This embodied economics does not make abstract socio-economic formations neatly legible. However, through the novel’s supple, impressionistic narration, it suggests that historical transformations are affective as well as institutional or political, offering a sensory history of change-over-time from an elite point-of-view. The Line of Beauty contrasts the immediate outcomes of AIDS and financial crisis and scandal through opposing vulnerable, compromised queer bodies and the seeming resilience of a heteronormative Conservative elite, and presents neoliberal futures based on a financialised imaginary as fundamentally dissonant, unsustainable and precarious.

Chapters Three and Four analyse the ways in which twenty-first-century British subjectivity and historicity are organised through the concept of ‘Thatcher’s Children’,

105 Brown, Politics out of History, p. 164.
arguing that there are continuities between nostalgic and traumatic narratives of childhood, both of which position the Thatcherite past as a point of pure origin. Chapter Three focuses on the interrelated figures of the adolescent and of nostalgia, through an extended reading of Mitchell’s *Black Swan Green*, a deceptively simple *bildungsroman* set in 1982 against the backdrop of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, which ambivalently fuses nostalgia with political critique. I argue that *Black Swan Green* simultaneously enact and problematises the widespread contemporary understanding of the 1980s as an aesthetic defined by fetishized consumer culture: what I term a *retro-memory* of the recent past. The novel juxtaposes this selective and seductively nostalgic vision with more troubling memories of the period, particularly the pervasive anxiety over Cold War militarism and potential nuclear conflict, and the increasing brutality of social relations in Thatcher’s Britain. Mitchell’s novel offers a perceptive take on the apparently quotidian and presents a complex and contradictory historicisation of life in the early 1980s. In counterpointing but not cohering a variety of narratives about that decade, it suggests that British contemporary collective memory of the recent past is similarly fraught and contestable. I will then move on to argue that figures of the adolescent and adolescence simultaneously offer distinctive critical and historiographic potential but are bound up with dehistoricised conceptions of human nature and infantilising models of subjects ‘stuck’ without agency.

Chapter Four argues that twenty-first century culture, narratives and metaphors of child sexual abuse are used to present revisionist histories, explore repressed or occluded elements of a deterministic past, and starkly embody the contradictions of living through a future beyond the End of History. Through readings of Peace’s *Nineteen Eighty Three* and Mina’s *The Field of Blood*, I will analyse the ways in which abuse narratives produce a radically circumscribed sense of contemporary historicity, in which there is no scope for twenty-first-century subjects ever to move beyond the paradigms of the Thatcherite 1980s, which is positioned as an abusive childhood.
Chapter One
The End of History

Coal is history
Brassed Off

I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed.
Francis Fukuyama

Introduction: Origin Myth

Skagboys (2012), the prequel to Irvine Welsh’s debut novel Trainspotting (1993), opens with a prologue in which Mark Renton and his father travel to picket the coking depot at Orgreave, South Yorkshire during the 1984-85 miners’ strike. On 18th June 1984, an estimated 6,000 pickets and 8,000 police clashed there in ‘the worst violence in a British industrial dispute since the war’, which quickly became known as the ‘Battle of Orgreave’. Television news reversed the footage so that it seemed as if mounted police were reacting to violence, rather than instigating the clashes. In fact, disproportionately violent and provocative police tactics and a subsequent cover-up have been widely alleged and were the focus of an Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigation which was subsequently wound down by the Home Office. In the opening pages of Skagboys, the wider

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1 Brassed Off, dir. Mark Herman (Film Four, 1996)
4 In a letter of apology, dated 3rd July 1991, the BBC suggests that ‘the editor inadvertently reversed the actions of the police and the pickets.’ Quoted in ‘A Mike Figgis Film of Jeremy Deller’s The Battle of Orgreave’, dir. Mike Figgis (Artangel Media, 2006), 14.30-15 mins. Thatcher reflected that the media presentation of the miners as the instigators of violence was highly significant: ‘[t]he battles at Orgreave […] did a great deal to turn public opinion against the miners.’ Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 353. This re-sequencing of the news footage is featured in David Peace, GB84 (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 138.
5 Despite the continuities in personnel and practices between the criminal actions of the South Yorkshire police at the Hillsborough disaster in 1989 and the policing of Orgreave, then Home Secretary Amber Rudd declined to review the latter after the IPCC probe, citing historical distance. See David Conn, ‘The scandal of Orgreave’, The Guardian, 18 May 2017
The significance of the coming defeat is heavily foreshadowed. Renton’s grandmother makes rounds of sandwiches ‘like it’s a funeral we’re gaun tae!’ On the picket line ‘thaire’s a sudden stillness in the air as the chants fade away; ah look at the plant and it feels a bit like Auschwitz and for a second ah get the queasy notion that we’re gonnae be corralled intae it.’ The state-sanctioned violence, when it comes, is brutal and figured in militaristic terms: ‘This isnae about policing or containment, this is a war against civilians. War, Winners, Losers, Casualties.’ On the bus journey home, as the bloodied trade unionists alternate between internecine sectarian conflict and maudlin nostalgia, Renton gets off the coach on to a motorway hard shoulder:

The cars shoot past us heading north, as I rip the COAL NOT DOLE sticker fae ma denim jaykit. The tear on the sleeve isnae too bad; it kin be stitched back nae bother. [...] Ah climb up the bankin ontae this overpass, n look over the railins doon the motorway at the cars n lorries ripping by underneath me. Ah’m thinking we’ve lost, and there’s bleak times ahead, and ah’m wonderin: what the fuck am ah gaunny dae with the rest of ma life?

Renton’s stasis is opposed to both the fragmenting collective political struggle represented by the departing bus that he fears (and the twenty-first-century reader knows) is doomed to defeat by Thatcherism, and to the frantic, ‘ripping’ movement of everyday socio-economic life that the motorway represents. The miners’ badge may be removed easily and the damage to his clothing mended, but losing the class war will have lasting, scarring effects.


Welsh, *Skagboys*, pp. 11–12. As discussed later, Holocaust imagery is also deployed by Peace in *GB84*. While the comparison is clearly hyperbolic, it re-enforces both the apocalyptic resonances of the strike in leftist cultural production, and the idea that state power is being used to systematically destroy groups of the body politic. For a discussion of the anxieties surrounding the use of the Holocaust as a metaphor, see Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1996), pp. 206-207.


Welsh, *Skagboys*, p. 21. The following section in the novel, narrated by Sickboy, is tautologically entitled ‘I Did What I Did’. The answer to Renton’s question about his future life is therefore intimated to be Sickboy’s egoistic embodiment of Thatcherism.
Earlier, Renton recalls listening to NUM leader Arthur Scargill speak: 'His words are like a drug, ye feel them coursin through the bodies around ye.' The implication is clear – the void left by the loss of this explicitly collective experience will be filled by atomised and individualistic heroin use, which Aaron Kelly argues represents in Welsh's novels 'the deadening logic of mainstream society in its most illustrative and terminal extremes', attesting 'not only to the effects of [Thatcherite and neoliberal] economics but also their capacity to invade and deform all aspects of social life.' Isolated from family, friends, work and tradition, and unable to conceptualise alternative futures, heroin users are immersed in an ahistorical perpetual present defined by cycles of destructive, repetitive consumption. The causal relationship being suggested between Orgreave and the future/present is further underlined by the framing narrative. The prologue to *Skagboys* is part of a failed 'Rehab Journal' that appears later in the text, in which Renton tries 'tae think ay how I got intae this mess. All that came out was being with my auld man in Orgreave.'

This historical novel therefore opens with a retrospective search for origins and causation

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11 Aaron Kelly, *Irvine Welsh* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 42. See also p. 39 for a link between formal strategies and heroin use in *Trainspotting*, (which is also applicable to *Skagboys* (itself in many ways a repetition of that earlier novel): '[the] sequential and interspersed episodes of the novel compound the trainspotting metaphor by bespeaking heroin’s reduction of contemporary life to a meaningless pattern of inexorable and unchanging seriality.'
12 The link between unemployment and heroin use is explicit: Spud is one of many ‘ordinary boys who’ve drugged themselves intae nothingness tae avoid the shame ay daein nothing.’ Welsh, *Skagboys*, p. 379. For an analysis of how a Scottish masculine identity which associates work with morality is fatally undermined by unemployment, see Andrew Perchard, “Broken Men” and “Thatcher’s Children”: Memory and Legacy in Scotland’s Coalfields', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, No. 84 (Fall 2013), 78-98.
13 Welsh, *Skagboys*, p. 3, p. 468. Elsewhere, *Skagboys* questions the causal relationship between socio-economic deprivation and addiction, not least in Renton’s own character, who is preoccupied by fears of an innate drive towards self-destruction: ‘Nobody else has fucked me; neither God nor Thatcher. Ah’ve destroyed the sovereign state ay Mark Renton’. Welsh, *Skagboys*, p. 374. Renton certainly has educational opportunities that many other characters in the novel do not. However, while there may have been no ‘invisible hand’ forcing a needle into his arm, the text still overwhelmingly suggests that the socio-economic context of 1980s Scotland, notably unemployment and deindustrialization, helped create a situation in which heroin became an available escape for subjects with little or no possibility of changing their lives. The main action of the novel is also punctuated by a number of pseudo-historical ‘Notes on an Epidemic’ in which an unnamed narrator didactically explains the exponential growth of heroin abuse, the effects of Thatcherite economic policies and the woefully inadequate and damaging official attitude to addiction and AIDS. The novel’s first edition cover which, recalling the skulls of *Trainspotting’s cover*, features a skeleton marionette, also signifies a concern with who or what pulls its subjects’ strings (and making those strings visible), who directs and determines their movements, who is *in control*, directly or indirectly.
in the Thatcherite past, and presents the 1984-85 miners’ strike as a foundational defeat that determines the repetitive, delimited futures and stuck, stalled subjects that follow in *Skagboys* and *Trainspotting*. Indeed, the text exemplifies the function of the strike in contemporary culture as a potent origin myth for neoliberalisation, a narrative that ‘collapse[s] whole epochs into symbolic moments,’ a British End of History.

Multiple senses of an ending (and multiple senses of history) coalesce and compete in twenty-first-century figurations of the 1984-85 miners' strike. It is a highly overdetermined End. This chapter will analyse the signification of the strike in contemporary cultural production, asking what ends, and what is inaugurated by this conflict? What kinds of foundation does it represent for contemporary politics and socio-economic life? And do deterministic figurations of Thatcherism articulated through the metonymic strike historicise the present in ways that elide contemporary historicity? These questions are explored primarily through a close reading of David Peace's historical fiction *GB84* (2004), a text that I argue is defined by highly significant contradictions. It critiques and historicises the ‘inevitability’ of neoliberalism by figuring its triumph and hegemony instead as the product of sustained and violent struggle. The strike is depicted as a demystifying war, revealing in stark terms the class conflict displaced by the uneasy compromises of welfare capitalism, bringing the state-sanctioned violence evident in Northern Ireland (and throughout colonial history) to the mainland, and exemplifying the corruption that sustains British ‘democracy.’ However, simultaneously, the very historical trajectories and articulations of history-as-a-process within which neoliberalism is situated are presented...

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15 Raphael Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain, Theatres of Memory Volume 2* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 16. I am adapting Samuel’s discussion of British ‘foundation’ or ‘creation’ myths. The distinction however, is that foundation/creation myths represent an entry into historical time, whereas this origin myth represents an exit from it.
as a depoliticized and even predetermined continuum of violence. How long can a longue durée be before it becomes implicitly naturalized, an underlying ‘fact’ of human experience?

The novel both interrogates and enacts the narrative that the 1980s heralded an End of History of the kind imagined by Fukuyama, after which political alternatives seem impossible to imagine and subjects remain inescapably determined by neoliberal common sense. Critique co-exists with a bleak determinism: alternative futures might have been possible once but, seemingly, are no longer. However, by staging these contradictions, *GB84* makes visible both the ideological ‘limitations beyond which [contemporary subjects] cannot think’ and, crucially, some of the processes through which those limits (and the freedoms to act and imagine that they close off or make possible) became hegemonic.16

Furthermore, its formal presentation of history as a sonic force – a ‘long, long scream of places and names, terror and treachery’ – that disrupts and determines subjectivity in the present questions whether history, in certain senses at least, can ever meaningfully end.17

These competing, sometimes contradictory impulses define the novel’s historicity and its formal politics. *GB84* offers a distinctive literary case study for both the complexities that lie behind any neat political injunction to ‘undo the inevitability or givenness of the present’ through strategies of historicisation, and the forms of historicity produced by discourses of the end of history.18

Histories

In a famous passage in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), George Orwell presents coal-mining as foundational to the development of Western industrial modernity:

> Our civilisation [...] is founded on coal, more completely than one realises until one stops to think about it. [...] In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner

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is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. He is a sort of grimy caryatid upon whose shoulders nearly everything that is not grimy is supported.19

Miners are both the vital extractive base and the mythologised pillars supporting the achievements of Western democratic civilisation (caryatids are Greek), as well as a crucial feeding/fuelling force that ensures that the industrial world-system, naturalised through bodily metaphors, keeps going. The highly dangerous and demanding labour of extracting coal did indeed fuel the industrial revolution, and made it possible in the first place, driving industrial capitalist history (and British imperial hegemony). Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that this history of fossil-fuel extraction and the resulting climate change is central to (but under-acknowledged within) humanistic and progressive historical accounts of modernities.20 So, the pit manager’s dismissive opinion in the film Brassed Off (1996) that ‘coal is history’ resonates far beyond his limited intended sense that it is an anachronistic material resource (and accompanying industrial culture) that has been superseded by market forces.

Given the centrality of mining to modern British industrial and labour history, it is unsurprising that miners’ strikes are so freighted with symbolic weight. As Raphael Samuel argues, their ‘symbolic associations, as a revolt from the lower depths, generates anxiety out of all proportion to its economic or industrial effects.’21 Nevertheless, the ‘economic and industrial effects’ and ongoing legacies of the strike are highly significant. The bitter industrial conflict between the Thatcher government and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) from March 1984 – March 1985 represents, as David Alderson argues,
The union's refusal to hold a national strike ballot enabled them to be presented as anti-democratic and precipitated the decisive breaking away of the Nottingham coalfields from the NUM. The focus on a mass victory at Orgreave has been criticised as a diversion from more strategically significant picketing opportunities. See Richard Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the Thatcher era* (London: Pocket Books, 2010), p. 166. The union was criticised more generally for running an insufficiently imaginative campaign that harked back uncritically to successes in the 1970s. One miner interviewed in a sympathetic post-strike oral history argued that '[t]he government had planned to win the strike in a very sophisticated and a very hard way and we hadn't planned to do the same. People were still running a 1972/1974 model of how to run a strike. In 1984 the TUC is in a shambles and there's 4 million unemployed.' The People of Thurcroft, Peter Gibbon and David Steyne, *Thurcroft: A Village and the Miners' Strike. An Oral History* (Nottingham and Atlantic Highlands: Spokesman, 1986), p. 236. Green echoes this first-hand analysis in *Thatcher*, p. 124. However, it is important to note that the two sides in this conflict were far from evenly matched in

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22 David Alderson, 'Making Electricity: Narrating Gender, Sexuality and the Neoliberal Transition in Billy Elliot', *Camera Obscura* 75 25.3 (2011), 1-27 (p. 2). I would argue that it is one of a few highly significant watershed moments, notably including financial deregulation and privatization, rather than the sole watershed. See also David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 22-23 for a discussion of the Thatcher government's British variant of neoliberalisation, and p. 59 for an analysis of the significance of the strike.

23 Technically the conflict was between the semi-autonomous National Coal Board (NCB) and the NUM, with the government only called upon to maintain law-and-order. However, this was a barely-maintained illusion. 'The government was not running the strike in the way governments have before. It was doing its damnedest to defeat the NUM leadership, but through the agency of others.' Martin Adeney and John Lloyd, *The Miners' Strike 1984-5: Loss without Limit* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 203.

24 Recently declassified cabinet papers have undermined the government's claim at the time that there was no wider plan to wind down the coal industry. See Nick Higham, 'Cabinet papers reveal "secret coal pits closure plan"', *BBC News*, 3 January 2014 [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25549596](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25549596) [accessed 7 January 2018]. The possibility of coal shortages causing blackouts, a powerful practical and symbolic tactic that the Union employed during the 1970s, was made less likely by beginning a strike going into the less energy-intensive Spring and Summer months. Furthermore, over-production by the NCB and a concurrent decrease in demand caused by the early recession of the 1980s ensured there were significant coal reserves. See E.H.H. Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), pp. 113-121.

25 The already declining coal industry was rapidly wound down, and its last remnants...
were privatized in 1994. A powerful and disruptive trade union had been destroyed, and another nationalised industry was in private hands.26 The human and economic costs of the rampant deindustrialisation of the early 1980s, coupled with the coal industry’s demise, continue to define swathes of twenty-first-century Britain. Former coalfields are now among the very poorest and most deprived areas of the United Kingdom. As a recent study put it, ‘the miners’ strike of 1984/5 may now be receding into history but the job losses that followed in its wake are still part of the everyday economic reality of most mining communities. The consequences are still all too visible in statistics on jobs, unemployment, benefits and health.’27 And these consequences, coupled with decades of underinvestment, continue to have a deleterious effect on public finances into the twenty-first century, even if governments are keen to individualise blame in austerity programmes rather than grapple with the legacies of past political decisions.28

terms of the institutional power and resources at their disposal. For a contemporary analysis from sympathetic academics and activists see Huw Benyon (ed.), Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners’ Strike (London: Verso, 1985). For an influential and frequently reissued/revised account of illicit government and MI5 actions to undermine the strike and the NUM leadership, see Seamus Milne, The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners. Fourth edition (London and Brooklyn: Verso, 2014). Vinen offers a persuasive ‘myth-busting’ analysis of the strike in Thatcher’s Britain, pp. 155-177, pp. 301-302. Future accounts of the strike are likely to be increasingly complicated by the awareness of the deleterious effects of fossil fuel emissions on global climate, sustainability and ecosystems.

26 Between 1979 and 1990, the NUM went from c253,000 members to 53,000 and falling. This is due to the split that created the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and to massive job losses in the industry. See Green, Thatcher, p. 123. The last deep coal mine in Britain, in private hands, closed in 2016.

27 Mike Foden, Steve Fothergill and Tony Gore, The State of the Coalfields: Economic and social conditions in the former mining communities of England, Scotland and Wales (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, June 2014), p. 7 https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/state-of-the-coalfields.pdf [accessed 23 August 2014]. See p. 23 for the ways in which underinvestment and structural unemployment was masked by a ‘big increase in the numbers on incapacity benefits rather than unemployment benefits’ a ‘diversion’ which has ‘for many years hidden the true scale of labour market distress in the coalfields.’ Since 2010, reducing incapacity benefits has been a key element of the Conservative-led governments’ austerity programmes, with little focus onto how this constituency of claimants are the result of political and ideological decisions of previous administrations.

28 Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill, Jobs, Welfare and Austerity: How the destruction of industrial Britain casts a shadow over present day public finances (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, November 2016) https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/cresr30th-jobs-welfare-austerity.pdf [accessed 29 September 2017] ’Low pay in former industrial areas depresses tax revenue and inflates spending on in-work benefits. […] The Treasury has misdiagnosed high welfare spending as the result of inadequate work incentives and has too often blamed individuals for their own predicament, whereas in fact a large part of the bill is rooted in job
Mark Fisher, tracing the ways in which neoliberalism apparently 'seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable', argues that the watershed of 1984-85 was 'at least as significant in its symbolic dimension as in its practical effects. The closure of pits was defended precisely on the grounds that keeping them open was not 'economically realistic', and the miners were cast in the role of the last actors in a doomed proletarian romance.'

The economistic reasoning used to justify the strike is exemplified by the historian Graham Stewart’s characterisation of Thatcherism as a project concerned with imposing the ‘impartial logic of the market’, opposed by the miners’ ‘fruitless struggle’, a ‘beaten army marching towards oblivion’. Neoliberal teleologies of this kind are often deployed in accounts of the strike, but David Alderson distinguishes between two different senses of ‘political inevitability’:

To the extent that the odds were stacked against the miners, and that other key unions (notably the pit deputies’, steel, and dockers’ unions), the Labour leadership, and other organizations failed wholeheartedly or partially to support them, their defeat may have been inevitable, but more frequently the invocation of that term to describe the strike’s outcome suggests a view that the Thatcher government was uncontestable because of the irrefutable wisdom of its worldview and its unstoppable momentum.

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31 Alderson, ‘Making Electricity’, pp. 5-6. The strike’s outcome was never completely predetermined. Due to mistakes and contingent events, the government came closer to defeat than was generally believed at the time, particularly when the NCB chairman almost provoked a nationwide strike from NACODS, the coal deputies’ union, which would have forced a legally mandated shutdown of the entire mining industry. However, as Alderson argues, structural and political conditions made the union’s victory unlikely. See footnote 24, and also Derek Howell’s argument that the federal institutional structure of the NUM itself made victory in 1984-85 almost impossible, in ‘Defiant dominoes: working miners and the 1984-5 strike’, in *Making Thatcher’s Britain*, ed. by Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 148-164.
There is a difference between identifying structural constraints which made victory within the circumstances of that historical conflict highly unlikely, and a sense of the strike as a stage in a directional, teleological history in which Thatcherite hegemony was natural and inevitable. Both sides certainly saw the 1984-85 miners' strike as a profoundly political struggle that would determine the future of more than just the coal industry. The socialist Scargill described it as an opportunity to 'roll back the years of Thatcherism', at that stage a by-no-means-yet hegemonic project that had yet to implement widespread privatisation and deregulation.\(^{32}\) Samuel argues that the miners' political agenda was animated by a 'radical conservatism' opposed to Thatcherite 'modernization'.\(^ {33}\) And while it is important not to elide structural and institutional forces by analysing the strike purely through its leaders' pronouncements, Thatcher's comments about the NUM in her memoirs exemplify both the flexibility of the naturalised idioms of economics and freedom within early neoliberal discourse and the strike's explicitly, hyperbolically political signification in the period:

What the strike's defeat established was that Britain could not be made ungovernable by the Fascist Left. Marxists wanted to defy the law of the land in order to defy the laws of economics. They failed, and in doing so demonstrated just how mutually dependent the free economy and a free society really are.'\(^ {34}\)

The strike, disingenuously figured here as an attack on 'natural' economic laws that must be policed as ruthlessly as those on the statute book to ensure 'freedom' for a society defined primarily as a free economic system, represented the 'apogee of Thatcher's campaign against organised labour', and by the end of the decade 'her goal of removing the trade

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\(^{32}\) Quotation taken from archive footage of a speech during the strike in 'A Mike Figgis Film of Jeremy Deller's The Battle of Orgreave'.

\(^{33}\) Samuel, 'Introduction' to The Enemy Within, p. 22. In a later essay dismantling the nostalgic, overdetermined claims made for 'Victorian Values', Samuel somewhat puckishly describes the defeated miners as the true embodiment of those conservative English ideals. See Samuel, Island Stories, p. 347.

\(^{34}\) Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 378. See pp. 339-378 for the former PM's chapter on the industrial dispute which presents the strike as a personal attack on the state from its very title: 'Mr. Scargill's insurrection.'
unions from the political stage had largely been achieved.'\(^{35}\) As with the historical and symbolic significance of the coal industry described by Orwell, Samuel and others, the metonymic nature of the miners' strike within wider narratives of both deindustrialisation and the neoliberal assault on organised labour, accounts for some of the hyperbole and mythologisation surrounding this undeniably significant event. Andy McSmith, contesting Jonathan Coe's description in \textit{The House of Sleep} (1997) of the particularly politicised character of students in the 1980s, argues that 'there is little evidence of students being "obsessed with politics" after the miners' defeat.'\(^{36}\) The first half of the decade might have been 'taken up with a titanic struggle', but by its end 'words like "Marxism" and "capitalism" went out of everyday use [...] as people stopped thinking about where politics might go.'\(^{37}\) McSmith's claims are plainly inflated and unsubstantiatable. However, they testify to the narrative appeal of the strike, in which complex oppositions and historical processes can be starkly staged in binary terms and neatly understood, presented as a clear watershed moment, a hinge within the Thatcherite 1980s, the end of one epoch and the beginning of another: the British End of History.

Raphael Samuel eloquently argues that historical genealogies, myth and collective memory were themselves powerful forces within the conflict itself:

In the [...] strike of 1984-5, the concrete and immediate issues were continually being overlain with symbolic reverberations of the past, both the historical past of remembered struggle, and the timeless past of "tradition." [...] [T]he strike was a war of ghosts, in which the living actors were dwarfed by the shadows they had conjured up.'\(^{38}\)


\(^{38}\)Samuel, 'Introduction' to \textit{The Enemy Within}, pp. 5-6
This sense of the strike as overdetermined, a synecdoche for wider conflicts between Labour and Capital, North and South, Left and Right, Socialism and Neoliberalism, Polis and State, is a commonplace in British cultural production, I will argue, and plays out in *GB84*. Ghosts and haunting too are central to the novel’s plot and formal politics. Suggestive too for this thesis’s focus on historicity (the perception of subjects and collectives about their situatedness in history) is the metaphor of ‘reverberation’, of the past as unhidden material/sonic after-effect rather than only a narrative, and the distinction drawn between ‘remembered struggle’ and a more ‘timeless’ fantasy about the transmitted traditions of the past. Also significant, considering the historical novel’s concern with freedom and agency, is Samuel’s metaphor of conjuration, which recalls Marx and Engels’ description of human agents’ lack of control over the forces of contemporary capitalism, like ‘the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells,’ powerful historical forces are set into motion that are beyond the control and even the perception of political actors. As I will argue, not only is a liberal politics organised around agency – both collective and individual – undermined in GB84’s paranoid history of the strike, but hidden voices and historical genealogies repeatedly surface and interrupt the novel, destabilizing the boundaries of both the diegetic present of Britain in the mid-1980s and the individual subjects caught up in the strike, typographically disaggregated as well as determined by powerful ‘reverberations of the past’. Before moving on to extended analysis of GB84, however, it is important to contextualise the novel within a selection of other twenty-first-century texts that engage with the strike and its legacies. How do they variously present the conflict’s relationship to pasts and futures? What ends with, and what is inaugurated by, the miners’ defeat in the 1980s?

39 In *GB84*, the synecdochic status of the NUM for the wider labour movement is consistently emphasised. As the strike collapses, the fate of the Leftist faction of the Union leadership foreshadows wider defeats for the Left: ‘The Left achieved nothing. Nothing. Ever. The Left never met again’ – Peace, *GB84*, p. 447.


41 Samuel, ‘Introduction’ to *The Enemy Within*, pp. 5-6
Fictions

*Our Friends in the North* (1996) is a BBC Drama set in Newcastle and London between 1964 and 1995, which narrates the history of post-war Britain, the decline of Labour and municipal socialism, primarily through the prisms of a changing urban landscape and endemic police corruption. In its 1984 episode, the strike represents less of a watershed moment and more a stark exemplification of the violence and corruption that increasingly defines late-twentieth-century British society. However, the supersession of working-class heritage and tradition is signified when Felix, the elderly former Jarrow Marcher, is humiliated and attacked by a family that clearly signifies the unemployed underclass. He is left disoriented and infantilised following the attack, wandering lost and confused through a rundown housing estate asking for his mother, unable to find his bearings in this new world as the camera pans back to show him dwarfed and overwhelmed by a dystopian concrete landscape. *Billy Elliot* (2000), set against the backdrop of the strike, also presents the conflict as the end of working-class culture, with art and metropolitan culture the only means for exceptional individuals to escape their doomed community. *Brassed Off* (1996), an elegy to the deprivation and despair of post-industrial communities, shares *Billy Elliot’s* presentation of art as offering limited amelioration but differs in that brass band music is a local and defiantly collective experience. *Billy Elliot: The Musical* (2005-2016) registers the disjuncture of Billy’s narrative on a formal level. A popular musical requires a feel-good razzmatazz final number that incorporates the whole cast, but in this case this climax is forced to be jarringly outside of chronology, almost extra-diegetic, given that Billy’s

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43 The Jarrow March was a protest in October 1936, presented as a ‘crusade’ against endemic unemployment and poverty in the Tyneside area of the North-East of England, in which around 200 men marched from Jarrow to London.
departure from his friends and family, the melancholy climax of the narrative, directly precedes it.

Recent cultural texts are more likely to be explicit or reflexive about their status as historicisations of the strike. Both Val McDermid’s *A Darker Domain* (2009) and John Harvey’s *Darkness, Darkness* (2014) are crime fictions that involve contemporary police officers investigating recently discovered bodies and long-suppressed historical crimes from 1984-85. There are buried secrets in the ‘dark’ Thatcherite past waiting to be illuminated, and which continue to define the communities they encounter. Both texts also cite Peace as an explicit influence: Harvey in an author’s note, and McDermid within the novel itself, as a former miner suggests that his son should read *GB84*, ‘if you want an idea of what [the strike] was like.’*46* Beth Steel’s play *Wonderland* (2014) is also seemingly indebted to *GB84*, particularly in its invocation of long-term historical genealogies stretching back to the Norman conquest. *Wonderland* includes Milton Friedman and 1980s cabinet ministers Nicholas Ridley and Peter Walker as characters, and explicitly frames the play and the strike as ‘the story of [an] idea’: neoliberalism.*47* One of its final stage directions states that as the defeated miners descend into the pit after the strike, they ‘begin to fossilise, reduce: down to teeth and bone.’*48* The metaphor of fossilisation connotes the miners’ destruction under extreme pressure, their extinction and status as a buried historical artefact, but it also suggests the strike’s potential as a cultural and political resource to be uncovered and productively used in the future to illuminate or generate political energy. *Pride* (2014) also presents the strike as a political beginning as well as an ending. The final march shown in the film is not the usual melancholy, defeated-yet-proud

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march back to work after the miners’ defeat, although that is presented earlier too, under a bleak, slag-grey sky. Instead, the June 1985 Gay Pride March, headed up in part by the miners from South Wales whose support from Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) this film focuses on, is the film’s climax. A recurring image in *Pride* is two hands entwined – in friendship, in sexual pleasure, but most of all in solidarity. The old union banner with that image, dusted off for special occasions, is held aloft in this final march with the Palace of Westminster in the background. The *union* being celebrated here, reinforced by Billy Bragg’s protest song ‘There is Power in the Union’ playing over this scene, is not so much the NUM or organised labour, but is a more diffuse union of oppressed and stigmatised people. The strike is thus optimistically refigured as less the end of the organised labour movement, the collapsing of horizons and the inauguration of mass unemployment, but rather as the birth of an intersectional, metropolitan identity politics.\(^{49}\)

Joseph Brooker argues that ‘the fictional return to the 1980s’ often functions as an excavation of ‘the contemporary’s foundations.’\(^{50}\) 1984-85 might be an inspiration for future collective action in Fiona Mozley’s *Elmet* (2017), set in post-industrial Yorkshire, but as with *Skagboys*, contemporary fictions more often figure it as a violent foundation for neoliberal life.\(^{51}\) In David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks* (2014), which spans 1984-2043, the miners’ strike is the starting point of a future history defined by energy crises and destructive capital flight. One sympathiser in 1984 argues that ‘energy ain’t just another

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\(^{50}\) Joseph Brooker, ‘Orgreave Revisited: David Peace’s *GB84* and the return to the 1980s’, *Radical Philosophy* 133 (September/October 2005), 39-51 (p. 49).

\(^{51}\) Fiona Mozley, *Elmet* (London: JM Originals, 2017). Philip Hensher’s *The Northern Clemency* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008) is a notable contemporary exception in that it presents the strike in explicitly unsympathetic terms: the embodiment of the violent egotism of revolutionary politics. An obnoxious and militant middle-class teenage socialist looks out on the battle of Orgreave ‘with a sense that here he has been at the cutting edge of history, and has the innocent blood spilt on his turn-ups to prove it’, p. 494.
industry. Energy’s security. The North Sea oil-fields won’t last for ever, and then what?”

By 2043, the question is implicitly answered: Britain is presented as an irradiated failed state, reliant on Chinese capital and energy and teetering on the brink of collapse and recursive barbarism. *The Bone Clocks* subtly presents the miners’ defeat as a precursor to future national, economic and even civilizational disintegration. Foundations are considered more literally in Edward Hogan’s *Blackmoor* (2008), in which the abandoned underground mineworks cause freak fires, mysterious gas leaks and undermine buildings, apocalyptic revelatory ‘signs’ that post-industrial communities are built on unstable, crumbling foundations. Gordon Burn also uses landscape as a metaphor for historical transformations and erasures that define neoliberal Britain. In *The North of England Home Service* (2003), former industrial land is now ‘blistered with man-made hills filled up with hundreds of tonnes of household rubbish’, immaculately turfed over. ‘The prettifying of industrial relics’ cannot erase the brutal past of a so-called progressive modernity: ‘Love-in-a-mist and sweet William’ might grow in ‘the old rusting tubs that half-blind, bow-legged ponies had once pulled along the tunnels of a busy underground town,’ but their obsolescence means violent despatching and burial in a way that eerily prefigures the fate of the mines themselves: ‘The ponies would be tossed on top of the coal and hauled to the surface themselves when they had outlived their usefulness. Jackie had heard tales of them being shot *en masse* in the fields of Nettle Hill Farm after modern mining methods had made...

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54 Edward Hogan, *Blackmoor* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009). There are also parallels with future energy crises in *The Bone Clocks* and unemployment-related heroin abuse in *Skagboys*: ‘As the energy crisis looms ever larger, there is talk of a new seam detected under Old Blackmoor, far deeper than any mined by hand or machine. Researchers have proposed that its energy could be captured using “underground coal gasification”. It is also said that it may be possible to process the coal using gigantic syringes. Such an absurd, dream-like image, vulgar in its irony in a village where heroin addiction was the result of a government’s adjudication that its coal stocks had run out.’ (p. 262).
55 Gordon Burn, *The North of England Home Service* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 42. The ‘queer’, ‘unnerving silence’ (p. 42) of these former industrial landscapes is also highlighted in the documentary *Still The Enemy Within*, dir. by Owen Gower (Dartmouth Films/Bad Bonobo, 2014). Historical footage of furious action during the strike is intercut with shots of those spaces, eerily silent and unrecognizable now. The legacies of the collapse of coal mining in Wales are also explored sonically in Public Service Broadcasting’s album *Every Valley* (PIAS Recordings, 2017).
them redundant, and bulldozed into mass graves. The abandoned mining past cannot be contained, unexpectedly breaching the boundaries of the postmodern present in slick, ahistorical contemporary housing estates:

The interpenetratedness of the life that had been lived under ground for generations and the modern lives currently being lived above ground was something that was constantly making itself felt. The previous summer large numbers of homes in Rusty Lane had had to be evacuated when polluted mine water from the old mines flooded the main street, slicking it ferrous orange. More recently a pensioner had died from inhaling stythe – mine gas pushed to the surface and expelled by the rising rank water. Jackie was always aware that wherever he walked there were complex networks of roadways and tunnels below him where day after day for a hundred years men had gone to work in the closed body of the earth.

Burn critiques maudlin nostalgia for an idealised industrial working class life and mining past, but the superficially attractive landscaping built on decaying consumer detritus, and the ways in which the occluded, abandoned industrial base imperils contemporary lives, suggest that twenty-first-century social and economic life is built upon precarious foundations and is haunted by its disappeared industrial base. If Hogan and Burn figure the mining past as a disruptive, Gothic presence undermining the surface of contemporary culture, Jeremy Deller is explicitly concerned with disinterring and re-animating that past in the context of the present. His Turner Prize-winning re-enactment of the 'Battle of

58 See also Craig Oldham, In Loving Memory of Work: A Visual Record of the UK Miners’ Strike 1984-85 (Unified Theory of Everything: 2015). The title of this collage and oral history suggests an epitaph for the strike and for the jobless communities and generations that followed, but also for the idea of ‘productive’ labour more generally.
Orgreave' (2001) was staged near to, but not precisely on, the original site of the battle, since the terrain had been too radically transformed since 1984. It combined re-enactors more used to civil war commemorations, as well as original strikers and police officers, in a piece of public art that Deller describes as not concerned with healing but with 'digging up a corpse and giving it a proper post-mortem, or [staging] a thousand-person crime re-enactment.'60 Deller inserts Orgreave into a tradition of 'great' historical battles; and simultaneously politicises the practice of re-enactment itself. Material from the Orgreave re-enactment formed part of Deller's exhibition at the British pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 2013, in which representations of (and the material remains of) marginalised pasts are juxtaposed with imagined future conflicts. Hal Foster argues that Deller's assemblages produce a perception of the present as historically determined and itself determining possible futures: 'a past event (such as a miners' strike) is linked up with a future one (such as a tax revolt), and together they pressure the neoliberal present.'61 This 'pressure' is generated by Deller's artistic vision of the neoliberal present's historicity: it is defamiliarised (as the product of genealogies of historical conflict) and denaturalised (as a moment of possibility that might inaugurate radical futures).62

**GB84** (2004), Peace's fifth novel, won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and was republished in 2010 as part of Faber and Faber's Revolutionary Writing imprint.63 Brooker

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62 Foster's analysis of Deller's *English Magic* echoes Jameson's description of a future-oriented historicity: 'it can first and foremost be defined as the perception of the present as history; that is a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarises it and allows that distance from immediacy which is at length characterised as a historical perspective.' Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 284.

63 Peace was also one of Granta's cohort of 'Best of Young British novelists' in 2003. He is the author of nine other novels, including the *Red Riding Quartet* (1999-2002) which was adapted into a three-part Channel 4 drama in 2009. I will discuss *Nineteen Eighty-Three* (2002), the final novel of the
describes it as one of the 'most distinguished neo-1980s novels to date.' It is widely taught within the academy and has accrued significant critical attention, for the historiographic and political significance of its fusion of formal experimentation and the crime genre, Peace's suggestive conception of 'occult history' and antagonistic model of politics, and for the novel's engagement with issues of historical and political authority within the strike. *GB84* is an exhaustively researched chronicle of 1984-85, which closely follows the chronology of the strike as an event (a day-by-day, week-by-week account, beginning as the walkout is declared, ending on its final day), albeit a year-long struggle that challenges the boundaries and definitions of an 'event.' The text juxtaposes and modulates two distinct, often tellingly disconnected, narratives and experiential histories. The main narrative, each chapter of which covers one week of the strike, explores diffuse, labyrinthine conspiracies between security services, corrupt union executives, Far Right fixers, paramilitary groups and the government. These are the shadowy contemporary forces that determine and drive the conflict. Punctuating these chapters are the first-person dialect accounts of striking miners Peter and Martin, adapted from a contemporaneous oral history and laid out in two columns of text that render their voices poised somewhere between a journalistic account and a biblical testament. Interrupting and structuring their accounts are fragmented,
italicised collective voices, which signify the subterranean *historical* genealogies that underlie and structure the strike. Andy Beckett is incorrect when he asserts that in *GB84* the strike ‘float[s] surprisingly free of historical context for a novelist with such a command of political reference.’ But to what extent does *GB84*’s figuration of the 1984-85 miners’ strike produce the kind of politicised, future-oriented historicity that Foster sees evinced in Deller’s work? Does its engagement with the strike as an End of History ‘pressure the neoliberal present’?

**Historicising the End of History**

In the final lines of Émile Zola's historical fiction *Germinal* (1885), Étienne, the leader of a miners’ strike that has been savagely repressed by the army, nevertheless glimpses, in the fields beneath which the miners toil in the dark, the potential for a transformed future:

> Seeds were swelling and stretching, cracking the plain open in their quest for warmth and light. [...] And still, again and again, even more distinctly than before as if they had been working their way closer to the surface, the comrades tapped and tapped. Beneath the blazing rays of the sun, on this morning when the world seemed young, such was the stirring that the land carried in its womb. New men were starting into life, a black army of vengeance slowly germinating in the furrows, growing for the harvests of the century to come; and soon this germination would tear the earth apart.

‘Germinal’ is the first month of Spring in the French Republican Calendar: a revolutionary historical schema to reorganise progressively not just time, but society with it, beginning afresh with ‘Year One’. Zola, writing long after these ideals had descended into first Terror and then Napoleonic dictatorship and, with a naturalist conflation of organic cycles and

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71 Beckett, ‘Political Gothic’.
72 Foster, ‘History is a Hen Harrier’, p. 15.
historical processes, nevertheless figures the seeds of radical change emerging from the miners’ defeat. Out of the miners’ struggle, hope – or, perhaps, given the ambivalence of the description ‘black army of vengeance’, just revolutionary transformation – is germinating under the ground.

*GB84* figures defeat very differently. Its final section is titled ‘Terminal, or The Triumph of the Will’ and is dated ‘March 1985 –’ (451).74 ‘Terminal’ explicitly inverts *Germain*l’s faith in a sense of futurity and growth and instead intimates multiple senses of an ending, suggesting a terminal diagnosis, the cessation of a journey, the end of progressive movement or of a movement as a final destination is reached. Furthermore, referencing Leni Riefenstahl’s 1935 propaganda film about the Nuremberg rallies, the text associates Thatcherism with Fascistic militarism (a common accusation from the Left in that decade) and the crushing of the strike with triumphant political spectacle. These allusions are reinforced in the portentously-titled ‘Last Week’ which follows. As the miners of Thurcroft in Yorkshire mass behind the union banner and the colliery band, preparing to march back to work after their defeat, Martin Daly, whose first-person narrative has been interrupted throughout by italicized, paratactic, mythic voices from the past, sees that they are not alone. There are ‘others – From far below. Beneath my feet – They whisper. They echo. They moan. They scream – From beneath the fields. Below the hills – The roads. The motorways – The empty villages. The dirty cities – The abandoned mills. The silent factories [...] The Union of the Dead.’ (452) In *Germain*, under the ground lay the revolutionary future in embryo; in *GB84*, all it contains is the sonic reverberations of the dead: Their muted pipes – That Whisper – That Echo [...] The country deaf to their laments. Its belly swollen with black corpses and vengeful carrion – Rotting in its furrows. It waits for harvests that never

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74 The atmosphere of memorialisation is emphasised by the image used on this title page: a washed-out photograph of a miner’s shadow on a brick wall dominated by a plaque, which seems in retrospect an epitaph, stating: ‘This colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people.’ (451)
come – the day their weeping will burst open the earth itself and drown us all’ (462). Past and present blur as Martin, the miners and these marching spectres from past centuries of English class struggle merge into a collective voice, which is then confronted by a triumphant, nightmarish Thatcher-figure:

We are but the matchstick men, with our matchstick hats and clogs – And they shave our heads. Send us to the showers – Put us on their trains. Stick us in their pits – The cage door closes. The cage door descends – To cover us with dirt. To leave us underground – In place of strife. In place of fear – Here where she stands at the gates at the head of her tribe and waits – Triumphant on the mountains of our skulls. Up to her hems in the rivers of our blood – A wreath in one hand. The other between her legs – Her two little princes dancing by their necks from her apron strings, and she looks down at the long march of labour halted before her and says,

Awake! Awake! This is England, Your England – and the Year is Zero. (462)

And so the strike and the novel end. GB84’s presentation of the miner’s defeat as ‘Year Zero’ goes far beyond the common presentation of that event as a ‘watershed’ moment or synecdoche for longer-term historical processes, as discussed earlier. ‘Year Zero’ is a violent act of state-sanctioned erasure, but this is not creative destruction to further a new progressive future. The monstrously sexualized Thatcher\textsuperscript{75} is more reminiscent of Pol Pot than Danton or Robespierre, with their revolutionary conception of history beginning again with ‘Year One.’ Indeed, the novel hyperbolically intimates nothing less than a Holocaust of the Northern industrial culture popularly exemplified by both the miners and L.S. Lowry’s ‘matchstick men.’\textsuperscript{76} There is no germ of change or transformation: progress, movement and

\textsuperscript{75} Along with suggestion of a Thatcherite Judgement Day here, the meeting of this monstered Thatcher-figure and the ‘Union of the Dead’ can also be read as a nightmarish reworking of the famous frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes’s classic work of political theory \textit{Leviathan} (1651), by the artist Adrian Bosse. See Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, ed. by C.B. MacPherson (London: Penguin, 1978). In GB84, the body politic is dangerously fractured and violently subjugated by its sovereign head, belying any concept of a social contract.

\textsuperscript{76} Brooker notes that Peace is also invoking Brian and Michael’s 1978 one-hit-wonder ‘Matchstalk men and their Matchstalk Cats and Dogs’, and suggests that such allusions ‘risk importing bathos to an epic idiom.’ (Brooker, \textit{Orgeave Revisited}, p. 48) However, Peace often incorporates contemporary pop lyrics into his textual reimagining of a historical subject’s consciousness, tracing the ways in
any sense of a futurity based on hope of transformation are all stalled. Stuart Hall’s description of Thatcherism as the ‘scorched earth phase of British neoliberalism’ is apt in this passage.77 Even the tension between past and present, between oppositional discourses, and between individual and collective subject positions – expressed throughout the novel in the interplay between italic and Roman text – seems resolved. In his review of GBB4, Terry Eagleton somewhat optimistically sees this ending as a ‘movingly utopian moment’ in which ‘the monologuing miner has a vision of his dead, dumped and defeated comrades marching shoulder to shoulder.’78 However, Eagleton’s own definition of utopian thought does not bear out this optimistic reading: ‘The best kind of utopian thought [...] holds present and future in tension by pointing to those forces active in the present that might lead beyond it.’79 This is a total victory, and the capacious dating of ‘March 1985 –’ suggests that there is nothing imaginable beyond this ending, that its bleak stasis still defines the twenty-first-century present. It is clearly employing the register of apocalypse.80

However, apocalypse, in the Biblical sense at least, is followed necessarily by renovation and rebirth. In GBB4, no ‘Day of Judgement’ is on the horizon. Inverting Germinal once again, ‘[t]here will be no spring. There can be no morning – There will be only winter. There can

which familiar phrases, the repetitive background static of a past moment, can become warped by unexpected connotation or traumatic experience. Mark Fisher argues that in Peace’s fictions (and for Peace’s readers), pop songs often function as ‘audio-madelines.’ Mark Fisher, ‘A world of dread and fear’, k-punk, 13 September 2005 http://k-punk.org/a-world-of-dread-and-fear [accessed 16 October 2014]. Contemporary song lyrics form the title of GBB4’s first four parts e.g. George Michael’s ‘Careless Whisper’, connoting a pervasive surveillance culture and Band Aid’s ‘Do They Know It’s Christmas’ (‘There’s a world outside your window, and it’s a world of dread and fear’), and the pervasive ‘Two Tribes’ by Frankie Goes to Hollywood, which structures so many retrospective pop-culture video-montages of the strike. (118, 229, 349)

77 Stuart Hall, ‘The neoliberal revolution: Thatcher, Blair, Cameron – the long march of neoliberalism continues.’ Soundings 48, (Summer 2011), 1-20 (p. 10).
80 Plucking this ending from the complex context of the novel, it could exemplify a crude, quasi-Narnian vision of the apocalyptic Eighties: a historical narrative suggesting that, since the triumph of the Witch in either 1979, 1983 or 1984-85, it has been ‘always winter and never Christmas.’ See C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (London: Collins, 2001), p.35.
be only night –’ (462).\textsuperscript{81} \textit{GB84} fits Perry Anderson's axiomatic claim that the contemporary historical novel departs from its ‘classical’ antecedents by exploring not ‘progress or emancipation, but impending or consummated catastrophe.’\textsuperscript{82} However, \textit{GB84} goes much further than complicating or rejecting metanarratives of historical progress: it eschatologically presents the defeat of the miners’ strike as nothing less than a hyperbolically apocalyptic end of history.

\textit{GB84} enacts the end of history, and implicitly presents twenty-first-century life as post-historical in that sense. However, crucially, it also simultaneously historicises that decisive ending, uncovering the forces that produced it. This may not be a figuration of apocalypse followed by renovation and renewal, but it does present apocalypse-as-revelation. The closing passage quoted above contains not only literary allusions to Zola, Orwell, Dante and others.\textsuperscript{83} It is also shot through with references to the interconnected socio-cultural forces and contradictions that made Thatcherism possible in the first place. Inextricable from the nightmare is the history that helped to form it.\textsuperscript{84} For example, ‘In Place of Strife’ refers to the proposed 1969 Labour anti-union legislation spearheaded by Barbara Castle, which fractured the already brittle relationship between trade unions and government. ‘In Place of Fear’ refers to the 1952 socialist blueprint by Aneurin Bevan, the Atlee government’s

\textsuperscript{81} Theological tropes are being used here to aggrandise a particular secular narrative. Frank Kermode persuasively argues that eschatological ideas continue to underpin contemporary historical narratives: ‘changed by our special pressures, subdued by our scepticism, the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world.’ Frank Kermode, \textit{The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 28.


\textsuperscript{84} ‘If you want to write about “the state of the nation,” you have to study dreams and nightmare as well as returns from the opinion polls. You can’t omit the emotional and the irrational.’ Hilary Mantel, ‘Expanding our Sympathies’, in \textit{Beyond Black} (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 5.
architect of the NHS, which protested the creeping compromises of welfare capitalism.85 'The forward march of labour halted' is the title of Eric Hobsbawm's seminal 1978 Marx Memorial lecture about the long-term structural twentieth-century decline of the labour movement, which helped to inaugurate the 'New Times' project associated with Marxism Today in the 1980s. It is worth noting that momentum is eschewed in Peace's reworking, in favour of duration – it becomes 'the long march of labour.'86 Even Enoch Powell's famous 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech is invoked, not only signifying rising racist reactions to an increasingly multicultural nation and the cultural production of 'enemies within', but also exemplifying the crisis of authority that emerged in the late 1960s, a period whose popular libertarian discourses Thatcherism re-signified to such great effect.87 These references are not just intertextual, therefore: they represent some of the many distinct but interlocking histories, crises and social contradictions that destabilised one historical formation – in this case, welfare capitalism, or what is often simplified in a British context into 'the post-war consensus' – and fused into what Louis Althusser termed the ruptural unity of the conjuncture.88 This phrase refers to a systemic crisis in which historical change is inevitable and from which there is no possibility of return. Stuart Hall elucidated Althusser's idea in one of his final interviews:

85 Alan Sinfield argues that 'In Place of Strife' expressed 'the corporatist project of smoothing away conflict. The fact that "strife" was to be removed by law indicates how, in that project, force will rarely be far away.' Indeed, the proposal produced explicit political conflict and had to be withdrawn.' See Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, p. 317. Peace's fictions often present 1969, which saw the violent escalation of the Troubles, as a moment in which post-war Britain takes a dystopian turn. In GB84, Malcolm Morris reflects on 'Faiths turned rotten. Faiths Gone bad – Bad Faith, 1969-1984.' (437). Nineteen Eighty-Three reveals that 1969 is also the start of the child murders and conspiracy that drives the Red Riding Quartet.

86 My emphasis. Hobsbawm's essay, with its longue durée approach to labour history, is often misunderstood to be simply a response to the conjunctural crisis of the late 1970s that created the terrain in which neoliberalism became hegemonic. The debates that the essay prompted between 1978-1981 in Marxism Today offer a snapshot of the Left's diffuse responses to the early years of neoliberalism in Britain, and are collected in The Forward March of Labour Halted? ed. by Eric Hobsbawm, Martin Jacques and Francis Mulhern (London: Verso, 1981). Contributors include the editors, Tony Benn, Raymond Williams and a number of leading trade unionists.


A conjuncture is a period in which the contradictions and problems and antagonisms, which are always present in different domains in society, begin to come together. They begin to accumulate, they begin to fuse, to overlap with each other. The ideological becomes part of the economic problem and vice versa [...] they fuse into a *ruptural unity*, and that’s the beginning of conjuncture.\(^{89}\)

Although some radical transformation *is* inevitable, there is also no *one* inevitable triumph or teleological outcome in either Althusser or Hall’s conceptions of the conjuncture – it is a model of historical transformation that challenges progressive metanarratives, be they Whig or Marxist. Change itself may be inevitable, but the future is never fixed: what comes next is the product of political and ideological contest within the terrain of the conjunctural crisis. As is discussed below, *GB84* articulates a much more limited sense of futurity, through the historical genealogies and senses of history-as-a-process within which it situates the strike. The novel’s ending enacts the end of history and suggests a post-historical twenty-first-century present: that contemporary subjects still exist in the ongoing, moribund, stalled time after ‘1985 –’ (451), still determined by the Thatcherite ‘Year Zero’ (462). New Times are rendered as End Times. Yet its historicisation of the march towards that end as defined by multiple constitutive crises is a marked departure from the end of history as Fukuyama defines it, ‘the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution.’\(^{90}\) Furthermore, the novel’s presentation of the strike itself makes clear that History did not gently come to an evolutionary close – it was the result of sustained, violent conflict and struggle.

\(^{89}\) Stuart Hall, James Hay and Lawrence Grossberg, ‘Interview with Stuart Hall’, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 10.1 (March 2013), 10-33 (p. 16). Hall differs with Althusser in one key sense – the latter argued that while conjunctures were formed of multiple constitutive crises, the economic base determined change ‘in the last instance.’ Hall argues in this interview that this is not always the case (pp. 17-18).

\(^{90}\) Fukuyama, *The End of History?*, p. 3.
Struggle and inevitability

Struggle and contest are explored in formally innovative ways in *GB84*. MI5 surveillance operative Malcolm Morris reviews secret surveillance tapes, which represent the novel’s closest approximation of an unmediated, pre-doctored ‘historical record’. As Morris plays back recordings of the Battle of Orgreave, the violent and chaotic clashes are figured through paratactic, sonic fragments that break down the various registers of conflict operating during the strike:

‘If a highwayman holds you up, it is always possible to avoid violence by handing over to him what he wants.’

[...]

‘- shields up -’

[- sound of body against Perspex shield -]

‘breach of line at middle holding area. Request -’

[...]

[- sound of rock hitting Perspex shield -]

‘- field operatives be advised horses imminent -’

[...]

- Zulus in retreat. MP 4 and 5 stand down -’

HERE WE GO –

‘- can't throw stones if they've got broken arms -’

[- sound of police truncheon against body -]

‘target is wearing white T-shirt, blue jeans and distinctive hat -’

HERE WE GO –

‘- on then, fucking hit him -’

[- sound of police truncheon against body -]

‘- officers down at topside holding area. MP 6, please respond -’

HERE WE GO –
‘- fuck off back where you came from -’

[- sound of police truncheon against body -]

‘- prisoners to be restrained in vans until further notice -’

HERE WE –

‘- Commie bastards are going to lose and so is that bald bastard Scargill -’

[- sound of police truncheon against body -]

‘- exceptional DSG B. Exceptional. Drinks are on us -’

HERE –

‘We are going down the royal road in this country that Northern Ireland went down in 1969.’

Malcolm listened to the tapes. He played it all back. The tapes never stopped.

(139-140)

The miners’ anthemic chant fractures as line-by-line of charging horses and police truncheons meet bodies in T-shirts and jeans. First they lose momentum (‘GO’), then collectivity (‘WE’), then presence: their existence and situatedness in the communities they inhabit (‘HERE’) disappears under sustained assault. The repressive state apparatus needed to enforce neoliberal freedoms is made visible: pace Thatcher, ‘the law of the land’ is a tool to implement a new neoliberal ‘law of economics’.91 Also in evidence in this passage are ideological state apparatuses, not just the future re-sequencing of the events at Orgreave by the media, but the resignification of the strike through the drawing of potent historical parallels. The then Home Secretary Leon Brittan described the strikers as lawless highwaymen, intent on daylight robbery of the British taxpayer through subsidy of the coal industry.92 The past is a homiletic, allegorical resource, used to characterise the picketers as criminal anachronisms, and the strike as a simple matter of right and wrong. The spectre of civil disorder and sectarian violence that dominated Northern Ireland during the

91 Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, p. 378.
Troubles is also invoked as a cautionary tale of allowing violent civil conflict to proliferate: 'We are going down the royal road in this country that Northern Ireland went down in 1969.' However, both the speaker and the collective ‘we’ being appealed to here are unclear, and the analogy between Northern Ireland and the strike is flexible in GB84. The Conservatives regularly drew parallels between the Fascistic military junta who ruled Argentina during the Falklands/Malvinas war, 'the enemy without', and the NUM, 'the enemy within' who were 'much more difficult to fight' and 'just as dangerous to liberty.' A similar interrelationship was also suggested between the NUM and the IRA, especially following the latter's attempt to assassinate the Thatcher government at the Conservative party conference in November 1984. However, elsewhere in GB84 the role of the British state in catalysing and proliferating the violence in Northern Ireland is emphasised, as well as the parallels between the advanced surveillance tactics used on Republicans and the NUM: 'Operation Vengeance. Imported from Ulster. Updated for Yorkshire' (127). Martin reflects that the violence displaced and projected onto the colonial/postcolonial margins of Britain and refracted through the media is shockingly relocated to 'home': 'I can't close my eyes – Petrol bombs. Burnt-out cars and buses. Huts and portakabins on fire. [...] Horses and dogs out – Like something you saw on news from Northern Ireland. From Bogside – Never thought I'd live to see anything like it here. Not here in England. Not in South Yorkshire.' (322) The police description of miners as 'Zulus' (139) in the Orgreave tapes similarly positions the strike within a history of colonial violence by the British state, and suggests a sneeringly primitive characterisation of the miners as savages resistant to progress. The neoliberal ‘Freedom of Cash’, ‘Capitalism and Opportunity’ (Peace, 2010: 134) espoused by the NCB Chairman and Thatcher's fixer Steven Sweet requires the aggressive resignification, marginalisation and violent suppression of dissenting voices and freedoms. Thatcher's

94 The miners' first-person narratives evidence a globally-informed historical consciousness. Police tactics and the rewriting of the law are likened to 'fucking Nicaragua' (264); miners hiding in trees 'dangl[e] like strange fruit off branches.' (238)
media pronouncement that ‘[t]here would have been neither freedom nor order in Great Britain in 1985 if we had given in to violence and intimidation’ (453) is rendered bitterly ironic, when compared with the miners’ view of their own use of violence as a last resort in their desperate attempt to extricate themselves from harm: ‘Bricks and stones. That’s what it takes to save us. [...] I fucking throw them and all – First fucking time. This is what it’s come to for me – To make them leave me be. To save myself. To get away. To be fucking free-’ (282). Thus the miners’ defeat – and, by association in GB84, with its metonymic understanding of the strike, a twenty-first century present defined by neoliberal hegemony – is the product of sustained, violent struggle in multiple arenas.

But how inevitable is this neoliberal hegemony? After all, struggle can be sustained and valiant but ultimately predetermined in its consequences – that is a structuring principle of classical tragedy.95 In GB84, the strike is being determined by shadowy, extra-parliamentary forces: capitalist special interests, the security services, even the neo-Fascist occultists that are near obligatory in Peace’s work. Neil Fontaine, Sweet’s own fascist fixer, plans the battle of Orgreave months before the pickets arrive: ‘He opens his eyes. He sees – Batons. Shields. Horses. Dogs. Dust. Blood – Victory. Neil Fontaine has his notes. His photographs. His plans. His battle-plans – [...] The Jew will have his victory – Here. [...] “Orgreave” (78-79). However, these forces are by no means unified in purpose or strategy – one Far Right-organiser and former General has political (as well as sexist and anti-semitic) divergences with Thatcherism: ‘Privatize this. Privatize that. End up with the whole bloody country owned by foreigners. Crush communism, trample down trade unionism. By all means. [...] Men like us know some things are simply not for sale.’ (262). Nor are they immune to contingency, such as the potential of a NACODS strike that could have ended the conflict, which briefly restores

95 Peace has refused any easy Marxian consolation in the dignity of struggle: ‘The struggle wasn’t the victory. It was a defeat for everybody involved.’ Mark Blacklock, ‘Peace in our time’, Telegraph 15 March 2004 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/donotmigrate/3613691/Peace-in-our-time.html [accessed 29 April 2009]
the miners’ sense of momentum (257-258). However, these contingent events are finessed by the security state and special interests. Furthermore, any resolution through regular political channels certainly seems doomed to fail. Negotiation based around resolving dissensus through compromise, and parliamentary democratic processes – two mainstays of liberal political discourse – are revealed to be sideshows. Negotiation is a torturously unproductive process: ‘Talks of talks. Talks of meetings. Talks about talks. Meetings about meetings.’ (88) Any occasional intimation of progress is torpedoed by informants and agents. Parliament is completely peripheral: a hardly-mentioned and far-away forum for ‘bankrupt fucking bickering’ (190). The NUM as an institution is also critiqued, from Scargill’s egotism and reliance on a court culture (33, 71, 204, 403), to the atmosphere of constant plotting and positioning amongst senior officials. The miners Peter and Martin, while loyal to the NUM and the strike, critically reflect upon myopic tactics such as the sustained picketing at Orgreave (118). Within the main narrative, the major political actors in the strike are referred to by role rather than name: Scargill is ‘The President’, Thatcher ‘The Prime Minister’, NCB Chairman Ian MacGregor ‘The Chairman’, Thatcher’s organizer David Hart (fictionalised as Stephen Sweet, and always seen from the point-of-view of the far-right Neil Fontaine) is ‘The Jew’. Peace’s fusion of paratactic modernist experimentation and terse, abstract ‘hardboiled’ prose has a powerful cumulative effect. These are not characters with any sense of realist interiority or motivation, but types, performative roles in a labyrinthine political process that masks the real centres of power: ‘Bright lights, smoke and mirrors’ (7). GB84 is defined by a distinct lack of observable,

96 Towards the end of the strike, the NUM leadership is obsessed with the prospect of the breakaway UDM. Terry Winters, a compromised senior union executive, is scathing about this blinkered concern: ‘The War in Heaven raged on. [...] This was all they talked about in the corridors and the canteen. The pubs and bars around the headquarters. Not the strike. Not their members stood out in the snow. Not their families – ‘ (403). Terry represents an often hostile point of view on the NUM’s upper echelons, but the novel never rejects this critical characterisation. Local NUM officials like Peter Cox are much more sympathetically represented.

97 The President sees Orgreave as an opportunity to repeat the triumphant closure of the Saltley Gate plant in the successful strike of 1972, a large portrait of which sits behind his desk, commemorating ‘His Destiny.’ (112-113). When Morris visits the abandoned Saltley site later in the novel, it is described as ‘The Winter Palace, 1972 [...] ‘He listened as he looked to the horizon. The lost and empty horizon – ‘ (387)
locatable agency, by subjects stuck in recursive patterns (that mirror the recursive pattern of history and absent imaginable futures in the novel), and by failed liberal democratic structures and institutions.

GB84 is undoubtedly a paranoid history. Conspiracy drives its fictional reimagining of the strike, and unlike Peace’s earlier *Red Riding Quartet*, there is no detective/journalist figure within the narrative to assume the implicit role of historian, to weigh evidence and provide some clarity and explanation, if not amelioration or redemption. Conspiracy as a form suggests that subjects and historical transformations are determined by unseen forces; that underneath the chaos of late capitalist experience, lies a hidden explanatory logic. This determinism echoes Terry Eagleton’s description, in his review of *GB84*, of the 1984-85 strike as a conflict in which the key political actors were ‘playing’ parts, performing historical ‘scripts’ that imbued the strike with a ‘tragic inevitability’:

Both parties to the conflict had their eyes set on its world-historic importance. There were two scripts and scenarios in play, one brief and brutal, the other a matter of an age-old antagonism stretching back to the Chartists. [...] Whatever the stake[s] being played for, then, it was certainly not just the coal industry. It was as though the individual characters involved [...] were simply stand-ins for historical forces in a drama that had a smack of tragic inevitability about it. It was a showdown that history, or at least the shift to a post-industrial Britain, was going to stage sooner or later.

In Eagleton’s understanding of the strike, unfolding historical processes (deindustrialisation and neoliberalisation) render the conflict inevitable (even if it is

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98 Brooker argues that *GB84* has ‘abandoned’ attempts at using narrative to explain the strike. ‘Orgreave Revisited’, p. 43.
99 See Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-22, particularly Knight’s insightful analysis of Jameson’s claim that conspiracy theories represent a ‘poor person’s cognitive mapping’ among the epistemologically-destabilising complexities of late capitalist life (pp. 19-21).
100 Eagleton, ‘At the Coal Face’. 
ambiguous within Eagleton’s account as to whether its outcome is predetermined). History is a process imbued with its own unfolding agency: it *stages* this metonymic conflict. In *GB84*, historical genealogies repeatedly surface and interrupt the narrative, destabilizing the boundaries of both the diegetic present of Britain in the mid-1980s and the individual subjects caught up in the strike, textually disaggregated as well as determined by powerful ‘reverberations of the past’. The multiple ‘scripts’ that these genealogies represent, and by association the multiple histories that seem to end with the defeat of the strike at the end of the novel, are ‘brutal’ but certainly not ‘brief’, and stretch back to long before the nineteenth-century Chartists.

**A War of Ghosts / History from Below**

The miners demonstrate a historical consciousness, employing historical parallels to conceptualise the 1984-85 strike, most often from recent labour history. Peter likens the violence at Orgreave to the repression of the General Strike: ‘Fucking troops. [...] 1926 all over again.’ (158) Similarly, the fixer Neil Fontaine also has a strong grasp of historical grievances between the regional mining unions: ‘They come to the Harworth colliery on the Yorkshire-Nottinghamshire border, this is the place where the Spencer union were finally defeated in a last bloody battle. *It’s 1937 again.*’ (12-13) Just as the strike as a process is defined by repetition (cycles of inaction, picketing, violence), *this* strike is figured as repeating betrayals from industrial conflicts earlier in the century. However, other historical perspectives punctuate the miners’ testaments without being explicitly invoked. An example of this interaction comes when the striking Martin and his wife Cath encounter a police officer while driving:

> Turn your vehicle around or you’ll be arrested. I start car. Martin, she says. He can’t do this. I say, Yes he can. Yes, he bloody can – *We warmed your houses. Your kitchens*

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101 Samuel, ‘Introduction’ to *The Enemy Within*, pp. 5-6
and your beds – [...] Half-nine by time I get home. Cath’s already in bed. Thank Christ
– We drove your dreams. Your cities and your empires – (40)

In the diegetic present, Martin’s freedom of movement is being limited by state forces
beyond his control, and at the same time his individual present-tense point-of-view is
interrupted by a mysterious, fragmented third-person past collective voice. The interplay
between roman and italic text here, between ‘I’ and ‘We’, suggests a dialogic relationship
between surface and subtext, present and past: a reminder of the miners’ overdetermined
foundational status in the historical development and material ‘metabolism of the Western
world’ in the face of a sustained campaign against them. Simultaneously, the sense of
Martin as a bounded subject possessing agency is complicated by the presence of this other
collective ‘script’. These fragments can also be assembled into something more cohesive. In
this early example, hidden across over a hundred pages of the first part of the novel, a
plaintive poem exemplifies the profound interrelationship between historical narratives,
articulations of history-as-a-process and formal strategies within GB84:

The dead brood under Britain. We whisper. We echo. The emanation of Giant Albion.

We suffocate. We drown –
You took us from the mountains.
You took us from the sea.
You took us from the wild-fields.
You took us from the whale-roads.

We warmed your houses. Your kitchens and your beds –
We drove your dreams. Your cities and your empires –
We fuelled your fears with our raven-wings –
You threw us in a pit.
You showered us with soil.

[...]

102 Orwell, The Road to Wigan, p. 18.
Put us in the ground –
To drown. To suffocate –
Under the ground.

Under the ground, we brood. We hwisprian. We onscillan. Under the ground we scream

(2, 10, 20, 40, 60, 68, 90, 100, 110).

This explicitly subterranean collective voice draws on William Blake’s mystical poems ‘Jerusalem: The Emanation of Giant Albion’ and ‘The French Revolution.’ 103 It suggests that what underlies the miners’ struggle, and their individual subjectivities, is a long history of industrial and colonial exploitation followed by burial alive. The twenty-first-century reader is uncomfortably, implicitly implicated by the second-person address: ‘You took us […] You showered us with soil’. A process of forced expropriation followed by forced disappearance is figured as the material base of contemporary Britain. Perhaps paradoxically, given the highly poetic diction, the central process of mining in the expansion and enrichment of Britain is demystified. Furthermore, as with Hogan’s Blackmoor and Burn’s The North of England Home Service, the actively disappeared industrial history of Britain is unquiet, returning to trouble the surface of contemporary life, albeit in GB84 prompted by the moment at which that history is apparently extinguished. 104 Reading/hearing this voice involves hermeneutic difficulty, both in the reader’s encounter with it as fragments (or in the attempt to piece it together), and in the encounter with an unglossed dead language: Old English. ‘Hwisprian’ means to whisper or murmur; ‘onscillan’ means to resound. 105 As with

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104 See pp. 15-16 of this chapter.

105 See entries for ‘Hwisprian’ and ‘Onscillan’, Old English Thesaurus http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/oehead2.php?groupx=02.05.10.16&word=hwisprian http://oldenglishthesaurus.arts.gla.ac.uk/oehead2.php?groupx=02.05.10.04&word=onscillan
the surveillance tapes of Orgreave, history is experienced in fragmented, sonic form: a disruptive history from below.

Hart describes these historical voices as an ‘obscure undermythology’ and argues that ‘Peace isn’t trying to construct some mythopoeic structure that explains or transcends the events of 1984-85.’

While transcendence is certainly not a strategy in the text, describing the voices as an ‘obscure under-mythology’ ignores the precise historical genealogies within which the novel seeks to frame the late-twentieth-century triumph of neoliberalism. In the passage quoted above, for instance, a precise historical parallel is being drawn by the use of Old English and the Anglo-Saxon poetic form of kennings (‘whale-roads’, ‘wild-fields’ [20]).

The voices of the miners are being linked to those of the victims of the Harrying of the North, a ‘scorched earth’ campaign following the eleventh-century Norman Conquest that aimed to destroy permanently the future political capacity of Anglo-Saxon society through killing and starving the inhabitants of the rebellious North of England. It was pursued with a ferocious violence that Robert Tombs argues was ‘unusually brutal even by the harsh standards of the day. [...] Much of the land was still deserted a generation after.’

This violent imposition of an Anglo-Norman elite class has been framed in colonial terms.


109 ‘A former Norman colony, having undergone the long imposition of French laws, language, servitudes and cultural forms (many of which endure even today), England continued to struggle towards an assertive and successful nationhood of its own. It was a slow, uneven process.’ A. E. B. Coldiron, ‘Public Sphere/Contact Zone: Habermas, Early Print, and Verse Translation’, Criticism 46.2
Peace has commented that early drafts of *GB84* contained even more Old English and that the Harrying was an important parallel to illustrate in his retelling of the strike. Raphael Samuel argues that in progressive Whig accounts of history, Anglo-Saxon England is often represented as a ‘precocious unity’ – the starting point of our “island story” and the foundation of representative government.’ Tombs concurs that a unified Anglo-Saxon polity oppressed by the ‘Norman Yoke’ is a potent if highly contestable historical narrative. The boundaries between history and myth are porous. In *GB84*, the Harrying represents an occluded act of foundational violence for a millennia-long history of exploitation, which directly prefigures the novel’s apocalyptic take on Thatcherism’s ‘scorched-earth phase of British neoliberalism.’ The strike is not just repeating earlier twentieth-century labour antagonisms – history in the *longue durée* is a recursive process of violence that predates the history of capitalism. Fisher suggests that *GB84* ‘is the first of Peace’s novels in which the possibility of any sort of group-subject is raised. More typically, his characters are solipsistically alone, connected only by violence, their only shared project dissimulation.’ However, what the interaction between the first-person miners’ voices and the collective history of class exploitation suggests is a ‘group-subject’ actually connected by these very experiences of violence. *GB84* combines fragments of multiple historical genealogies and schemata (Whig, Marxist, radical) to articulate this experience of historicity, the recursive structure of which itself constrains the possibility of alternative futures.

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(Spring 2004), 207-222 (p. 214). Ironically, the nation that exported colonialism to so much of the world can itself claim colonial displacement as the ‘Year Zero’ of its own island story.

110 Shaw, *David Peace: Texts and Contexts*, p. 86.
113 Hall, 'The neoliberal revolution', p. 18.
114 Fisher, ‘A world of dread and fear’
The history of organised labour which ends in GB84 lacks any sense of past, progressive momentum: ‘The Union of the Dead – From Hartley to Harworth. From Senghenydd to Saltley – From Oaks to Orgreave. From Lofthouse to London – The dead that carried us from far to near.’ (452). These places, variously the sites of mining disasters, successful strikes and violent clashes with the authorities, are stripped of any historical or chronological relation to each other and transformed into an alliterative, ahistorical incantation.115 Watches stop: ‘Time slips. It stops again. It starts again –’. (92)116 Indeed, time slips recur throughout, often prompted by violence. As progressive temporality breaks down, the ‘bloody Middle Ages [,] Dark Ages’ (68), no longer safely past, unexpectedly bleed into the 1980s.117 Neil Fontaine, driving the interstitial ‘lawless Yorkshire borderlands with Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire’, a boundary between striking and non-striking miners that would eventually split the NUM, sees figures in the road: ‘Roundheads lead their horses across the road. Bloody. They are beaten. In retreat. The steam rises from the backs of their horses to meet the rain. To wash away the battle. Neil Fontaine blinks. He starts the car. He pulls out of the lay-by. Back to Orgreave –’ (112). Later, he encounters more jarring, spectral presences on the roads: ‘Cavaliers struggle with the broken wheel of a wagon. Purple-frocked

115 The Hartley colliery disaster in 1862 killed 204; Harworth was a major Nottinghamshire colliery and the site of clashes in 1937 and 1984; 440 people died at the Senghenydd colliery in 1913 – the worst mining disaster in British history; The Battle of Saltley’ prompted the NUM’s 1972 victory; an explosion at the Oaks mine in South Yorkshire killed a total of 367 people in 1866; Orgreave was the site of famous clashes during 1984-85; seven men drowned at Lofthouse in 1973 - only one body was ever recovered.

116 Peter Cox’s watch, is destroyed during the clashes at Orgreave, signifying the destruction of a stable understanding of time through concepts of inheritance from previous generations: ‘No front teeth. I looked down at myself […] Strap of my watch was broken. Face stepped on and crushed. My father’s watch it was and all.’ (142)

117 Descriptions of the clashes between pickets and police regularly use the term ‘medieval’, connoting both the apparently anachronistic clashes between mounted police and pickets armed with stones and makeshift weapons, and the seemingly regressive, uncivilised association of the violence. Deller’s re-enactment employs similar juxtapositions. One miner interviewed in The People of Thurcroft et al, Thurcroft: A village and the Miners’ Strike likens clashes at Harworth to ‘medieval warfare’ (p. 72), while another likened the lines of Metropolitan police with riot shields to ‘bloody soldiers from Cromwell’s army’, part of a ‘military occupation’ (p. 120). The metaphor of occupation is common. One Yorkshire policeman likens the Met to ‘foreign forces’ at war in ‘A Mike Figgis Film of Jeremy Deller’s The Battle of Orgreave: However, the narrative of the Metropolitan police as exceptionally violent and antagonistic is complicated in Thurcroft: A village and the Miners’ Strike: ‘[b]y common consent, the South Yorkshire police were equally brutal and the Greater Manchester police equally corrupt’ (p. 97).
men bark orders in the rain and mud. Crosses around their necks. Rings on their fingers –’ (148). It is unclear how and even if the seventeenth-century Wars of the Three Kingdoms, a complex conflict about class, religion, parliamentary sovereignty and an over-mighty executive power, maps onto the twentieth-century battle between state and union in *GB84*, which is explicitly framed as ‘The Third English Civil War.’ (137). The fifteenth-century Wars of the Roses, presumably the first in this succession of civil wars, also overlay the strike. When miner Peter Cox is injured at Orgreave, this act of contemporary violence blurs the distinction between conflicts past and present:

CRACK – He’d felled me. This copper – *Listen to the voice*. Ground was hard – *The voice saying*, *Follow me*. Sun right warm – *Follow me*. Lovely on my face – My father used to take us as a lad to many of fields from Roses and Civil Wars: Wake-field. Ferry Bridge. Towton. Seacroft Moor. Adwalton Moor. Marston Moor – Picnics in them fields. Flasks of tea in car if weather was against us – Photograph of me somewhere, squinting near Towton memorial on a Palm Sunday. Snow on ground – He was dead now, was my father. Ten year back. I was glad he was, too. Not to see me in this field. Here – Orgreave. South Yorkshire. England. Today – Monday 18 June 1984. Puke down my shirt. Piss on my trousers – I was glad he was dead. I closed my eyes – *Forgotten voices*. *A lost language*. *A code*. *Echoes* – Like funeral music. Drumming was. They beat them shields like they beat us. Like we were air. Like we weren’t here. – Here. Now – I opened my eyes. (136)

Violence shatters the boundedness of the ‘Here. Now’ – Orgreave in June 1984 – and Peter reflects on the ways in which historical conflicts are memorialised as part of a heritage culture, a cozy inter-generational social activity between father and son. The battle he is vividly experiencing now, covered in vomit and piss, is the latest in a long history of local slaughter: Yorkshire is a landscape of battlefields, past and present, some remembered,
most forgotten and on the margins of memorial culture. There are eerie repetitions and doublings in the passage. The battle of Towton also occurred on a snowy Palm Sunday in 1461, prefiguring the remembered photograph at the memorial. It is considered to be one of the most destructive in English history. Shakespeare famously presented it in *Henry VI, Part 3* as a chaotic bloodbath in which, blinded by the weather, fathers killed sons and sons killed fathers without realising who their real opponent was. It is the epitome of civil conflict taking on a violent and apolitical logic of its own that is highly destructive to generational relationships and national unity. It is important to note here, however, that the miners are not being associated with any particular subject position in either of these historical conflicts. The battlefields mentioned include Lancastrian and Royalist, as well as Yorkist and Parliamentary victories and defeats. The defining feature of this history is violent continuum of conflict, rather than any specific radical genealogy or political account of British history. In *GB84*, the ‘occult language of civil war’ does not, as Hart argues, function as an ‘intensifying device that foregrounds the exceptional nature of the 1984-85 strike’, but in fact presents the strike as an exemplar event in the long, interwoven histories of violence and exploitation.

Italicised, mysterious voices also irrupt into Peter’s experiences at Orgreave. First comes an otherworldly request to follow a voice into the light – to retreat into memories of better times, perhaps, or move towards an afterlife. Then, a highly suggestive moment: ‘I closed my eyes – *Forgotten voices. A lost language. A code. Echoes* – Like funeral music. Drumming

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118 There is no plaque or memorial at Orgreave. Now that the ground has been stripped of its last resources, the biggest housing estate in Europe is being constructed there. Named Waverley, with ironic echoes of Walter’s Scott conservative fictional take on the contradictions of progress, it is being built by Barrett Homes, supposedly Thatcher’s favoured builder, although she lasted a matter of weeks in her Barrett-built Dulwich retirement home after leaving office, rapidly decamping to a townhouse in Chelsea.


This is the most succinct description GB84 offers for its own formal and
historiographic presentation of history. ‘History’ is a chaotic, discordant, multi-vocal
cacophony comprised of voices, many of whose experiences and histories have been
‘forgotten’ and ‘lost’ – less a chronological narrative and more, like the apocalypse-as-
conjuncture at the novel’s end, an excess of associations and connotation. These voices
represent a hermeneutic and interpretive difficulty (a ‘code’ or ‘lost language’ whose
meaning is to be deducted or translated) but nevertheless continue to resonate in and with
the present. These fragmented ‘Echoes’ of the past and the present cacophony of police
banging their shields simultaneously intimate the losses to come: ‘Echoes – Like funeral
music. Drumming was.’ (136) The distinctive formal fusion of hidden histories and spectral
tropes in Peace’s work is often described as ‘occult history’:

In an interview with Mark Lawson, [Peace] explains that the adjective in “occult
history” signifies the state of being hidden or occulted more than the realm of the
supernatural. In this sense, then, “occult” refers to the unknown or obscured
elements of British political history [...]. But this is only part of what Peace means
by that phrase. For that term has implications beyond the uncovering of things we
do not know. With its connotations of haunting and ritual violence, “occult history”
suggests that the political history of Britain – and the narrative form required to
uncover that history – is subterranean in more than one sense, a matter of bodies
that will not stay buried as well as stories that have not been told.121

In Hart’s analysis of ‘occult history’, the past is not merely a hidden narrative that needs to
be articulated or retold, but a concatenation of forces that have an active but mysterious
agency in the present, structuring contemporary life but defying rational comprehension.
Peace’s palimpsestic model of the subject (of which the miner Martin is just one example)
is one in which, to quote Marx, ‘the consciousness of the past weighs like a nightmare on the

121 Hart, ‘Third English Civil War, pp. 577-578.
brain of the living.’ Mark Fisher, in a discussion of Jacques Derrida’s concept of hauntology, suggestively (and succinctly) describes the spectre or ghost as a metaphorical figure for ‘the agency of the virtual: with the spectre understood not as anything supernatural, but as that which acts without (physically) existing.’ This conception of a past that has an unseen, immaterial power but that nevertheless determines individual consciousness and collective historical experience best elucidates GB84’s contradictory historicism. Concepts of agency and historicity are radically constrained by historical forces that defy rational comprehension; but history, understood in this multivocal sense at least, can never be decisively ended. Any intimation otherwise is the apocalyptic fantasy of a depleted political and cultural imaginary.

GB84 is not the only contemporary historical fiction about the 1980s to situate neoliberalisation within a longue durée than post-war British history. The Line of Beauty draws subtle parallels between late-nineteenth-century and late-twentieth-century neoliberal financialisation by presenting high Victorian architecture as a kind of proto-postmodernism: an ahistorical bricolage that has become naturalized over time but was once ‘ostentatiously new’, with the novel questioning the novelty of neoliberal financial reforms. Hart argues that GB84 advances an essentially antagonistic conception of contemporary politics. However, I would argue that in fact the thousand year longue durée within which GB84 situates the miners’ strike actually presents a depoliticized

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124 Mark Fisher, Ghosts of My Life: Writing as Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), p. 18. Developing the ideas of Martin Hägglund, Fisher argues that the concept of virtual agency transcends narrow debates about hauntology: ‘[t]he great thinkers of modernity, Freud as well as Marx, had discovered different modes of this spectral causality. The late capitalist world, governed by the abstractions of finance, is very clearly a world in which virtualities are effective, and perhaps the most ominous `specter of Marx’ is capital itself.’
historicisation of that decisive conflict in the neoliberatisation of Britain. Wendy Brown defines depoliticization as the effacement of political causation in favour of either individual, natural or cultural causation:

Depoliticization involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other. [...] Depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from a recognition of the powers that produce and contour it.\textsuperscript{126}

\textit{GB84} does not present neoliberalisation as the outcome (or fault) of individual political actors – there is no Great Man or Woman model of history underpinning Peace’s text (even if its portrayal of Scargill in particular does emphasise some ‘fatal flaws’). In fact, individuals are presented as having very little freedom to act rationally in meaningful ways. Nevertheless, the ‘powers that produce and contour’ neoliberal Britain are figured as an incongruous fusion of natural and cultural forces: a thousand-year continuum of violence and oppression. How long does a \textit{longue durée} have to be before it becomes naturalized into an underlying ‘fact’ of human experience? \textit{GB84} offers a kind of post-historical Marxism stripped of any emphasis on process and systemic contradiction, but retaining as the central motor of history a destructive class conflict between oppressor and oppressed, a powerfully stark history from below that represents one strangely atemporal ‘long, long scream of places and names, terror and treachery’ (288). It offers a nuanced, formally innovative deconstruction of the historical subject – consistently structured by voices and perspectives from the past, determined in complex ways that transcend rational or empirical comprehension by ‘messages from the dead’ that nevertheless act as ‘tocsins’ – alarm bells – for the living. (315) And yet its historicisation of neoliberalism within the \textit{longue durée} of

history as a continuum of conflict is paradoxically transhistorical – a depoliticised historicisation that risks naturalizing the very objects of its critique: the British End of History and the 1984-85 miners’ strike.

Conclusion: Historicity without futurity

Perhaps unsurprisingly, GB84 is not optimistic about the political potential of either literature or revisionist historiography. Peter’s wife Mary Cox produces a scrapbook called the ‘True History of Great Strike for Jobs,’ ‘under all lies she cut out, she’d then write truth of matter. Even had two of books signed by King Arthur – Just another way to pass time, I suppose.’ (350) Mary’s assemblage of historical material, in its explicitly revisionist intervention, has been read as ‘parallel’ for GB84. However, Peter sees it as a means of filling time rather than redeeming it. And the scrapbook has an even more explicitly palliative double, given to a working miner (or working for now) by The Chairman: ‘He gave me two signed books on mining which not many folk can have. I will keep them forever to pass on to my children, and their children, and their children's children.’ (346)

The novel does not figure political pathways through the decisive triumph of Thatcherism at the miners’ strike. It does not tease out alternative futures, or suggest even obliquely the possibility of imagining them. In fact, given its deterministic models of subjectivity and its figuration of liberal democracy as marginal to historical transformations, it is only political in profoundly ambivalent ways. However, this experimental historical fiction nevertheless has immense critical potential. Jameson argues that ‘one of the great indispensable functions of ideological analysis [is] to show the contradictions in which we are ourselves imprisoned, the oppositions beyond which we cannot think.’ The futures a society can imagine represent in many ways the limits beyond which it cannot think And GB84 makes

128 Jameson, Antinomies of Realism, pp. 308-309.
visible these limits through the kinds of historicity it articulates, figuring the contradictions
that seem to define the horizons of many forms of contemporary oppositional politics: that
the neoliberal present is as the historical product of often violent political and ideological
contest, but that a future based on similar contest and transformation seems impossible to
conceptualise; that the dominant political idiom is still based on the agency of the sovereign
subject, and yet a pervasive determinism is impossible to challenge. *GB84 performs* rather
than just *critiques* the End of History: simultaneously enacting and interrogating the
pervasive and often apocalyptically-inflected narrative that the strike, with its
overdetermined status as a ‘war of ghosts’, is ‘Year Zero’ for neoliberal Britain.129

Beckett argues that bodies in crisis just like Peter Cox at Orgreave are a persistent metaphor
in *GB84* and the earlier *Red Riding Quartet*: ‘It’s as if the corruption that Peace sees
everywhere has found its way into their bodies; as if taking part in, or even just probing,
British political life as these books define it – competitive, obsessive, claustrophobically
male – always destroys people in the end.’130 *Skagboys* also figures historical
transformations through the body. However, unlike *GB84*, this novel is mainly focused on
life after the mythologised End, and the novel explores Thatcherism through metaphors of
repetitive, increasingly deadening consumption. Tommy Laurence reflects sadly on the
possibility of him escaping 1980s Leith:

> Nah have tae say that I envy Rents, everything’s working oot good for him; a nice
> bird, a good education and ye ken that when he graduates, he’ll be off somewhere,
> he’ll no stick aroond here. Ah admire that aboot him, cause ah’m too much ay a home
> bird. Ah’d like tae git away, though. It would be great.

- Right, Davie says, raising the gless n drainin it. He shakes the empty tumbler and
  ah get the picture,

130 Beckett, ‘Political Gothic’
Tommy is stuck: the possibility of change and movement are stymied not by his attachment to a ‘home’ defined by unemployment and poverty but by a total absence of alternatives to it. The chances for change and relocation that are available to his friend Renton through higher education are not open to Tommy. Instead, the cyclical rounds of drinks symbolise both static and repetitive consumption and a shared masculine experience structured by mutual obligation, albeit one that acts as compensation for a lack of other collective experiences, notably labour. The male body becomes a topography onto and through which life in newly neoliberal Britain is explored. In many ways, The Line of Beauty, with its London setting and depiction of a moneyed Tory milieu, could not be further away deindustrialised landscape of Leith or the picket lines of GB84. Indeed, Brooker argues that GB84 and The Line of Beauty seem to ‘contrast so drastically that they effectively divide the decade between them.’ However, there are notable continuities in their presentations of a profound crisis in futurity rooted in the Thatcherite past, and their figuration of neoliberalism and its effects through male bodies in crisis.

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Chapter Two
No Future?

I was not thinking about the world. I was not thinking about history. I was thinking about my body’s small, precise, limited, hungry movement into a future that seemed at every instant on the verge of being shut down.
Wayne Koestenbaum, 'My 1980s’1

[W]e might do well to attempt what is surely impossible – to withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism.
Lee Edelman, No Future2

On you in you in your blood we write have written: STASIS! The END.
Angels in America Part II: Perestroika3

Introduction: 'Our little systems have their day; They have their day and cease to be'4

In the third and final part of The Line of Beauty (2004), the novel’s protagonist and focaliser Nick Guest joins his closeted boyfriend Wani Ouradi, who is visibly sick with AIDS, for a business lunch with a pair of ‘socially hungry’ gay American film producers who are ‘clearly working, with one eye always on the square beyond, at a thorough penetration of London.’5

The restaurant has rapidly aestheticized the recent October 1987 stock market crash, nicknamed ’Black Monday’, into an eponymous cocktail. Discussion of this confection seems to lead ineluctably onto the subject of Wani’s so-far unacknowledged illness:

"It’s dark rum, and cherry brandy, and sambucca. And loads of lemon juice. It tastes like a really old-fashioned laxative," Treat said.

"I can't drink any more," said Wani, “but when I hear that, I don’t mind.”

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4 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam A.H.H., ed. by Erik Gray. Norton Critical Edition, 2nd edition. (New York: Norton, 2003), Prologue 17-18, p5p. 5. Tennyson’s couplet uses metaphors of bodily fragility to suggest that supposedly stable, naturalised systems of belief are themselves fragile and historically contingent. Tennyson is primarily concerned with religious and scientific systems, while this chapter will be analysing figurations of socio-economic systems.
5 Alan Hollinghurst, The Line of Beauty (London: Picador, 2010), p. 427. All future citations from this text will be taken from this edition and be indicated parenthetically within the body of this chapter.
There was a brief pause. Treat ran his finger along his fringe, and Brad sighed and said, "Yeah... I wanted to ask..." The both of them, nicely enough, seemed relieved the subject had been brought up.

Wani tucked in his chin. "Oh, a disaster," he said, frowning from one to the other. "Quite unbelievable. One of my bloody companies lost two-thirds of its value between lunchtime and teatime."

"Oh... oh, right," said Brad, and gave an awkward laugh. "Yeah, we had it real bad too."

"Fifty billion wiped off the London stock exchange in one day."

Treat looked at him levelly, to show he'd registered but wouldn't challenge this evasion, and said, "Hey, the Dow was down five hundred points."

"God, yes," said Wani, "well, it was your fault."

Brad didn't argue, but said job losses on Wall Street were terrible.

"Oh, fuck that," said Wani. "Anyway, it bounces back. It has already. It always recovers. It always recovers."

"It's a worrying time for all of us," said Nick responsibly.

Wani gave a mocking look and said, "We'll all be absolutely fine." And after that it was impossible to approach him on the subject of his fatal illness. (433)

This exchange, with its keen attention to the elisions and brittle, chatty modulations that contour polite conversation, is characteristic of Hollinghurst’s writing. Yet Wani’s evasion signifies more than just the smoothing-over of a socially awkward subject. Crisis in the financial system functions here as a performance to mask the spectacle of a different system in terminal crisis: a twenty-five-year old queer male body that is fragile and visibly failing. Finance is being used to try and forestall any acknowledgement of this imminent, immanent decline. However, Wani’s simultaneous attempts to emphasise the discontinuities between the body and the market while insisting on the intrinsic health and sustainability of the financial status-quo are persistently undermined by the novel’s metaphorical elision of
economic systems and bodily processes. The ‘hungry’ American money-men are planning a steady ‘penetration’ of the city’s elite residential ‘squares’, a description that both conflates the sexual with the transactional and connotes the foreign penetration through financial power of the otherwise apparently stratified British class system. Crucially, this description also evokes the proliferating viral penetration of a cellular system. Fredric Jameson notes the epistemological and representational challenge posed by the increasingly complex, abstract and immaterial global financial systems that dominate late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century capitalism, which are perpetually in states of such rapid digital flux that human actors find them almost impossible to conceptualise and narrativise.6 He

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6 Fredric Jameson, The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern (London and New York: Verso, 2009), pp. 136-139. Many novels, films and plays of the neoliberal period, from Martin Amis’s Money (1984) and Caryl Churchill’s Serious Money (1987) to Dennis Kelly’s Love and Money (2006) and John Lanchester’s Capital (2012), wrestle formally with the problems of how to represent financial neoliberalism, and indeed whether such representation is even possible, within a system predicated on our implied status as entrepreneurial, risk-managing, individual neoliberal subjects. However, just as financialisation long predates its neoliberal iteration, these epistemological/representational problems themselves have a long history. For a useful survey of visual artists’ changing attempts to figure finance, see Paul Crosswhaites, Peter Knight and Nicky Marsh (eds.), Show Me the Money: The Image of Finance, 1700 to the Present (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). The Line of Beauty explicitly contrasts two notable nineteenth-century literary engagements with an earlier financial expansion. Anthony Trollope sought to figure the paradoxes of finance – how it can be immaterial and ephemeral, and yet simultaneously thoroughly determine so many concrete aspects of economic and political life. The swindling financier Melmotte from Trollope’s The Way We Live Now (1875) argues that ‘Gentlemen who don’t know the nature of credit, how strong it is – as the air – to buoy you up; how slight it is – as a mere vapour – when roughly touched, can do an amount of mischief of which they themselves don’t in the least understand the extent!’ Yet he too is undone by unsustainable financial speculation and takes a swathe of the English aristocracy down with him. See Trollope, The Way We Live Now (London: Penguin Classics, 1994), p. 312. Henry James was less interested in figuring the mechanisms of finance itself, and instead, throughout his work, traced the transformative effects of what he called ‘the banking mystery’ on Anglo-American society and culture. See James, The Portrait of a Lady (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 38. In The Line of Beauty, in a telling exchange with the financier Lord Kessler, James aficionado and scholar Nick criticises Trollope for his stodgy prose and is politely rebuked that ‘Trollope’s [...] very good on money’, implying Nick’s ‘complete ignorance’ of the subject. (52) Nick instead identifies as a ‘James man’, signifying both a queer filiation and aesthete’s affiliation for that author’s detailed, impressionistic narration of the object world, and his ability to register the ways in which finance transforms perceptions of society and time: “People say he didn’t understand about money, but he certainly knew all about the effects of money, and the ways having money made people think.” [...] “He hated vulgarity,” he added. “But he also said that to call something vulgar was to fail to give a proper account of it.” (140) A significant strand of academic criticism of The Line of Beauty focuses on its relation to the legacies of James. See for example Dennis Flannery, ‘The Powers of Apostrophe and the Boundaries of Mourning: Henry James, Alan Hollinghurst and Toby Litt’, The Henry James Review 26.3 (Fall 2005), 293-305; Julie Rivkin, ‘Writing the Gay ‘80s with Henry James: David Leavitt’s A Place I’ve Never Been and Alan Hollinghurst’s The Line of Beauty’, The Henry James Review 26.3 (Fall 2005), 282-292; David James, ‘Integrity After Metaphiction’, Twentieth Century Literature 57.3 & 57.4 (Fall/Winter 2011), 492-515.
proposes that one way of figuring the seemingly invisible penetrations and mutations of capital in late capitalism is ‘as a kind of virus’. Nicky Marsh argues that these kinds of parallels were in fact drawn regularly in the 1980s – specifically between the HIV virus/AIDS crisis and the increasingly deregulated, dematerialized and dominant neoliberal financial system. On the one hand, ‘the [Thatcher] Government’s initial response to AIDS made it clear that its liberalism was strictly economic.’ On the other, viral analogies and metaphors became a means of registering ‘real fears about the changes in money itself’:

[T]he parallels between money and AIDS reflected anxieties about money as well as anxieties about permissive sexualities. The characteristics frequently attributed to a dematerialised money – its ability to self-generate, to move rapidly in vast amounts across vast distances, to adapt and mutate to new environments, to shed an identifiable physical form, were frequently equated with the newly fearsome languages of the viral.

However, The Line of Beauty's suggestive juxtaposition of compromised financial and bodily systems is not limited to viral metaphors. The financial crisis of Black Monday is likened to a ‘really old-fashioned laxative’, a purgative used to re-balance a system that cannot regulate its consumption, or to rapidly restrict or obsessively halt and reverse growth. Multiple parallels between consumption and excess in the economic system and in bodily systems are being suggested through such juxtapositions. Wani might repeatedly insist that the stock market ‘always recovers’, but the proximity of his atrophying, ‘gaunt and blotched’ (432) body complicates this stable, cyclical vision of a healthy financial futurity, always ‘bouncing back’ due to capitalist homeostasis. The manifest failure of one

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7 Jameson, The Cultural Turn, pp. 139-140.
9 Ibid.
10 Marsh, Money, Speculation and Finance in Contemporary British Fiction, p. 90.
complex, supposedly self-regulating system undermines confident ideological claims that seek to naturalise another. Instead, over lunch, Wani’s body, so different from the ‘hungry’ Treat and Brad’s, with its waning appetites and increasing inability to consume, seems to Nick to be imbued with a radical, even revelatory potential:

He ate very little, and a sense of disgust at the expensive food, and at himself for being unable to eat it, seeped into the conversation. He looked at the slivers of chicken and translucent courgettes as pitiful tokens of the world of pleasure, and clutched the table as though to resist a slow tug at the cloth that would sweep the whole vision away. (434)

Wani’s gaze demystifies the ‘translucent’, ‘expensive [...] world of pleasure’, seeing through the food and what these currency-like ‘tokens’ represent, as Nick perceives in his altered body a resisted potential to ‘sweep the whole vision’ of pleasure through consumption away.11 Yet Wani hasn’t always been the disruptive spectral body at the feast, with its ‘new possibilities of expression’ (432) inscribed through illness. Indeed, this young, queer, Lebanese, Eton-educated man is in many ways the archetypical Thatcherite consumer in the novel, and not just in his prodigious consumption and newly-acquired entrepreneurial family wealth.12 Wani reflects some of the profound discontinuities and tensions within Thatcherite ideology and the policies of the Thatcher governments, between acquisitive individualism and family values, between arch-conservatism and hyper-consumption, and between English nationalism and transnational capitalism. Wani is riven by the

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11 Wani’s gaze, with the critical potential posited here, should be compared with the design of the ironically-named restaurant ‘Gusto’ itself. As with other spaces in the novel, notably the postmodern Kesslers investment bank headquarters, Nick perceives the restaurant as superficially revealing the processes of production. In fact, it stages labour as an aestheticized spectacle: ‘Nick hoped Gusto would amuse them. He saw Treat watching the kitchen through the blue glass wall, which turned the chef and his sweating minions into a faintly erotic cabaret of hard work.’ (427)

12 Wani’s wealth comes from his authoritarian father Bertrand Ouradi, a Lebanese immigrant who founded a chain of convenience stores, the first of which opened in Finchley, North London. Margaret Thatcher, MP for Finchley from 1959-1992, was the daughter of Grocer Alfred Roberts, and is proudly claimed as a family friend of the Ouradis. Parallels are clearly being drawn between Wani and the ‘Grocer’s daughter’, but the differences between an inter-war Grantham Grocer and alderman and the multi-millionaire businessman who effectively purchases a peerage through donations to the Conservative Party are also suggestive.
irreconcilable demands to conform to socially conservative notions of ‘reproductive futurism’ on the one hand, and illicit, obsessive appetites for cocaine and sex with men who can be bought on the other – compulsions rendered even more pleasurable because they are ‘all done with money’. (216)\textsuperscript{13} After their meal, as Wani vomits in the restaurant toilets, Nick juxtaposes these past, financialised pleasures with Wani’s now fatally-compromised system:

He thought with a bleak hilarity that this was their most intimate moment for many months. He looked at the streaky black walls and found himself thinking of nights here the year before, both cubicles sometimes carelessly busy with the crackle of paper and the patter of credit card. There was a useful shiny ledge above the cistern, and they would go in turn. The nights sped by in unrememberable brilliance. “Well,” said Wani, grasping his stick and giving Nick a fearful smile, “no more parfait for Antoine.” (437)

The brilliant, ‘careless’ and ‘unrememberable’ temporality of 1986, represented by cocaine consumption, with its simultaneously stimulating and anaesthetising rhythms, is ‘no more.’\textsuperscript{14} Wani’s system, with its weakened heart following the latest ‘crisis’, would be unlikely to withstand another hit or shock. (490) In The Line of Beauty, the diegetic present of 1987 is defined by multiple crises of, and crises figured through, the queer male body, a disruptive spectacle that seems ‘both to focus and to repel attention’. (429)

This restaurant scene highlights the dynamics and problematicities that this chapter explores: the complex and uneasy metaphorical relation between bodily systems and socio-economic

\textsuperscript{13} In No Future: Queer Theory and the Death, Lee Edelman argues that politics, whether putatively conservative or radical, is structured by ‘reproductive futurism’, an intensely conservative fetishisation of the child and reproduction as ‘the embodiment of futurity’ (p. 10). Reproductive futurism thus functions as ‘the logic within which the political may be thought’ (p. 3); the abstracted Child is ‘the telos of the social order [...] the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust.’ (p. 11). Edelman suggests that queerness (which remains an ill-defined radical non-normativity in his account) has an inherent potential to undermine ‘reproductive futurism’ because of its embodiment of and identification with the non-progressive and anti-futurist death drive, a ‘radical threat’ that the homophobic Right understands better than progressive or liberal thinkers. (p. 13)

\textsuperscript{14} Cocaine’s relationship with futurity will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
systems in *The Line of Beauty*; the ways in which finance is suggested to be an unsustainable means of forestalling and evading knowledge of a terminal situation; and how hedonistic consumption has apparently inevitable future costs. This chapter argues that the novel narrates and historicises the Thatcherite 1980s and the emergence of British financial neoliberalism through queer bodies that experience and signify a profound crisis of futurity. Hollinghurst’s historical fiction is set between 1983 and 1987 – the boom period that saw a new world of financial deregulation and digital trading inaugurated by the ‘Big Bang’ and the widespread rollout of privatization: the selling of publically-owned utilities, infrastructure and companies into private hands (or, from a Thatcherite point-of-view, from state-owned companies into public shareholders’ hands). Book-ended by the decisive election victories of 1983 and 1987, this is the period that Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders argue represents ‘high Thatcherism’.15 These radical transformations in the ‘economic landscape’ – the material and ideological terrain that defines the possibilities of political economy and establishes a sense of irreversibility – persist into the twenty-first-century.16 The novel follows the middle-class Oxford graduate and aesthete Nick Guest’s movement through the gilded worlds of the Fedden and Kessler families, who occupy elite positions in the Thatcher government, aristocracy and the City. *The Line of Beauty* does not seek to represent realistically the complex political and institutional mechanics of financial

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16 Richard Vinen argues that ‘privatized companies were never popular; rather, like nationalized companies in the 1960s and 1970s, they were simply accepted as part of the economic landscape. The Conservatives had not so much won the argument as persuaded the British people that there was no argument to be had.’ See Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), p. 299. Vinen also argues that, despite the mythologised ‘talk about the role of “barrow boys” and cockney dealers’, in reality ‘it was members of the established upper-middle class who were the big winners from the prosperity of the City.’ (191) For an in-depth analysis of ‘popular capitalism’ in the period, see Amy Edwards, “Financial Consumerism”: citizenship, consumerism and capital ownership in the 1980s’, *Contemporary British History* 31.2 ‘New Times Revisited: British in the 1980s’ (2017), 210-229. Even Charles Moore, in his very optimistic analysis of Thatcher’s deregulation and privatization, acknowledges that the Big Bang ‘contributed to the disaster of the credit crunch in 2008.’ See Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Volume II: Everything She Wants* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), p. 220.
neoliberalism; nor does the novel reflexively problematize the possibility of such representation through metafictional or other experimental forms. Instead, it figures economic processes such as financialisation and the proliferation of hyper-consumption through the body, specifically the queer male body: through sensation, pleasure, consumption and crisis. This embodied economics does not make abstract socio-economic formations neatly legible. However, through the novel's supple, impressionistic narration, it suggests that historical transformations are affective as well as institutional or political, offering a sensory history of change-over-time from an elite point-of-view. Finance increasingly shapes the cultural imaginary of the economically clueless Nick and those around him: it contours their experiences of time, the way they conceptualise pleasure and their increasingly manic consumption, notably of cocaine and sex. Furthermore, the novel explores financial neoliberalism through metaphors of bodily systems and processes, juxtaposing two different risk economies – neoliberal finance and the growing AIDS crisis. Nicky Marsh argues that *The Line of Beauty* contrasts the ‘two kinds of risk that AIDS and money proffered in the eighties’ in order ‘to demonstrate the vapidity of the parallel between the two.’

Marsh is astute in her analysis that the novel highlights the Thatcher government’s paradoxical attitudes to economic and social liberalism through its differing treatment of the AIDS crisis and financialisation. Ultimately, she argues, the ‘viral capacities of the money economy and AIDS are shown to have devastatingly antithetical consequences: money’s contaminating auto-generative capacities are shown to protect its community (especially through financial crises) whilst for those with AIDS the opposite is morbidly true.’

*The Line of Beauty* contrasts the immediate outcomes of AIDS and financial crisis and scandal through opposing vulnerable, compromised queer bodies and the seeming resilience of a heteronormative Conservative elite.

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However, I argue in this chapter that the relationship between these two ‘risk economies’ is more complex, and less oppositional, than Marsh acknowledges. The metaphorical continuities between AIDS, finance and consumption in the novel are far from vapid. By intercutting failing markets with non-reproductive queer male bodies who are unable to consume due to the ravages of HIV, the novel demonstrates a profound ambivalence about the sustainability of the neoliberal settlement, years before the 2008 crisis. In doing so, it undermines ideologies of the market as a natural, self-regulating system: the so-called ‘Darwinian economy’ in which regulation stifles ‘biodiversity’ in business and the processes of economic ‘natural selection’, to quote the historian Niall Ferguson. Instead, through its persistent imbrication of finance with futurelessness and fatality, The Line of Beauty figures late capitalism as persistently haunted by the threat of systemic dissolution, hinting at natural limits to (and damaging contradictions within) the forms of consumption that structure it.

**Bodily permeabilities**

How will this chapter theorise the body and its systems as metaphors and as a locus of perceptual, affective histories? Judith Butler, building on the work of Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), suggests that cultures often deploy figures and metaphors of the body to conceptualise and to police social systems. If social systems (or, given this chapter's focus, *bodies politic*) are vulnerable ‘at

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19 See Niall Ferguson, *The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die* (London: Penguin, 2014), especially his chapter on the ‘Darwinian economy’ (with financial regulation less good animal husbandry and more stifling ‘biodiversity’ and ‘survival of the fittest’). What do economies and evolutionary systems have in common, Ferguson asks? “‘[G]enes,” in the sense that certain features of corporate culture perform the same role as genes in biology, allowing information to be stored in the “organizational memory” and passed on from individual to individual or from firm to firm when a new firm is created; - the potential for spontaneous “mutation”, usually referred to in the economic world as innovation and primarily, though by no means always, technological; - competition between individuals within a species for resources, with the outcomes in terms of longevity and proliferation determining which business practices persist; - a mechanism for natural selection through the market allocation of capital and human resources and the possibility of death in cases of under-performance – that is, “differential survival”; - scope for speculation, sustaining biodiversity through the creation of wholly new “species” of financial institutions; - scope for extinction, with certain species dying out altogether.’ (p. 64)
their margins’, and ‘all margins are accordingly considered dangerous’, then Butler argues that male queer bodies often function as a focal point for anxieties about ‘unregulated’, penetrable, uncontrollable systems:

If the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS.  

Butler’s arguments about social systems can, I argue, also be used to talk about economic systems. In *The Line of Beauty*, the ‘unregulated [...] bodily permeabilities’ of the supposedly marginal queer male body are a means of figuring a neoliberal financial system that is itself increasingly ‘unregulated’ and in which established spatial and socio-political boundaries are rendered permeable and penetrable by capital flows. The novel does not endorse the homophobic signification of the dangerous queer body. Rather, it enacts and explores these existing cultural anxieties, tracing continuities between queer experiences (a target of sustained opprobrium by many Thatcherites, although much more compatible with later iterations of neoliberalism) and the ‘freedoms’ and pleasures offered by the de- or re-regulated market, that the Thatcher governments enthusiastically embraced. One ‘unregulated [...] permeability’ is licensed; the other is discriminated and legislated against. These continuities and hypocrisies are visible in *The Line of Beauty* when AIDS is finally explicitly discussed during a tense foreign holiday, late in 1986. The asset-stripping financier Maurice Tipper frames the crisis as an inevitable moral rebalancing of a system

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doomed by excess: “I just don’t see why anyone’s remotely surprised. The whole thing had got completely out of hand. They had it coming to them.” (390) During the discussion, the closeted Wani is ‘screened above the knees by the raised pink broadsheet with its headlines about record share prices, record house prices. From time to time he smacked the page flat.’ (337) Wani may be ‘screened’ from this awkward discussion by the patina of business, and by his smoothly hypocritical embrace of ‘family values’, but a financial system itself defined by excess and the consistent breaching of established limits, codes and norms looks less self-evidently stable in the uneasy historical atmosphere.

Wayne Koestenbaum, in a fragmentary autobiographical essay meditating on his American 1980s, positions the AIDS crisis as an intensely personal and embodied crisis of futurity: ‘I was not thinking about the world. I was not thinking about history. I was thinking about my body’s small, precise, limited, hungry movement into a future that seemed at every instant on the verge of being shut down.’ This was the era when AIDS represented an immanent ‘death sentence’, before the pharmaceutical breakthroughs of the mid-1990s when ‘the invention of the AIDS cocktail [...] turned fated life back into an ellipsis.’ Koestenbaum’s conception of hungry queer bodies moving towards a future defined by precarity and the possibility of immanent annihilation mirrors elements of the structure of The Line of Beauty. However, in Hollinghurst’s novel, the relationship between ‘the world’, ‘history’ and the body is more porous than Koestenbaum’s formulation suggests, and not only because the AIDS crisis was itself a product not only of the HIV virus but also of discursive political and historical forces. The novel juxtaposes crises of markets, bodies and consumption without

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22 Koestenbaum, My 1980s and other essays, p. 11. Kostenbaum's essay also suggests an interrelationship between cocaine and AIDS in collective memory of the decade: This morning I asked my boyfriend, an architect, about the 1980s. I said, "Let’s make a list of salient features of our eighties." We came up with just two items: cocaine, AIDS. (p. 5)


24 See, for example, Susan Sontag, AIDS and its Metaphors (London: Allen Lane, 1989), pp. 76-78, and Leo Bersani, ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?, October Vol. 43, ‘AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism’ (Winter 1987), 197-222. This chapter has been informed by Bersani’s related argument that the ‘ideological body’ is a crucial object of critique: ‘An authentic gay male political identity therefore implies a struggle not only against definitions of maleness and of homosexuality as they are
forcing a straightforward analogy. It goes beyond the genres of vanitas or memento mori to gesture towards a structural crisis in futurity in its historicisation of the unfolding Thatcherite 1980s. As in Tony Kushner’s Angels in America, wider articulations of ‘stasis’ and ‘the End’ are ‘written’ ‘on’, ‘in’ and through the ‘blood’ of queer men.  

The financialised imaginary

Lee Edelman positions queerness as a radical opposition to what he terms ‘the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism.’ Edelman’s metaphor conflates an unsustainable/fraudulent financial system designed to enrich elites at the expense of ‘ordinary’ investors and based on myths of unsustainable future returns, with heteronormative systems of futurity and social reproduction. Edelman’s proposition underlies this chapter’s specific focus on the relationship between queer bodies, finance and crises of unsustainable futures, and it is also an example of the importance of finance as a metaphor. Finance is not just an economic mode or process, but a means of figuring historical, temporal and moral relationships and processes. Edelman and The Line of Beauty are not alone in metaphorically associating finance with fatality and futurelessness. Fergusson acknowledges that from the early days of Judeo-Christian civilisation there has been ‘a recurrent hostility to finance and financiers, rooted in the ideas that those who make their living from lending money are somehow parasitical on the “real” economic activities of agriculture and manufacturing’ even as he argues that in fact ‘money is the root of most progress. [The] ascent of money has been essential to the ascent of man.’ Fergusson’s account is at pains to both historicise and naturalise finance, arguing that any financial problems or crises simply ‘reflect’ flaws in human nature: ‘markets are like the mirror of mankind, revealing every hour of every

reiterated and imposed in a heterosexist social discourse, but also against those very definitions so seductively and so faithfully reflected by those (in large part culturally invented and elaborated) male bodies that we carry within us as permanently renewable sources of excitement.’ (p. 209).


Edelman, No Future, p. 4.

working day the way we value ourselves and the resources of the world around us. It is not the fault of the mirror if it reflects our blemishes as clearly as our beauty.'

However, the naturalised concept of a ‘Darwinian economy’ that mirrors so-called ‘human nature’ is suspect on many levels. Friedrich Hayek argues that rather than capitalist thinkers appropriating Darwinian discourses of evolutionary competition to naturalise economic systems, nineteenth-century Darwinian discourses themselves were in fact shaped and articulated through the economic language and metaphors of eighteenth-century philosophers such as Adam Smith. These thinkers provided ‘the intellectual tools which Darwin and his contemporaries were able to apply to biological evolution.’

Clearly then, just as processes of financialisation are nothing new, the metaphoricity of market economics has a long and complex history. However, within neoliberal capitalism, the financialised imaginary is increasingly pervasive. As Leigh Claire La Berge argues, from the 1980s onwards, more than ever before, ‘economic signification is derived in large part through the representation of finance.’ La Berge argues that this ‘ascension of finance to a site of representational dominance’ is linked to the precarious contemporary experience of socio-economic life: ‘[w]hen “the economy” is represented by “the stock market,” when access to “the future” is represented by credit and loans, the great majority of us [...] should

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28 Fergusson, The Ascent of Money, p. 362. This quotation is uncritically reproduced as the conclusion to Katy Shaw’s Crunch Lit (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 163.
29 The economic historian Ha-Joon Chang is highly critical of the ways in which markets are naturalised in capitalist ideology (and historiography), arguing that selective protectionism and state control played a key role in capitalist development, with supposedly unregulated ‘free’ market forces being then imposed on colonial and postcolonial nations to the benefit of existing national and international elites. See Chang, Economics: The User’s Guide (London: Pelican Books, 2014), pp. 47-107.
understand their present as a precarious situation.' If fantasies of futurity, and of past-present-future relations, unfold within financial logics, then ‘access’ to the future is not only highly selective, but rooted in a volatile system structured by recurrent crisis.

Links between finance and imperilled experiences of futurity are not cultural myth-making, as Marxist historian of the longue durée Giovanni Arrighi makes clear. Developing Fernand Braudel’s argument in Civilisation and Capitalism that financial expansions are ‘a sign of Autumn’ for historical regimes of accumulation, Arrighi argues that finance in this way offers a short-term reversal of fortune for a hegemon that has reached the natural limits of profitability through material expansion:

[T]he financial expansion that came to characterize the global economy in the closing decades of the twentieth century was not a new phenomenon but a recurrent tendency of historical capitalism from its earliest beginnings [...] Although financialization enables its promoters and organizers to prolong their leadership in the world economy, historically it has always been the prelude to the terminal crisis of the dominant regime of accumulation, that is, to its collapse and supersession by a new regime. [...] Through successive reorganizations of this kind, capitalism moved to global dominion and progressively gained in reach and penetration.

Arrighi posits a recurrent and causal relationship between financial expansion and ‘terminal crisis,’ offering a material grounding for the cultural association between finance and fatality. This analysis also offers the kernel of a historical basis for conceptions of decadence, which posit a causal relationship between an ill-defined (and often moralistic)

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32 La Berge, Scandals and Abstraction, pp. 4-5.
conception of 'excessive' wealth/consumption and a society's imminent decline. Mirroring the long history of antipathy towards finance outlined by Fergusson, narratives of decadence shape historical events into an underlying law: unproductive economic relations, often conflated with un-reproductive or queer socio-sexual relations, are systemically unsustainable.

A contemporary literary example of the ways in which queer bodies and models of decadence can be combined to narrate and shape the history of neoliberalism, and of the problematics bound up with the financialised imaginary, comes in Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002). This text transposes Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) from the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* to the 1980s and 1990s, with late twentieth century history figured through metaphors of gay and queer subcultural decadence. Hedonistic hyper-consumption of narcotics and bodies is simultaneously causally linked to, and a means of retreating from, immanent historical and socio-economic crisis: 'No one's suggesting that you stop dissipating yourself for one minute [...] The IMF are being called into Rome – fiddle on.' Henry Wotton's *bon mot* – 'Who gives a shit about being too decadent, when to be contemporary is to be absolutely so' – encapsulates the novel’s presentation of decadence as emblematic of the 1980s and roaring 1990s. It also gestures towards the ahistorical temporality of decadence, specifically its association with a quasi-postmodern perpetual present that anaesthetises the influence and awareness of history.

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36 *The Line of Beauty* persistently uses bodily metaphors to intimate that financial injections may have damaging longer-term effects. Wani describes the marriage between a 'cripple[d]' aristocrat with 'a twisted spine and a crumbling castle' and a middle-class heiress whose family company's 'vinegar fortune had come in very handy.' (8) At the meal with Treat and Brad, Wani describes the marriage as 'a life-saving transfusion of vinegar', and Nick reads 'a trace of cruelty in the remark, against himself and thus obscurely against them.' (430)


38 Self, *Dorian*, p. 59.
and futurity through consumption and apparently ‘excessive’ pleasure. AIDS is the embodiment of this crisis, and the apparent cost of decadence. The ‘disease du jour’ is the temporal and eschatological force arrested by Dorian’s ‘portrait’, a video installation named *Cathode Narcissus*; the virus literalises the asymptomatic Dorian’s ‘corrupting’ effect on others as he deliberately infects unsuspecting sexual partners; and it even functions as an extended metaphor for the ‘transmission’ of the social and cultural values forged in the early 1980s throughout the course of that decade and beyond. Critics have suggested that Wilde’s Dorian is not just arresting time and the effects of ageing, reading the descriptions of the corrupted figure in the painting as connoting the effects of syphilis.39 Part One of the novel, set in the summer of 1981, and including both Dorian’s ‘immortalization’ in analogue and infection with HIV during a ‘conga line of buggery’, is titled ‘Recordings’; Part Two, ‘Transmission’, narrates events between 1981 and 1991; Part Three, ‘Network’, explores the early to mid 1990s.40 The narrative of production, reception and spreading consolidation intimated by this structure functions as a metaphor in a number of ways: for HIV infection and the spread of AIDS; for the interrelated trajectories of the artwork *Cathode Narcissus* and its subject Dorian Gray; and for the dissemination and consolidation of neoliberalism, paradigms of hyper-consumption and postmodern culture in the Global North through the last decades of the twentieth century. While the politics of Thatcherism are not addressed explicitly, the summer of 1981, with its incongruous juxtaposition of the Toxteth and Brixton riots and the wedding of Diana Spencer and the Prince of Wales, is described as the moment that ‘Britain was in the process of burning most of its remaining illusions.’41 In *Dorian: An Imitation*, a dying Henry Wotton figures the relation between AIDS and futurity in a telling fusion of moral and financial registers:

40 Self, *Dorian*, p. 69.  
41 Self, *Dorian*, p. 36.
In truth, Henry Wotton had always understood – at an intuitive, cellular level – that drug addiction and sexual obsession, besides being ways of making time’s amorphousness measurable, were also methods of amortising the future. That for each minute or hour or day or week of abandonment purchased *now*, you would have to pay *later*. Pay with physical dissolution and mental disintegration. On this actuarial basis alone it did not surprise him in the least to wind up dead at forty.

Amortisation has multiple meanings. It is a financial transaction that involves writing off a debt or an asset’s value over time, as in a mortgage; it is the process of transferring property into the control of a corporation, or *alienating it in mortmain*; it also signifies, as the French and vulgar Latin *mort* at the core of the word suggests, death and dissolution: the OED’s first definition for amortise is ‘to deaden, render as if dead, destroy.’ For Wotton, to amortise the future is thus both to mortgage it, in the sense of an asset owned by a subject being financialised and realised in ready cash in the present at the expense of future debt and forfeiture, and in so doing also to destroy it. Finance is figured in Faustian terms, and the currency being deployed in this ‘actuarial’ temporal transaction is pleasure. Wotton declares earlier in the novel that ‘Pleasure is nature’s credit rating.’ As evidenced by the slippery use of the terms ‘amortisement’, ‘credit’ and ‘mortgage’ above, the novel does not advance a precise or coherent metaphorical economy of pleasure. However, by consistently deploying financial terms and tropes to describe the relationship between pleasure, consumption and AIDS, it suggests their implication in systems of excess, debt and repayment. The pleasure offered by sex and narcotics is both a means of escaping time – pursuing ‘abandonment’ – and organising it. However, pleasures that are not controlled or

44 Self, *Dorian*, p. 59
proportionate, or that trouble concepts of rational action and the sovereign subject, such as 'addiction' and 'obsession'; that are excessive in relation to some unspoken limit; that are non-normative or non-productive, will cost a subject their life. The 'wages of sin' are realised at the 'intuitive, cellular level', taking the form of HIV and then AIDS, visiting upon the subject the premature and painful 'disintegration' and 'dissolution' of their body: the site of pleasure and consumption, and of their 'hungry movement' towards the future. In Dorian: An Imitation, then, historicity is produced according to mutually reinforcing capitalist and conservative moralistic logics. Queer pleasures are purchased at the expense of the future; AIDS sufferers are therefore 'living on mortgaged time'; subjects eventually, inevitably, have to pay for their pleasure/sin. The novel figures queer subjects and subcultures and AIDS through this metaphorical trajectory, even as those supposedly marginal subjects and subcultures exemplify increasingly hegemonic aspects of neoliberal socio-economic life.

In The Line of Beauty, the Thatcherite 1980s are the focus, and the relationship between finance and futurity is both less hyperbolically presented and subject to a greater possibility of critique because it is historicised. Readers are able to perceive the development of financialised conceptions and experiences of time in Nick Guest, which unfold in relation to historical and political processes. Nevertheless, does the novel’s juxtaposition of AIDS,

45 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Romans 6:23; Koestenbaum, My 1980s, p. 11.
46 In a typically postmodern manoeuvre for Self, the novel features an epilogue that positions most of the novel to be Wotton’s roman a clef, making it even more important than ever not to uncomplicatedly conflate Wotton’s satirical point of view in this passage with a stable sense of the novel’s politics. However, Dorian is a novel structured by tacit homophobia, narrow class politics, and a prurient indictment of queer sexual hedonism that divorces sex from social, economic and historical contexts as well as politics and pleasure. David Alderson analyses Dorian and Self’s 2002 article ‘The Love That Will Not Shut Up’ in ‘“Not everyone knows fuck all about Foucault”: Will Self’s Dorian and Post-Gay Culture’, Textual Practice 19.3 (2005), 309-329. Alderson is particularly critical of Self’s confused moralism regarding AIDS and his problematic critique of gay subcultures and identity politics: ‘Self may claim that he thinks sexuality should be about doing rather than being, but he still positions himself as “straight” and his writing provides new ways of defining the alterity of gay men even as he suggests that the ways in which they have defined themselves as different are delusional. If this is the future, we may have been here before.’ (pp. 326-327)
financialisation and excess contain shadows of the eschatology and moralism that structures Dorian? How does AIDS – which destabilises the male bodies that represent Nick’s sexual and romantic imagined futures, making them simultaneously aged and childlike, embodying a decaying and non-reproductive future – relate to the novel’s wider senses of history and historicity? To what extent is the 1980s produced in this twenty-first-century historical fiction as a period of multiple, intersecting ends-of-history? These questions and theoretical contexts underlie this chapter’s ongoing analysis of The Line of Beauty.

Shaping the 1980s: reprise and the ‘light of the moment’

During a party at which the long-anticipated visit of Margaret Thatcher finally takes place, Nick Guest imagines (and aestheticises) himself ‘smiling down like an eye-catching unnamed attendant in a history painting.’ (375) Nick’s peripheral position is central to the novel’s narration. A middle-class man lodging in an upper class-household, a gay man amid an ‘efficiently reproductive’ Conservative elite (64), an intellectual and an aesthete in a wealthy milieu that sees art more in terms of its insurance valuation (361): Nick is an ‘odd man’ in this environment in multiple senses, with a position and license that is precarious from the beginning. Yet, recalling Charles Ryder in Evelyn Waugh’s Brideshead Revisited (1945), Nick Carraway in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby (1925) and William Guest in William Morris’s utopian News from Nowhere (1890), this liminal relation allows for crucial critical distance. The Feddens and Kesslers have ‘the fortune not to describe but to enjoy’ (47) their richly lush and privileged environment; Nick by contrast revels in the registering and description of impressions, of art, spaces, objects and sensations, ‘smiling widely while

48 Perhaps the clearest metaphor of Nick’s position in the Fedden household, a precarious ‘careful pretence of equality’ (23), is their gift of French aftershave ‘Je Promets.’ Wearing a family hand-me-down suit to an upper class twenty-first birthday party, Nick notes with alarm ‘a sharp stale smell, the re-awoken ghost of numberless long-ago dinner-dances in Lincolnshire hotels’, then douses himself with ‘Je Promets in the hope of delaying and complicating the effect.’ (60) The scent, and the promise from the Feddens that it represents, fades. Years later, meeting Thatcher, he is again wearing it. (380)
his eyes darted critically, admiringly – he didn’t know what’ over the world of the Thatcherite elite. (47) Adam Roberts argues that The Line of Beauty resists any neat political categorisation or reading, in large part due to this structuring ambivalence of Nick’s focalisation and point-of-view.49 However, the ways in which the novel presents Nick’s keen impressionism (and the telling elisions in what he perceives) as mutable and historically/ culturally contingent, shapes the events of the 1980s and offers critical perspectives on the period.50

49 Adam Roberts, ‘Ogee: The Line of Beauty’, in Sex and Sensibility in the Novels of Alan Hollinghurst, ed. by Mark Mathuray (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 111-128, (pp. 111-114). Hollinghurst’s work has long been read as defined by a reflexive awareness of its complicated relationship to the act of political critique. John McLeod argues that ‘The Swimming-Pool Library cannot fully uncouple itself from the prejudicial milieu it seeks critically to expose’: see McLeod, ‘Race, empire and The Swimming Pool-Library’ in Alan Hollinghurst: Writing Under the Influence, ed. by Michèle Mendelsohn and Denis Flannery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 60-78, (p. 74). Geoff Gilbert, by contrast, makes a convincing claim that The Line of Beauty’s meticulous and materialistic style is bound up with more explicitly critical impulses: ‘Of course I crave Gerald Fedden’s beautiful home, which is delightful and comfortable, filled with objects on which skilled labour has been lavished, and through the gorgeous quiddity of which we can imagine the redemption of that labour. These are things we should all have together: the problem is not in the having of beautiful things, but that the fact of value thrusts them out into a realm where I can only wish for them impartently. This is the topic of Hollinghurst’s novel: political economy rather than morality is its field; its affect and its modal instability derive from the heavy presence of that barrier in value.’ See Gilbert, ‘Some properties of fiction: value and fantasy in Hollinghurst’s house of fiction’, in Alan Hollinghurst: Writing Under the Influence, ed. by Michèle Mendelsohn and Denis Flannery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 125-140 (pp. 133-134).

David James, in his analysis of *The Line of Beauty*'s contemporary engagement with the impressionistic and Modernist aesthetic of Henry James, argues that Hollinghurst does not 'try simply to emulate or pastiche [these] audacious lessons in form' but is instead engaged in the distinctive 'genre of reprise':

At the heart of a reprise, as it affects the construction of a musical movement or literary episode, is a two-stage process whereby an initial phrase (or in the case of fiction, a recurring object or register of perception) is repeated in a way that transforms it. With respect to the novel, a reprise's characteristic sense [is] adaptation-as-regeneration allows us to account for the fact that Hollinghurst doesn't intend to be impressionistic [...] Instead he adopts but also revivifies key aspects of fictional Impressionism as they inform rhetorical and structural aspects of his own narrative.51

Given Hollinghurst's persistent attention to music and the musical within the diegetic worlds of his novels, and as structural metaphors for their organisation, James's invocation of reprise is apt. I consider reprise here not in terms of the text's contemporary working through of Jamesian modes, but of its subtle figuration of historical change over time: the ways in which motifs, situations, spaces and crucially bodies, are perceived, experienced and recalled differently in the three distinct diegetic presents of 1983, 1986 and 1987 that structure the novel.52 These textual presents are presented less in terms of chronological or historical progression and more as shifting, unfolding affective atmospheres. Throughout the novel, subjects and objects 'gleam' (412) with the reflected, mutable 'light of the moment.' (501) In 1983, as Nick encounters waiters at a country-house party, and remembers previous summers in which he did the same job, we are told that 'the glare was

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51 James, 'Integrity After Metafiction', pp. 496-497.
52 In many ways, the tripartite structure of the novel mirrors the tripartite historical schemata of the decade. Jackson and Saunders for instance divided their analysis of the 1980s into three sections, loosely organised around the three Thatcher governments: 'back from the brink', then 'high Thatcherism', followed by 'decline and fall'. See Jackson and Saunders, 'Introduction: Varieties of Thatcherism', pp. 5-8.
bright and unsentimental here. No enriching glow of candles or picture lights.’ (82). Wani’s postmodern flat, at the height of his excess in 1986, is perceived through the ‘peculiarly gilding light of the lamps’ (200), while one year later, ‘in the remorseless glare’ of AIDS, the same ‘flat looked even more tawdry and pretentious.’ (409) The novel figures unfolding transformations in the very ‘feeling of being historical, [...] a converging unity of experience in an ongoing moment that could later be called epochal but at that time marked a shared nervous system.’\textsuperscript{53} We observe the ways in which perception changes over time and evaluate the effects of historical and socio-economic changes, how they are embodied and internalised. Historical and political transformations are presented as structures of feeling that determine Nick’s interactions with the world, the precise economic detail of which Nick never truly grasps: “...[S]ince we’re all feeling a little light-headed...” Something called the Big Bang had just happened, Nick didn’t fully understand what it meant, but everyone with money seemed highly exhilarated, and he had a suspicion he was going to benefit from it too.’ (361-362) Here, socio-economic change is something \textit{felt}, perceived through embodied experience, rather than rationally comprehended.

Some examples of \textit{reprise} in the novel illustrate changes in Nick that are not \textit{historically}-inflected. In 1983, Nick admires Rachel Fedden’s ‘style, [...] a code both aristocratic and foreign. Her group sounded nearly Germanic, and the sort of thing she would never belong to; her \textit{philistine}, pronounced as a French word, seemed to cover, by implication, anyone who said it differently.’ (8) After the novel jumps from 1983 to 1986, Nick has taken on this ‘code’, emphasising the distance between his life with the Feddens and his own family: “‘Don’t pretend to be a philistine, Dad,” said Nick, and saw him unable to separate the praise from the reproach; the French pronunciation of \textit{philistine} didn’t help.’ (279) No third-person narrator explicitly links these two fleeting moments or makes a didactic point about Nick’s

absorption with (and desire to be absorbed into) an upper-class surrogate family. Instead, the text subtly enacts a 'two-stage process whereby an initial [...] recurring object or register of perception is repeated in a way that transforms it.' An attentive reader can perceive change-over-time in ways that Nick, immersed in his diegetic historical present, seems unable to. However, other examples of reprise suggest transformations that are more clearly bound-up with socio-economic change. Nick experiences love and desire for his first boyfriend Leo as a transformatively violent and pleasurable 'love chord', 'high and low at once, an abysmal pizzicato, a pounce of the darkest brass, and above it a hair-raising sheen of strings. It seemed to knock him down and fling him up all in one resisted gesture.' (138)

By 1986, the same metaphor is used to describe the transformative power of Wani's money: ‘They were one of a thousand car-loads of easy wealth that roared and fluttered round London, knocking things down and flinging things up.’ (196) Nick's capacity to be remade by experiences of sexual pleasure is juxtaposed with the capacity of capital to radically remake the urban environment. A simpler opposition, and sense of historical change, is also suggested here: between love and money.

Architecture is a key metaphor in the novel and offers examples of both reprise and the relationship between finance and history. Nick's own 'sense of history' is aesthetic and architectural, 'a useful image [...] of the centuries like rooms in enfilade.' (234) An enfilade is a long sequence of rooms whose doorways align precisely to provide an unbroken vista from one end to the other. It is an architectural feature most commonly found in palaces

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54 James, ‘Integrity After Metafiction’, pp. 496-497. Alderson argues that The Line of Beauty 'highlight[s] the symbolic resonances [of things] in their particularity'; 'they share in the topicality of characters; they assist, indeed, in establishing it.' See Alderson, 'Attachment and Possession', p. 135. This description is astute, but it is also important to emphasise the fact that the changes in Nick's perception of and interaction with things destabilise the concept of a singular 'particularity.'

55 A traffic jam in 1983 is just one example of these spatial metaphors. Stuck in 'a long unimpressable tailback, as you did everywhere these days', Nick observes that 'they were taking out the last old roundabouts and traffic lights and forcing an unimpeded freeway across the scruffy flat semi-country', a spectacle of 'stationary' subjects stuck 'on the motorway of the future.' (46) Neoliberal economics are presented here as an American path 'forced' onto ill-suited terrain, with possibilities for progression and movement delimited.
and palatial metropolitan art galleries.\textsuperscript{56} For Nick, history is a linear sequence of periods defined by artistic movements and aesthetic modes: history is a matter of style, or a succession of styles defined by aristocratic and elite cultural production, the domain of the consumer and the connoisseur, a fantasy denuded of contradiction and conflict. However, the architecture of finance capitalism disrupts this stable figuration of history. Hawkeswood, the late-Victorian seat of the Kessler family (clearly modelled on the Rothschilds’ Waddesdon Manor) is described as ‘a strange and seductive fusion of an art museum and a luxury hotel’ (48), an ahistorical bricolage with its ‘High Victorian wealth of everything’ (51), ‘a giant chimneypiece made from bits of a baroque tomb’, ‘rococo boiseries that had been removed wholesale from some grand Parisian townhouse [...]. It was one of those moments that only the rich could create.’ (48) Historical objects are wrenched out of context and re-composed in a ‘seventeenth-century château re-imagined in terms of luxurious modernity’ on an ‘artificially flattened hilltop in the Buckinghamshire beech woods, which had grown to hide all but its topmost spirelets from outside view’ (48); ‘[n]ow the house seemed settled and seasoned, a century old with its own historic light and odour, but then it was ostentatiously new.’ (54) The long-since naturalised style of late nineteenth-century finance capitalism is presented as a kind of proto-postmodernism. Just as David Kynaston argues that the Big Bang of 1986 itself was a deliberate ‘reprise’ of the City’s pre-World War I ‘Golden Age’, Wani’s flat in 1986 reprises Hawkeswood’s ahistorical style.\textsuperscript{57} Nick again likens this ‘private space’ to a ‘swanky hotel; just as such hotels flattered their customers by being vulgar simulacra of lavish private homes.’ (409) Wani’s ‘pleasure in the place was above all that of having had something expensive done for him’:

\textsuperscript{56} Notable examples include the Baroque palaces of Versailles, Hampton Court and Blenheim, as well as nineteenth-century art complexes like the National Gallery and the Palace of Westminster in London.

On the ground floor was the glinting open-plan Ogee office, and on the two upper floors a flat that was full of eclectic features, lime-wood pediments, coloured glass, surprising apertures; the Gothic bedroom had an Egyptian bathroom. The high tech of the office, [the architects] seemed to say, was less the logic of the future than another style in their post-modern repertoire. (199)

The ahistorical postmodernism of Wani’s office and home nullifies a ‘logic of the future’, again associating financial speculation with an absence of meaningful futurity and suggesting a longer and more complex genealogy for the economic transformations of the mid-1980s than simply the actions of the Thatcher governments. And this postmodern space is one defined by reprise and repetition in other senses: it is the setting for the cyclical consumption of pornography (the ‘real deep template for [Wani’s] life’ [353], that disaggregates male bodies into fragmented stimuli, ‘unattributable organs and orifices at work in a spectrum of orange, pink, and purple [...] the actors grunted their binary code – yeah... oh yeah, oh yeah... yeah... oh... yeah, yeah... oh yeah...’ [484]) and, crucially for this chapter’s focus on the queer male body as a figure for socio-economic and historical processes, the consumption of cocaine.

_Cocaine economics_

Cocaine consumption is a central metaphor in the _Line of Beauty_ for the effects of finance. Like the hollow of a male back leading into the curve of the buttocks, lines of coke are one of the ‘lines of beauty’ that function as an ‘animating principle’ for the text: late twentieth-century updates of Hogarth’s aim to define the aesthetically perfect form. (225) And like the ‘promise’ that Nick sees in the male body, this drug is a pleasure that is bound up with fatalism: ‘the irresistible curve of hope, and its hollow inversion.’ (174) In the 1983 section of the novel, Nick sees Brian de Palma’s _Scarface_, and is shocked by the film’s ‘opulent and soulless’ presentation of cocaine: ‘[t]he drug was money and power and addiction – a young blonde actress in the film snorted joyless volumes of it.’ (168) Tony Montana dies ‘a slave at
last to his own instrument of power’, once again suggesting Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ description of human agents’ lack of control over the forces of contemporary capitalism, likened to ‘the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells’. Just pages later, the book jumps forward three years to 1986, and Nick is a regular user of what he calls ‘fine white fuses of pleasure.’ (198)

Cocaine produces possibility: ‘Anything seemed possible – the world was not only doable, conquerable, but lovable: it showed its weaknesses and you knew it would submit to you.’ (256-257). Cut with credit cards and snorted through banknotes, cocaine is ‘all done with money’, but the associations with finance go beyond the mechanics of its consumption. (216) Nick perceives its effects through financial metaphors, albeit of the schoolboy variety: ‘Nick loved the way the coke took off the blur of champagne, claret, Sauternes, and more champagne. It totted up the points and carried them over as credit in a new account of pleasure. It brought clarity, like a cure – almost, at first, like sobriety.’ (377-378)

The ‘almost’ is vital. The ‘cure’ is illusory – the effect of a short-term boost that inevitably grows ‘patchy and dubious. In four or five minutes it would yield to a flatness bleaker than the one it had replaced.’ (223) This temporality evokes Arrighi’s model of finance characterised historically by a short-term restoration of a tottering hegemon, but which in fact signals a slow unravelling of their ‘regime of accumulation.’ Eventually, finance is fatal. It also fits with the motif of decadence followed by decline and dissolution, which, as I argued earlier, is a common means of shaping and emplotting historical processes. As 1986 climaxes in The Line of Beauty with a party at the Feddens’ graced by Thatcher herself, there is an air of a

58 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 41. Scarface suggests that cocaine produces an illusory feeling of ‘possibility’. Montana’s mansion centres on a sculpture of a globe emblazoned with the neon slogan ‘The World is Yours’. The hubris of this ‘possibility’ is underscored by the film’s final shot: Montana’s dead body floating face down in the pool at the foot of the globe, as blood turns it red. Given the crisis of futurity that I am discussing in this thesis, the film’s association between cocaine use and sterility is also suggestive. Elvira, played by the ‘young blonde actress’ (390) Michelle Pfeiffer, is berated for her childlessness by her partner Montana, who suggests cocaine has ‘poisoned her womb’. See Scarface, dir. by Brian De Palma (Universal Pictures, 1983).

profound loss of control in which compulsive consumption displaces agency and the neoliber al subject's need for individual risk-management. Wani, 'chewing and sniffing, almost shivering, like someone who is ill' has a 'look of wide-eyed gloom, racing and lost. He said he was fine, never better.' (385) Cocaine here represents an infantilising, damaging 'delusion of choice':

They were all wired up now and desperate to go on, with the great, almost numbing reassurance of having packets more stuff. It was beyond pleasure, it was its own motor, pure compulsion, though it gave them the delusion of choice and of wit in making it. [...] Wani was down on his knees, trying clumsily to do justice to the thing he always wanted. His pants were undone, but his own little penis, depressed by the blitz or blizzard of coke, was puckered up, almost in hiding. He was lost, beyond humiliation – it was what you paid for. He sniffed as he licked and sucked, and gleaming mucus, flecked with blood and undissolved powder trailed out of his famous nose into the waiter's lap. (387, 388-389)

The undissolved powder and the hints of haemorrhage in the blood-flecked mucus suggest a natural system at saturation point. Wani’s body is overwhelmed by the 'blitz or blizzard' of cocaine, 'paid for' consumption that takes the subject far 'beyond pleasure' into 'pure compulsion'.

In The Line of Beauty, cocaine is clearly imbibed and experienced through financial mechanisms and metaphors. But to what extent does cocaine and its temporality function within the novel as a wider metaphor for socio-economic life in the mid-1980s? The drug dealer is one of the era’s defining non-productive, speculative young professionals: Nick’s 'needle-fine pinstripe' suit, bought by Wani, makes him look 'like one of the young keen professionals of the age, the banker, the dealer, the estate agent even...’ (257) When Bertrand Ouradi asks whether Nick would like to know 'the big simple thing about money, [...] [t]he really big thing –', Nick and Wani make their excuses to go to the toilet together,
positioning cocaine consumption and/or furtive sex between putative employer and employee as both an escape from and answer to Bertrand’s question. (229) And in a more diffuse sense, the temporality of the short-term stimulus that anaesthetises worries about the future, and which cocaine consumption embodies, defines the novel’s presentation of the atmosphere of ‘high Thatcherism’ in 1986.60 Nick is avowedly apolitical, ‘marvell[ing] at just how unavailable his thoughts on the subject were’ (135); while he relies on rich friends and partners, he is happily estranged from any understanding of the mechanics of commerce or finance, ‘lik[ing] the noise of business and politics, it was an adult reassurance, like the chatter of parents on a night journey, meaningless, fragmentary, and consoling to the sleepy child on the back seat.’ (476) However, the political and economic atmosphere is perceived by Nick in terms of bodily sensation: ‘Big Bang’ is ‘felt’ rather than comprehended (361-362); politicians offer an ‘an undiluted fix of policy, the really unanswerable need to reduce manufacturing, curb immigration, rationalize “mental health” (what abuse and waste there were there!), and get public services back into private hands’ (243); ‘council-house sales and tax cuts’ are a means of ‘sedat[ing]’ Gerald Fedden’s constituents (269). Less explicitly articulated but more pervasive is an atmosphere of a deferred reckoning. Amid the ‘meridional heat’ of the Feddens’ French holiday home, Nick is disturbed by the ‘sinister geniality’ of two ‘spooky […] little German paintings on glass […] Autumn, where a woman with an aigrette filled a girl’s apron with easily reached fruit, and Winter.’ (341) The lapsarian significance of this ‘easily-reached fruit’ is an unacknowledged ‘sign of Autumn’ in a financial climate that is expanding seemingly beyond human control:61 “'I just don't see why, when you've got, say, forty million you absolutely have to turn it in to eighty million.” “Oh...!” said Sir Maurice, as if at an absurdly juvenile mistake. “It sort of turns itself, actually,”

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60 Cocaine is presented a disorientating means of maintaining an existing dispensation, at the price of reflexivity: ‘the coke became a short sprint of panic. He smiled defensively, and the smile seemed to search and find a happier subject, in the opening bloom of the drug. It was hard to know what mattered. There was certainly no point in thinking about it now. Out in the marquee the music had started, and everything had the air of an escapade.’ (378)

61 Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism, p. 246.
said Toby.’ (331) Wani’s postmodern offices in 1986 are also defined by an air of futurity held at bay, with their prevailing ‘air of fantasy [...], the distant sense of an avoided issue.’ (209) Nick’s mother reinforces the prevailing interrelationship between these unsustainable forms of consumption and incipient bodily crisis: “You must be doing very well, dear,” she had said, in just the tone she would use to say “You don’t look very well, dear.”” (264)

In her history of the relationship between writing and narcotics, Sadie Plant draws a distinction between the ways in which opium/heroin and the then newly synthesised cocaine functioned in late-nineteenth-century culture:

If the opiates had provided [Thomas] De Quincey’s generation with a means of escaping the ravages of the mechanical age, coca and cocaine woke everyone up to an era humming with new distributions of power and a new means of mass communication. Electricity and telephones wired the world, and both energy and information were now running in fast-moving currents with which everyone felt compelled to keep up.63

Plant sees heroin as a drug that offers escape from late modern technological and economic change, albeit one whose material contexts of production and circuits of distribution are inextricable from, indeed are only made possible by, that change. By contrast, cocaine allows users and bodies to catch up, to acclimatise to and mirror new technologies and economies.

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62 The Line of Beauty’s articulation of 1986 as a highly unstable atmosphere mirrors David Cannadine’s historical analysis of the period, in which debt-fuelled consumerism and tax cuts gave an short-term boost to a structurally weak economic system: ‘Towards the end of [1986] unemployment began to fall for the first time since Thatcher took power. Moreover, low inflation and low interest rates combined to make Britain one of the fastest-growing economies in the EC, and in the aftermath of the Big Bang the City of London was beginning to thrive. There was talk of a “British economic miracle”, but the so-called “Lawson boom” was both partial and fragile, for it depended on a consumer surge driven by increasing household indebtedness, and on using the income derived from North Sea oil and privatization to finance tax cuts. In 1986 industrial investment was still lower than it had been when Thatcher became prime minister, and the following year Britain’s gross national product fell behind that of Italy.’ Cannadine, Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 91.

63 Sadie Plant, Writing on Drugs (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 61.
Rather than a means of escaping the disruption and accelerated time-space compression of modernity, cocaine was its embodiment: the drug of modern capitalism's *perpetual present*. Similarly, the *Line of Beauty* presents late capitalist financialisation, conflated with forms of hyper-consumption as an intoxicating and intensely pleasurable sensation that focuses the subject on the present, producing a futureless, even sterile, sense of historicity. Finally, and crucially given the novel's presentation of AIDS as a quasi-teleological crisis, excessive cocaine consumption, functioning as the ultimate metaphor for 'keeping up' with the increasingly 'fast-moving currents' of this economic system, is presented as disrupting and eventually disaggregating the male body, the primary figure for futurity in the text.\(^{64}\)

**Embodied crises of futurity**

In *The Line of Beauty*, Nick Guest's fantasies about, and his investments in, futurity are focused on the 'possibilities' offered by the male body.\(^{65}\) In the text's opening section, set in 1983, the 'coded promise' of Leo's initial personal ad, which leads to Nick's first sexual relationship, is 'twenty years together' (9); glimpsing his putatively straight Oxford contemporary Wani Ouradi at a party in 1983, he 'could picture a happy alternative future for himself and Wani – who was sweet-natured, very rich, and beautiful as John the Baptist painted for a boy-loving pope' (64); and as the reggae music from the Notting Hill carnival is associated for him with sex with the black and working class Leo, 'The music shocked him with its clear repetitive statement of what he wanted. Then one vast sound system warred happily with the next, so that there were different things he wanted, beautiful jarring futures for him' (45). The novel's *reprise* of these embodied fantasies of futurity presents

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\(^{64}\) Ibid.

\(^{65}\) The raft in Highgate Ponds, discussed below, is an interstitial site with a changing complement of men: 'each figure waiting on the jetty or clambering onto the raft had the gleam of a new possibility.' (184) As discussed above, cocaine, in the early stages of consumption at least, also produces a quasi-sexual possibility: "I hope you haven't given me too much,” Nick said; though over the next thirty seconds, holding Wani to him and kissing him lusciously, he knew that everything had become 'possible.' (217)
the 1980s as an unfolding crisis of futurity, in which the unfolding AIDS crisis has a wider historical metaphoricity.

In 1983, rejecting any intimation of 'solidarity' with a much older cabinet minister facing disgrace after being caught with a male prostitute, a sexually inexperienced Nick Guest imagines a different, idealised future: 'Nick's taste was for aesthetically radiant images of gay activity, gathering in a golden future for him, like swimmers on a sunlit bank.' (25)66

This typically aestheticised fantasy of the future, expressed with Nick and the novel's fantastic sensitivity to a space or scene's lighting and reflection, could simply be read as the naïve expectation of someone whose 'first kiss, the first feel of his body, had staggered a boy who till then had lived all in his mind.' (422). However, this fantasy swimming scene is reprised again at the beginning of the novel's second section, set in 1986.67 The novel lacks

66 The disgrace of Hector Maltby anticipates the trajectory of both Nick and Gerald in the novel. He is arrested with a rent boy in Jack Straw's Castle, an area/pub in the centre of Hampstead Heath (with a queer poetic connotation – Thom Gunn's 1976 collection is titled Jack Straw's Castle), and Nick's precarious experiences of queer sexuality and sociality at the bathing pond occur at Highgate Ponds, on the other side of the Heath. Finally, Gerald's resignation for financial improprieties is prefigured in this earlier disgrace – with his own cartoons on the wall by 1987 despite not quite achieving 'the accolade of a Spitting Image puppet in his likeness, [...] one of his main hopes for the new Parliament' (414). Gerald becomes precisely what Nick disdains in Hector at the beginning of the novel: 'a real life-cartoon of the greedy “new” Tory.' (24)

67 The swimming pool, as both a space and a figure, is persistently returned to in the novels of Hollinghurst. His debut, The Swimming Pool Library (1988), explores the overlapping homosocial and homosexual possibilities and resonances of both the pool and the body of the male swimmer, which are persistently eroticised and idealised by the novel's protagonist Will Beckwith. Memories of adolescent sexual encounters in his school swimming pool represent a seductive, simultaneously pure and erotic, origin myth for Will. Arguably, the swimming pool functions as a fount of gay identity formation. Will is the 'librarian' of the eponymous swimming pool at school, an oxymoronic honorific that positions this sexualized space from his past as a body – or series of bodies – of knowledge, an interpersonal or affective archive to be accessed and to manage. Given the novel's concern with queer and gay archives and historiography/autobiography, the title is particularly significant. See Mitchell, "That Library of Uncatalogued Pleasure": Queerness, Desire and the Archive in Contemporary Gay Fiction', in Libraries, Literatures and Archives, ed. by Sas Mays (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014), pp. 164-184 (pp. 170-174). And in the novel's diegetic present of 1983, notably just on the cusp of the AIDS crisis, swimming pools facilitate cross-class sexual and social encounters. They are a homosocial space for pickups; for gazng, objectifying and consuming male bodies; for gossip and discourse. They are spaces in which queer sociality and sexuality are possible and indivisible. Hollinghurst's figuration of pools/ponds as spaces of queer sociality structured by precarious futurity as well as pleasure, and threatened with an imminent, if unspecified dissolution, echoes motifs found in the poetry of Thom Gunn but reworks some of their fundamental political and, crucially, relational resonances. See Gunn, Jack Straw's Castle (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), most notably 'The Plunge' (pp. 33-34), 'The Geysers' (pp. 21-27), and 'An Amorous Debate Leather Kid and Fleshly' (pp. 57-58). For a critical analysis of Gunn's hedonism and take on homeostasis, see Tom Sleigh, 'Sex, Drugs, and Thom Gunn: The life and work of a true servant of eros', Poetry Magazine 10th June 2009
omniscient narration, and so the reader experiences Nick's impressionistic narration *in media res*. The bathing ponds, a typically Hollinghurst-homophile sexualized 'primitive' fusion of the 'distantly classical', the 'English' and 'school-like' (181), are described as a fantasy site for Nick: 'Out in the middle of the pond was the old wooden raft, the site of endless easy contacts, and the floating platform of some of Nick's steadiest fantasies. Half a dozen men were on it now, and soon he would be with them.' (183) There is a clear echo of Nick's fantasy from three years earlier, albeit in less straightforwardly idealised and more material and erotic terms: 'Sex made them half conscious, half forgetful of the picture they made; they were sportsmen resting in stunned camaraderie, but some of them wriggled and held hands and breathed lustfully in each other's faces. They kicked their feet in the water, indolent but purposeful.' (185) The 'bank' of Nick's earlier fantasies, a stable threshold space, is transposed into something more precarious, and unstable: a site of pleasure as well as a tentative structure for safety as well as repose from the 'solid world' (189) outside the ponds. Given the news of a mysterious death – 'He was only thirty-one' (182) – that greets Nick and Wani, it is tempting to read the structure as a life raft. The raft and the bathing ponds are the nearest thing to a space of gay or queer sociality or collectivity that appears in the text – an absence of *the scene* that is notable given the text's reception as a quintessential contemporary 'gay novel.'

And yet, there is something uncannily quiet about this scene, a melancholy intimation of stasis: 'He loved it here but he was disappointed, it was too early in the season perhaps, he matched the calm of today and the chill of the water against the swarming heatwave Sundays of last year, the raft mad with the clutching and jumping, the toilets crowded and intent, the queens on the grass outside packed like a city in a dozen rivalrous districts.' (184-85) The sexual and subcultural alternative polis of the previous summer is eerily depopulated and still: 'Wani shivered and

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68 Mitchell, “Who are you? What the fuck are you doing here?”, pp. 40-43.
Nick said, “You need to keep moving,” and kicked away towards the middle of the pond.’ (185) Nick, who is (to employ a Jamesian designation) the centre of consciousness through which the novel is focalised, evades any question of cause or explanation for this 'lateness'. However, he is clearly confronted with one, an early example of the text’s subversion of investments in bodily futures:

As Nick had grown slowly and unseriously heavier, the Spaniard, if that’s what he was, black-haired and lean, with large rosy nipples, had grown perceptibly thinner, into an eerily beautiful etched-out version of himself. He leant lightly on Nick now, and seemed almost to shrug off this undeniable fact, or perhaps to challenge him to see it, but not himself to allude to it in any way, unless by a lingering, fearful glance. Nick twisted casually away from him, and what came back gleaming out of the blur of memory was his round bottom and the tiny black curls just showing when he bent over: an image which also reminded him of Wani. He scanned the water blandly, and thought that perhaps he had gone in – just then the fun began again, the Spaniard abruptly dive-bombed, everyone shouted, and the raft itself groaned and creaked. Nick hopped around, laughing and shouting something himself into the unavoidable drench after drench as people jumped in. And there, in the wallow, was Wani’s face, almost tearful with concentration as he tried to avoid the reckless arms and legs of the other men and find a moment to clamber out. (186)

Sarah Brophy argues that the Ponds are an example of the novel’s presentation of 'heterotopic spaces [...] in the Foucauldian sense: as everyday sites which become generative for the utopian, non-normative pleasures and intimacies they bring into being.' However, Nick’s encounter with the Spanish swimmer in the passage above suggests forms

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69 Sarah Brophy, ‘Queer histories and postcolonial intimacies in Alan Hollinghurst’s The Line of Beauty’ in End of Empire and the English novel since 1945, edited by Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 184-202 (p. 191). Brophy’s essay offers a highly attentive close reading of the text, but I do not share her overarching and optimistic argument that the text explores the potential for alternative, cosmopolitan futures: 'cross-racial and cross-class intimacies, impure and vulnerable as they are, may perform their work of critique and social reformation.' (p. 197). By contrast, this chapter’s reading of the text is more politically ambivalent.
of pleasure and intimacy that are less utopian and more bound up with a pervasive if unspoken anxiety about the future. More than just *Et in Arcadia Ego*, the Ponds present a spectacle of bodily atrophy and temporal crisis. Futurity based on inevitable systemic ‘growth’ is demonstrated to be far from inevitable, and yet a fantasy that the subjects on the raft desperately need to be maintained. As in much of the novel, Nick avoids and evades knowledge that troubles his investments in the future, embodied by the sexual possibility of the queer man. Instead, he attempts to transform a destabilizing impression and encounter into the idiom of the aesthetic, ‘eerily beautiful’, even as he is being ‘etched out’ by something corrosive. The Spaniard’s presence unsettles the already precarious ‘platform’ for ‘Nick’s steadiest fantasies’ (183), a space and a group haunted by the possibility of imminent disappearance and crisis. Wani’s later illness is also foreshadowed fatalistically through Nick’s associations between their two bodies, however publically ‘desperate’ he is to avoid entanglement in the ‘reckless arms and legs of the other men.’ (186)

In the 1987 section of the novel, this scene is itself reprised. In the context of his first lover Leo’s recent death from AIDS, Nick unexpectedly encounters a photograph of the Spaniard, remembering explicitly the evasion and elision of terminal knowledge hinted at in the passage quoted above, and suggesting the synecdochic status of this male body within the text: he had ‘turned up everywhere, […] been a nice dark thread in the pattern of Nick’s early

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70 The events of 1986-87 are often emplotted in historical accounts using the narrative framework of tragedy, with its deterministic hubris and nemesis. Cannadine, for instance, presents Thatcher’s central problem as escalating arrogance and self-reliance: ‘signs of hubris; and sooner or later, nemesis would surely follow.’ Cannadine, *Margaret Thatcher: A Life and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 58. E.H.H. Green widens the metaphor to link Thatcher’s ejection from office with Black Monday: ‘In October 1987 the advent of a hurricane in Britain coincided with a similar gust through the stock market, and the protracted boom in Britain’s financial sector came to an end. Through the 1980s the City and the financial service sector had seemed immune to recession, and their success and prosperity has seemed to symbolize the Thatcherite “economic miracle”: the manner in which the City’s hubris turned to nemesis was in some ways to be a foretaste of Thatcher’s own experience.’ Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Headline, 2006), p. 6. David Childs’s analysis of ‘The end of Thatcher: and Thatcherism?’ begins with the events of Black Monday. Childs, *Britain since 1945: a political history* 3rd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 340-341.
gym days and bar nights, almost an emblem of the scene for him, its routine and compulsion, and he knew he must be dead – he'd seen him a year ago at the Ponds, defying his own fear and others’ fear of him.’ (404-405) In the novel, the eschatological atmosphere of 1987 is produced by multiple crises of which AIDS is the most profound embodied example. 71 The Thatcher government wins its third election, but the atmosphere is one of exhaustion and stasis: “‘The 80s are going on forever’ [...] it was as if the dawn had been deferred, though it was high summer, and hours after sunrise’ (392); “‘the land did slide once, as we all know. And it looks very much as though it’s going to stay slipped.”’ (419) Aesthetic beauty registers bodily impermanence and fragility: ‘shining fiercely and stoically with their one truth, that they would last for centuries longer than the young live people who were looking at them.’ (416) However, other elements of socio-economic life that used to seem permanent, appear suddenly fragile. Nick notes the ‘eggshell sheen’ of property (441) – underneath his usual attentiveness to colour and architecture is the intimation that a formerly stable investment in the future has a brittle carapace. 72 As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the former hyper-consumer Wani is the starkest embodiment of this atmosphere of crisis, now prematurely ‘fading from view in the middle of the day’ (486), his shrinking body reversing the promise of futurity based on growth, a new suit ironically likened to ‘the formal dress of a little prince, which might only be worn once before he grew out of it.’ (483) His ‘memorial tablet’ is the first and only issue of the magazine Ogee, a ‘wonderland of luxury’ that nevertheless has a ‘glint to it, a glassy malignity’, and through which the advertisers ‘Bulgari, Dior, BMW’ act as ‘astounding godparents to Nick and Wani’s whimsical coke-child.’ (488-489) It is a queer and futureless monument to 80s excess: the child of

71 For a compelling attempt to reconstruct elements of the historical atmosphere in 1987 using Mass Observation and other sources, see Mark Cook, “‘Archives of Feeling’: The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987’, History Workshop Journal 83 (2017), 51-78.

72 ‘In the ten years to 1988 non-housing loans given by UK banks increased from £4 billion to £28 billion; during the same period, housing loans increased from £6 billion to £63 billion. Borrowing on this scale sat oddly with a government that talked about the need to live within one’s means.’ The rise in interest rates in the 1988 budget led to a profound slump in house prices that led to a massive rise in negative equity, and was a major contributory factor to the recession of the early 1990s. Vinen, Thatcher’s Britain, p. 205.
unsustainable cocaine economics, simultaneously the ‘gleam of something over’ (488) and a metaphor for a system of speculation and consumption that remains economically hegemonic in twenty-first-century life.

**Conclusion: Dissonances**

As I have argued, *The Line of Beauty* writes the story of the emergence of British financial neoliberalism upon queer bodies that together represent a profound crisis of futurity. Nick’s fate, the ‘obscure futurity’ (498) that he can imagine, is suggestively dissonant. He is seemingly secure in a financial sense through a ‘meretricious’ office block left to him in Wani’s will, a payment with a ‘sharp tease’, ‘even a kind of lesson’ (440). However, expelled from his surrogate family, his uncertain HIV status leaves Nick unable to imagine a future in which he too does not ‘fade pretty quickly’ (500). The interrelated association of finance with something systemically fatal and doomed, and the ‘revelatory’ potential of the body, both persist to the novel’s end. This sense of imminent and indeed systemically *immanent* crisis, ‘the distant sense of an avoided issue,’ (209) is oddly anticipatory, given that this text was produced in the midst of the comparatively economically becalmed Blair years. Its ambivalence about the sustainability of financial neoliberalism, and its intimations of the damage that obsessive, excessive consumption can wreak on natural systems, read very differently thirteen years after publication. As well as understanding its foundational moments, a vital part of historicising financial neoliberalism entails rethinking its foundational ideologies – of homeostatic markets and rational consuming subjects. What I’ve called Hollinghurst’s *embodied economics* – his figuring of changing financial markets and their effects through queer male bodies that function as a cultural focal point for

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73 Gilbert argues that the inheritance of Baalbeck House complicates any neat reading of the ending as either the triumph or defeat of aestheticism at the hands of capitalistic value. Gilbert, *Some properties of fiction*, pp. 138-139. Flannery argues that ‘both Nick and Hollinghurst’s novel troublingly owe their futurity and their impact to the sacrifice of a black man.’ Flannery, *The Powers of Apostrophe and the Boundaries of Mourning*, p. 302. It has not been within the scope of this chapter to examine the novel’s racial politics. However, I would argue that Flannery advances a reading of Nick’s embodiment of futurity that is inattentive to the ambivalences that I discuss above.
anxieties about unregulated permeabilities, penetrable and uncontrollable systems – complicate and critique these assumptions. And the queer man, embodying unproductive pleasure and non-reproductive futures, is presented as *emblematic* of the systems of finance and hyper-consumption that are legacies of the Thatcherite 1980s and that continue to structure neoliberal economics. A fundamental dissonance is also suggested between the economic base that propelled Thatcherism and the ‘efficiently reproductive’ status of its Conservative elite. (64) Metaphors of reproduction and childhood are the focus of the two chapters that follow, which analyse both nostalgic and traumatic narratives about childhood in the 1980s, and the forms of contemporary subjectivity and historicity that these texts produce.
Chapter Three
Thatcher’s Children: Neoliberal Adolescence

We are none of us, whatever our ages, Harold Wilson’s children or Heath’s children, or John Major’s or Tony Blair’s. We are all of us, like it or not, rebel or not, the children of Margaret Thatcher.

Andrew Marr’s History of Modern Britain

They fuck you up, your mum and dad
Philip Larkin, ‘This Be The Verse’

Often I think boys don’t become men. Boys just get papier-mâchéd inside a man’s mask. Sometimes you can tell the boy is still in there.
David Mitchell, Black Swan Green

Introduction: Genesis or Preface?
The adult narrator of David Mitchell’s short story ‘Preface’, also a schoolboy and minor character in the author’s 1980s Bildungsroman Black Swan Green (2006), is deeply nostalgic for the decade of his childhood and highly critical of the twenty-first century Britain he now inhabits. His commute takes him through Greater London’s dense and sprawling suburbia, dominated by swathes of new-build housing estates that he contemptuously associates with his former schoolmates: ‘These estate dwellers are everywhere. Choking our motorways, the airports, the checkout lanes, […] they are who we went to school with, they are Modern England. Friends Reunited? Not if I see you coming first.’ Yet he is unable to conceptualise the causal relationship between the politics and socio-economic transformations of the 1980s that shaped him and those he ‘went to school with’ and the homogenous ‘Modern

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1 Andrew Marr’s History of Modern Britain, ‘Episode 4: Revolution’ (BBC Television, 2007).
3 David Mitchell, Black Swan Green (London: Sceptre, 2006), p. 160. All future citations from this text will be taken from this edition and be indicated parenthetically within the body of this chapter. All emphasis original.
Britain’ he disdains: between neoliberal past and present. Instead, the early Thatcher years are remembered as an unspoiled, stable and explicable time:

Back in the early 1980s, back when I was a boy, back when Great Britain could win wars singlehandedly, back when Labour were commies and Maggie was Maggie, this land was made of hamlets and towns and cities and valleys and beacons and dales and national parks and rivers and tow-paths and lochs and tarns and mudflats and tumuli and estuaries. Now it’s just a road atlas of routes.⁵

Nostalgia for childhood is implicated with a nostalgia for a time of strong political oppositions and absolutes, and for decisive military success, with a heterogeneous ‘natural’ landscape yet to be instrumentalised into ‘routes’ or utilised as ‘one giant car park.’⁶ A more astute character frames the relationship between past and present in more deterministic terms, remarking that ‘[o]ur childhoods […] are our Old Testaments. Our Books of Genesis, our Deuteronomies. It’s all written down there. And once writ, it can’t be unwrit.’⁷ In this suggestive (if somewhat ironic) formulation, childhood does not simply represent a prior state. These biblical metaphors suggest a mythologized period of birth and emergence that assumes a historical tabula rasa, and that establishes the laws and norms – economic, political and moral – that determine subsequent history and society. Understanding the 1980s in Old Testament terms – a more visceral, violent iteration of later Christian thought – perhaps undercuts nostalgia for the period, while hinting that a root of the contemporary desire for our neoliberal childhood may lie in these very absolutes: in an apparently more ideologically clear-cut experience. ‘Preface’ and Black Swan Green, along with Andrew Marr in the epigraph to this chapter, position the 1980s and the emergence of Thatcherite neoliberalism in these decisive terms: as contemporary Britain’s determining collective childhood.⁸

⁸ This highly-gendered label of ‘Thatcher’s children’ has been deployed in multiple ways. The label is deployed towards politicians as either an accolade or a label of opprobrium across the dispatch box.
However, rather than simply endorsing this deterministic myth of pure origin, the figure of the 'Preface' suggests different kinds of historical and textual relationalities. At the end of the story, a sudden shock makes the narrator reassess his life to date not as the 'end of [a] story' but as 'just the preface' to an unfolding and unpredictable future. Prefaces can be and are rewritten, they frame and introduce the parameters of a text. The short story 'Preface' is a preface to the novel Black Swan Green, and positions subjects' immersion in the twenty-first-century present as the inescapable preface to remembering or historicising the Thatcherite past. Crucially, it also positions childhood itself as a preface, simultaneously a determining force and a narrative about the past that is always in the process of being rewritten and reconsidered to frame and introduce the present anew. Mitchell’s short story thus performs the problematic of the historical child and complicates the conceptualisation of modern Britons as 'Thatcher’s children.'

in the House of Commons. Brian Wheeler, ‘Thatcher Child v Son of Brown’, BBC News, 2nd December 2010 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11890130 [accessed 17th November 2013] It is used to characterise the unfolding post-Thatcher neoliberal governance of Britain, as in the title of Simon Jenkins’s book Thatcher and Sons: A Revolution in Three Acts (London: Penguin, 2007), which deploys the label as a generational metaphor and invokes Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron as carrying on a family business. In Ali Smith’s How to be both (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2014), the metaphor is mangled through a version of Botticelli’s Venus in which Blair stands ‘naked on a shell (not the beach kind, the missile kind) with Thatcher all puffed-out cheeks blowing his hair about […] The Birth of Vain Us’, (p. 205). As Marr suggests, it is also a label bound up with deterministic and infantilising understandings of both Thatcher and Thatcherism’s legacy in twenty-first-century British life, and the capacity to move beyond it. In November 2012, the Bishopsgate Institute in London held a debate titled ‘The Legacy of the Iron Lady: Are we all Thatcher’s children?’ The contributors – including former cabinet ministers from the Thatcher and Blair governments Cecil Parkinson and Clare Short as well as Mark Field, a sitting Conservative MP, and a socialist journalist, Owen Jones – differed wildly in their analyses of Thatcher, Thatcherism, and the long-term effects of Britain’s neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s. However, and with an ironic degree of consensus given the subject of their discussion, they agreed that contemporary Britons (the all-embracing even totalising ‘we’) are in many significant ways ‘Thatcher’s children’. See ‘Back to the 80s: The Legacy of the Iron Lady: Are we all Thatcher’s Children?’ http://bishopsgate.org.uk/events_detail.aspx?ID=250 [accessed 17 November 2013] The label is also used by social scientists to indicate a generation of children who grew up during the 1980s. See Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.) Thatcher’s Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s (London: Falmer Press, 1996)
The following chapter analyses the ways in which twenty-first century British culture remembers the 1980s through the interrelated figure of the adolescent and the lens of nostalgia. This analysis is rooted in an extended reading of Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*, a deceptively simple *bildungsroman* set in 1982 against the backdrop of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict which ambivalently fuses nostalgia with political critique. I argue that *Black Swan Green* simultaneously enacts and problematises the widespread contemporary understanding of the 1980s as an aesthetic defined by fetishized consumer culture: what I term a *retro-memory* of the recent past. The novel juxtaposes this selective and seductively nostalgic vision with more troubling memories of the period, particularly the pervasive anxiety over Cold War militarism and potential nuclear conflict, and the increasing brutality of social relations in Thatcher's Britain. *Black Swan Green* reasserts these perspectives on the 1980s through a focus on the ideological and historical contexts that shape its adolescent narrator Jason Taylor and his seemingly 'ordinary' interactions with his everyday material environment. Mitchell’s novel offers a perceptive take on the apparently quotidian and presents a complex and contradictory historicisation of life in the early 1980s. In counterpointing but not cohering a variety of narratives about that decade, it suggests that British contemporary collective memory of the recent past is similarly fraught and contestable. I will then move on to argue that figures of the adolescent and adolescence simultaneously offer distinctive critical and historiographic potential but are bound up with dehistoricised conceptions of human nature and infantilising models of subjects ‘stuck’ without agency.

**Retro-memory**

This thesis seeks to situate historical fictions as part of – and often reflexively engaging with – the workings of a broader memorial culture, and *Black Swan Green* is enmeshed in one of the dominant contemporary forms of remembering the recent past: materialistic and often intensely nostalgic *retro-memory*. Retro, heritage, vintage: the fetishisation of historical
objects and styles defines a retrospective culture in which the past is primarily a commodified aesthetic. However, retro isn’t simply a twenty-first century phenomenon, and fetishistic attitudes to material culture and object-based historiographies are hardly new developments. Raphael Samuel argues that retro culture – a minority taste for aesthetes and collectors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – ‘acquired a wider resonance in the prosperity of the 1960s as an alternative version of consumerism, pandering to the nostalgia for a simpler life,’ and proliferated exponentially in the decades that followed.9 Joseph Brooker similarly contends that retro’s transformation into a ubiquitous mode of consumer culture can be clearly dated to the 1980s.10 Furthermore, critical debates about heritage and the commodified ‘heritage industry’ are highly prominent from the 1980s onwards.11 So what is so distinctive about twenty-first century retro?

Two distinguishing factors are the digital revolution and the globalized neoliberalism that David Harvey argues is inextricable from it, which have both dramatically altered the past’s presence in our material world.12 Simon Reynolds suggests that the Internet and other contemporary memory-technologies offer a new experience of pastness:

10 Joseph Brooker, Literature of the 1980s: After the Watershed (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 210-211. Brooker also emphasises the importance and prevalence of delays in childrearing and the previous ‘milestones’ of adulthood, such as home-ownership, which provide subjects with both a greater degree of disposable income and a more porous boundary between adolescence and adulthood.
11 For an influential account of the relationship between heritage, materialistic nostalgia and Thatcherism, see Andrew Higson, ‘Re-Presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film’ in Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism, ed. by Lester E. Friedman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 109-29. Patrick Wright’s On Living in an Old Country (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), first published in 1985, is a classic account of British ‘heritage’ cultures which also situates them squarely within the political and economic context of a Thatcherism he sees as a profoundly nostalgic formation (pp. 1-27). David Lowenthal’s The Past is a Foreign Country (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), exploring similar themes in an American context, was published the same year. For a more recent take on the phenomenon, see Jerome de Groot, Consuming History: Historians and heritage in contemporary popular culture (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), particularly pp. 62-99.
Old stuff either directly permeates the present, or lurks beneath the surface of the current, in the form of on-screen windows to other times. We've become so used to this convenient access that it is a struggle to recall that life wasn't always like this; that until relatively recently, one lived most of the time in a cultural present tense, with the past confined to specific zones, trapped in particular objects and locations.\textsuperscript{13}

Digital objects replay vast swathes of the accumulated past on demand, at our leisure, wherever we are: an instant and seemingly infinite archive that encompasses everything from an early Beatles gig to the digitally enhanced Kennedy assassination and the looped impacts of 9/11. Reynolds' argument that in the past, people 'lived most of the time in a cultural present tense' is simplistic and misleading – forms of revivalism have a long history – but it is undeniable that the ways in which subjects perceive, experience and consume their history are changing rapidly and in unprecedented ways. And retro represents in part a commodification of this cultural anxiety at this lack of material boundaries and limits in our twenty-first century relationship with the past: an indiscriminate and proliferating digital glut of memory. As novelist Gordon Burn notes, a few words tapped into Youtube brings 'so many moments of the past crowding back – a pandemonium of fragments' that leaves contemporary subjects synaesthetically overwhelmed.\textsuperscript{14} Retro represents a valorised alternative to this chaos: a nostalgic fantasy of a fixed and more authentic window to another time. The fetishized historical object becomes a commodified symbol of obsolescence and rapid change around which other dissatisfactions with modern life can congeal, but it also signifies tangibility in an unreal world where 'the analogue and artisanal [...] are equated with a sort of spiritual integrity.'\textsuperscript{15} (Burn, 2008: 91) Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'aura' possessed by an original artefact or artwork is now diffused, arguably

\textsuperscript{13} Simon Reynolds, 	extit{Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past} (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 57.
\textsuperscript{14} Gordon Burn, 	extit{Born Yesterday} (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 175.
\textsuperscript{15} Burn, 	extit{Born Yesterday}, p. 91.
indiscriminately, throughout pre-digital material culture.\(^{16}\) As long as it is in grainy analogue, even the recording or reproduction now signifies authenticity: a material portal to a supposedly simpler time. It is through these sought-after commodities that twenty-first century culture often remembers the recent past.\(^{17}\)

Like the obsessive collector described by Burn, contemporary subjects yearn for retro-objects ‘to possess a moment which remains pure, unreproduced except in memory, and is not available to be freeze-framed, or focus-shifted or enhanced – *exhausting all the reality stored in its magnetic pores.*’\(^{18}\) The fantasy to ‘possess’ an authentic and affective material link to one’s personal or collective past – with possession’s simultaneous suggestions of ownership and fetishism – is deeply nostalgic. And nostalgia – a painful longing/”algia” for “nostos”/home – is considered to be a dominant cultural mode of late capitalism, with its homogenising erosion of local and national cultures. Charged by many critics, notably Fredric Jameson, with being an ahistorical and numbing commercial palliative\(^{19}\), contemporary nostalgic desire is more sympathetically defined by Svetlana Boym as a materialistic but ‘affective yearning for a community with collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world.’\(^{20}\) Their conclusions about nostalgia may differ, but both


\(^{17}\) Neil MacGregor argue that object-oriented historiography has the potential to produce more egalitarian and global histories, given the historically limited and recent nature of writing and texts, and also emphasises the hidden histories embedded in these particular acts of poetic reconstruction and interpretation. He is less explicit about the colonial appropriation of indigenous and global objects by the British Museum, the venue for his exploration of this theme. See Neil MacGregor, *The History of the World in 100 Objects* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), xix.


\(^{19}\) For an influential analysis of nostalgia, late capitalism and postmodernism, see Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991). Jameson opposes postmodernist cultural production’s ‘ininsensible colonisation of the present by the nostalgia mode’ with a so-called (but ill-defined) ‘genuine historicity’ (pp. 19-20). The essay ‘Nostalgia for the Present’ in that collection offers a particularly relevant analysis of period detail and contemporary historicity, pp. 279-296. See ‘Introduction’ for further exploration of these issues.

\(^{20}\) Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xv. Boym rejects the traditional opposition between nostalgia and critical enquiry, contending that the expression of this “ache of temporal distance and displacement” represents “the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance” and can offer critical historical potential (p. 41, p. 44).
agree that this desire for the past is expressed through – and structured by – fetishized historical objects. As Black Swan Green's thirteen-year old narrator Jason Taylor puts it, when one forges a relationship with the past, 'Photos're better than nothing, but things’re better than photos 'cause the things themselves were part of what was there.' (368)

As this chapter’s reading of Black Swan Green will suggest, the commercialised retro-memory of a lost and less complicated past often manifests itself through an idealised focus on childhood, as two cultural fantasies of innocence and fixity become imbricated. Indeed, Brooker argues that the valorisation of childhood is central to the development of twenty-first century retro-culture:

The aspects of the past being revived are primarily those that appealed to the young. [...] Contemporary retro is also fuelled by affluence, and by the demographic shift in which, for an increasing proportion of the population of developed countries, childrearing takes place later. Childhood itself can thus become prolonged or fondly replayed.21

Rather than putting away childish things, we heap arguably undue historical meaning upon them. In Black Swan Green's afterword, Mitchell acknowledges ‘debts of detail’ (373) to Andrew Collins’ memoir Where Did It All Go Right? (2003), a text which exemplifies this fetishistic retro-memory of childhood and the desires it represents.22 Collins emphasises that his is the story of a 'normal' upbringing (explicitly contrasted with the late twentieth century boom in 'misery memoirs' of traumatic childhood), and communicates this so-called 'normality' through a surfeit of period details and cultural references. The book's website – an interactive archive designed to be ‘an oasis of happy uneventful childhood memories’ – is prefaced with the suggestive invitation to readers ‘that no story is too mundane or “ordinary” to tell! It’s the universal truths we’re after. So, as much detail as

21 Brooker, After the Watershed, p. 213. My emphasis.
22 Andrew Collins, Where did it all go right? Growing up normal in the 70s (London: Ebury, 2003).
possible (names of aunties, sweets, streets, games, guinea pigs) and don't be shy.’

A universalised and Edenic collective memory of childhood is structured by seemingly ‘mundane’ period details. Toys, games, music, TV programmes and other cultural products imbue this nostalgic version of the recent past with a reality-effect. Collective experience is not defined by community, class, shared labour, or identity politics; rather, these neoliberal collectivities of consumption evoke a shared experience of ‘normal’ life through a collection of retro-signifiers that seem to authenticate and universalise personal memories. Readers too might remember (and more would understand the periodising signification of) the Rubik’s Cube or the Raleigh Chopper, Frankie Goes to Hollywood and Fleetwood Mac. ‘We’ seemingly have this material culture in common; it offers a pleasurable and melancholy shared experience of the idealised past contrasted with the atomized present. Our childhoods – individual and collective – are a troublingly fantastic ‘oasis’ against which the complex adult world can never compete. As in Benjamin’s definition of the collector’s fetishistic desire for metonymy and control, our recent past is ‘present, and indeed ordered, in each of [these] objects.’

Collective childhoods are defined and fondly replayed through their consumer detritus.

There is a particular paradox at the heart of retro-engagements with the 1980s: the desire to escape from a socially fragmented and seemingly immaterial contemporary life to a nostalgic and materialistic vision of the decade that arguably shaped that life more than any

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24 See for instance Michael A Johnson’s claims about a collective historical constituency through memories of shared ‘stuff’: ‘If you’re a child of the eighties yourself, you’re probably going to remember most of the same stuff as me and will be doing a lot of nodding, grinning and cringing as you read through some of the memories that we share. If you were an adult in the eighties, well, chances are you’ll still remember the same stuff, but you might not be able to identify as easily with wearing He-Man picture pyjamas or trying to play the theme tune to The Flumps on your school recorder. Of course, if you weren’t even born in the eighties, then you’re about to learn just how many cool things you missed out on.’ A 1980s Childhood: From He-Man to Shell Suits (Stroud: History Press, 2012), pp. 10-11.

other, a period of hyper-materialism that accelerated commercial-technological shift towards immateriality; the irony of memorialising through vintage, retro and heritage modes the very period that consolidated their commodification of the past. Yet, as I have suggested, this retro-memory of the 1980s is a dominant narrative in contemporary culture. Popular series like *I Love the 1980s* (BBC, 2001) are comprised of nostalgic surveys of the decade’s consumer culture – toys, fashion and music – often with celebrity talking heads reminiscing about simpler technologies as a metaphor for simpler times.

Another notable example is the drama *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008–2010) and its evocation of the 1980s through pop culture truisms and retro-signifiers. The programme’s reflexive formal gloss – that its period setting is the trauma-fantasy of a dying woman, remembering her 1980s childhood through the prism of twenty-first century retro-memory – still facilitates an alarmingly conservative conception of the decade. The commodification of the past – like the interrelated idealisation of childhood – often masks more complex and troubling historical narratives. And *Black Swan Green*’s presentation of retro-memory is, if not overtly critical, then decidedly ambivalent; in Mitchell’s text, retro signifies ‘retrograde’ and ‘retrogressive’ as much as ‘retrochic.’

‘You’ve obviously forgotten what it’s like’

The novel’s narrator is thirteen year-old Jason Taylor, who lives in the eponymous Black Swan Green: a parochial Midlands village that represents middle class middle-England in...

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26 In Ali Smith’s short story ‘astute, fiery, luxurious’, the narrator reflects on what is effaced by nostalgic retro-memory of the 1980s: ‘We were watching an I love 1980s programme, one we’d watched twice before. We were talking about how it had become possible that there never was a miners’ strike, a war, a right-wing landslide, a massive recession or any huge protest march; instead there were only Rubik’s cubes, *Transformers* and a puppet TV compère shaped like a rat.’ Smith’s short story exemplifies the common and persuasive opposition between commercialised nostalgia and political engagement – in this case, engagement with the divisive legacies of Thatcherism. Ali Smith, *The first person and other stories* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 175-176. Similarly, Joseph Brooker argues that cultural production like *I Love the 1980s* and *Ashes to Ashes* is ‘wilfully apolitical’, forging ‘a pastel 1980s bleached of strife;’ Brooker, *After the Watershed*, p. 213.

27 For a convincing analysis of the gender politics of the programme, particularly its ‘gendered discourses of recession’, see Hannah Hamad, “Don’t let him take Britain back to the 1980s”: *Ashes to Ashes* as postfeminist recession television*, Continuum* 28.2 (2014), 201-212.
the early 1980s. Brooker describes *Black Swan Green* as a retro-inflected ‘reconstruction of childhood's travails [which] does not primarily aim to be a state of the nation address.’ It is certainly not a programmatic ‘state of the nation’ novel, and its provincial setting, ‘in the middle somewhere’ – dismissed by Jason as so ‘boring’ that ‘no one ever knows where it is’ (215) – is less obviously ambitious than Mitchell’s transnational and temporally complex novels, particularly *Ghostwritten* (1999) and *Cloud Atlas* (2004). However, Jason’s description of his modest surroundings – viewed at night from the apex of a fairground ride – as a ‘galaxy squashed flat’ (319) is indicative of the novel's broader, synecdochic vision. Its thirteen month-by-month chapters set between 1982 and 1983 offer less of a linear narrative and more a succession of linked incidents, and are represented by the ‘series of thirteen dinosaur postcards’ Jason buys: ‘[e]ach one’s got a different dinosaur, but if you put them end to end in order, the background landscape joins up and forms a frieze.’ (213-213)

This cumulative metaphor suggests that just as *Black Swan Green* presents Jason's identity as fragmented, mutable and accretive, a multifaceted historical period like the 1980s can only be understood as the simultaneous interaction of many complex events, contexts, desires and ideologies. The novel suggests that ‘childhood’s travails’ (a problematically universal and dehistoricised idea of childhood) are in fact determined by these specific, unfolding historical circumstances, and that Jason's seemingly ordinary adolescent experiences can illuminate this historical ‘landscape.’ Behind its deceptive simplicity lies what Ali Smith terms ‘a knowing foray into a contemporary novelistic mode, the late-20th-century coming-of-age novel, the land of Hornby and Coe.’ The novel reflexively charges

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contemporary culture and its idealisation of both childhood and the 1980s with a form of selective amnesia. If, like Jason's father, readers unthinkingly desire our recent past, Jason's narration suggests that they have ‘obviously forgotten what it's like.' (211)

However, from its first page, *Black Swan Green* presents the 1980s through the lens of retro-memory: an excessive accumulation of nostalgic objects and period detail. The narrative abounds with cousins 'busy solving a Rubik's cube at high speed’ (53) and classmates described as 'rows and columns of faces [...] like a screen of Space Invaders.' (44-45) Scenes unfold around 'the Asteroids console' (73) or the 'Sinclair ZX Spectrum 16k' (291), with a constant backdrop of iconic 80s tracks like “Don't You Want Me?” by Human League [...] thumping out dead loud’ (1). The specificity is relentless and not confined to pop music: few brand names and elements of early-1980s pop culture escape a name-check. Brooker persuasively links this excessive interest in period detail with an attempt to 'plausibly convey the priorities of a child: the latest challenge that Mitchell, a formidable technician, had set himself.’31 A two-way association can be gleaned here between childhood and retro-materialism. Childhood is associated with nascent consumerism and a particular awareness of/investment in the material object, while retro-memory – which transposes these fetishisms into historiography – is inherently childlike, or, more pejoratively, childish.32 Adolescence is certainly presented in *Black Swan Green* as a materialistic and brand-conscious time, an association playfully satirised when a dismayed Jason learns that his sister Julia has ended her relationship with boyfriend Ewan: “Oh.” But Ewan had a silver MG. “I liked Ewan.” “Cheer up. Stian's got a Porsche.” (341) However, even taking into account the novel's attempt to represent the materialistic priorities of an adolescent and the emergence of a neoliberal subjectivity increasingly predicated around consumerism the

32 There is a long cultural tradition of children being understood to be particularly aware and responsive to their natural and material surroundings. For a notable working-through of these ideas, see Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood Around 1900*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2006), pp. 99-100, pp. 140-142 and pp. 152-158.
scale of *Black Swan Green's* collection of period detail is obsessive. A car is never just a car: it is ‘a sky-blue VW Jetta’ (357), a ‘Vauxhall Viva’ (86), a ‘white Ford Granada Ghia’ or a ‘Datsun Cherry.’ (53) Meals and snacks become a periodising name-check: ‘Findus ham’n’cheese Crispy Pancakes, [...] butterscotch Angel Delight for pudding’ (13); ‘Mum’d bought Maryland Chocolate Chip Cookies. They're new and totally lush.’ (159). These childhood references are occasionally very subtle: a radio alarm is described as ‘glowing in numerals of mekon green’ (44), the Mekon being a green alien antagonist in the *Eagle*'s Dan Dare comic strip, which was relaunched in 1982. More often, they are less than subtle: “’Morning,” I said. “What’s that magazine?” Julia held up the front cover of *Face.*’ (45) The materiality of early- and pre-digital technologies is particularly lovingly fetishized throughout: from the aforementioned Sinclair Spectrum ZX, vinyl LPs and Betamax cassettes to Jason's love for his ‘Silver Reed Elan 20 Manual Typewriter’, particularly ‘how it’s got no number 1 so you use the letter “l.”’ (41)

Mitchell was criticised by many reviewers for this ‘[overdoing of] the period detail [...] striving to situate his story in 1982 in a way that someone actually writing in 1982 would never bother to.’ However, I would argue that the scale of this materialistic excess goes beyond historical fiction's need for authentication or even a novelistic pastiche of period detail. As the style of Jason's first-person narration makes clear, *Black Swan Green* always has one eye on his future and the twenty-first century present. Past and present tenses can blur in the course of a single sentence: ‘I had one of those odd moments when now isn’t now.’ (153) The fusion of past and future tenses at the end of the novel further emphasises its retrospective position: ‘How Grant Burch pushed docile Philip Phelps over the edge, I’ll never learn. That was the last time I’ll ever clap eyes on them.’ (367) The novel's narration highlights its status as a twenty-first century text. *Black Swan Green* reflexively presents

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readers with a retro-1980s: the materialistic decade as we materialistically remember it now, packed full of the signifiers that are objects of nostalgic desire, popular media reminiscence and desired retro-commodities in contemporary life.

Of course, there is nothing inherently problematic about remembering the past materialistically. However, this retro-fetishism ignores the more changeable (and difficult to capture) ideological and political contexts in which objects circulated and signified in the past. Material things never signify consistently: historical context and perception create and alter their meaning. This is neatly demonstrated in Black Swan Green by Jason’s changing perception of the same set of objects over time, as unhappiness over bullying at school increasingly erodes his childish optimism: ‘A velvet staircase sliced sunlight across the hall. A blue guitar rested on a sort of Turkish chair. A bare lady in a punt drifted on a lake of water lilies in a gold frame.’ (180); ‘A knackered blue guitar’d been left on a broken stool. In the gaudy frame a shivery woman sprawled in a punt on a clogged pond.’ (191); ‘The guitar’s blue paint’d flaked off like a skin disease. In her yellow frame a dying woman in a boat trailed her fingers in the water.’ (208) Black Swan Green remembers the 1980s through the materialistic lens of retro-memory, but it also seeks to recapture the historical contexts that determine subjects’ perceptions of the other objects and affective environments that comprise the ‘normal’ world. In doing so, the novel undermines the fantasy diagnosed by Bill Brown (and embodied by retro-memory) that material things offer us ‘dry ground’ above the ‘instabilities and uncertainties, the ambiguities and anxieties’ of twenty-first century experience and culture.34 While seductively presenting a commodified fantasy of innocent childhood and the recent past, the novel uses things to simultaneously remember other, less palatable visions of growing up in Thatcher’s Britain. Like Jason’s description of the Tudor warship Mary Rose being dragged from the seabed in 1982, with its ‘sily, drippy, turdy timbers [that] look nothing like the shining galleon in the paintings’ (278), the text

emphasises that a nostalgic idealisation of the 1980s is an illusion that occludes a much more complex hidden reality. In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym taxonomises two different forms of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. The distinction is overly neat, but nevertheless offers a useful critical framework. Restorative nostalgia, often imbricated with nationalism, is a narrative figuring the past as discrete, whole, knowable and fixed: ‘Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history’.

Reflective nostalgia offers a “meditation on history and the passage of time” and is “more oriented towards an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself”, emphasising historical contingency and multiplicity. By juxtaposing different historical narratives through Jason’s engagement with material culture, *Black Swan Green* is deploying nostalgia reflectively. Within the excessively materialistic memorial framework of nostalgic ‘stuff’, a forgotten 1980s can be textually remembered through another engagement with *materiality*: Jason’s adolescent perceptions of the material world.

**The nuclear 1980s**

Despite the fear that if his peers find out ‘they’d gouge [him] to death behind the tennis courts with blunt woodwork tools and spray the Sex Pistols logo on [his] gravestone’ (4), Jason is a budding poet, and his first-person narration is defined by inventive attempts to figure his environment. The novel makes clear that this creativity and perceptiveness are shaped and delimited by the ideological and historical contexts that determine Jason in the

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35 Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 41. Boym taxonomises two different forms of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. The distinction is overly neat, but nevertheless offers a useful critical framework. Restorative nostalgia, often imbricated with nationalism, is a narrative figuring the past as discrete, whole, knowable and fixed: ‘Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history.’ (p. 41) Reflective nostalgia offers a “meditation on history and the passage of time” and is “more oriented towards an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself”, emphasising historical contingency and multiplicity. (p. 49) By juxtaposing different historical narratives through Jason’s engagement with material culture, *Black Swan Green* is deploying nostalgia reflectively.

early 1980s, and uses this process to historicise and denaturalise that historical moment. Black Swan Green counters retro-memory by drawing parallels between the brutality of adolescent social relations and the period’s disturbing militarism. The early 1980s saw a resurgence of Cold War tensions: from Ronald Reagan’s bellicose proliferation of the nuclear arms race in his first term in office to the chilling public information programme ‘Protect and Survive’, which prompted hysterical media coverage in Britain. A ‘Britain and the Bomb’ special issue of the Daily Mirror in November 1980 exemplifies this apocalyptic mood with biblically-inflected headlines intoning ‘Only the chosen will be saved’ alongside arresting photographs of ‘the nuclear family’ who have survived the atomic blast but are stuck in decontamination suits and ‘can’t even touch each other.’ Since 1989 and the end of the Cold War, the fear of nuclear war is often airbrushed from collective memory, or fixed in metonymic moments like Reagan’s 1983 ‘Evil Empire’ speech or the Greenham Common protests of 1982. These event-led histories explore Cold War tensions through important narratives of global politics and identity politics, but often obscure their effects on the regular realities of life during the 1980s. However, Black Swan Green reasserts the nebulous everyday horror of living with the possibility of nuclear annihilation through Jason’s interactions with day-to-day ‘stuff.’

From the beginning of the novel, references to nuclear threat abound. While illicitly exploring his father’s study, Jason fleetingly notes that ‘the office phone’s red like a nuclear hotline’ (1), before playing a solitary war game:

Dad’s swivelly chair’s a lot like the *Millennium Falcon’s* laser tower. I blasted away at the skyful of Russian MiGs streaming over the Malverns. Soon tens of thousands of people between here and Cardiff owed me their lives. [...] I’d refuse all medals.

"Thanks, but no thanks," I’d tell Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan when Mum invited them in, “I was just doing my job.” (2)

This childhood fantasy disquietingly blurs the boundaries between the sanitised and heroic conflict of SF action films like *Star Wars* – with its *Millennium Falcon* crewed by virtuous rebels fighting their own evil Empire – and the exigencies of a real nuclear conflict. But the Cold War undercurrent transcends pop-culture fantasy. Jason’s absorption of nuclear imagery and metaphors inflects his perceptions of a range of everyday experiences. He watches girls spill ‘out of [a] photo booth after the fourth nuclear flash’ (214); empty school corridors look 'like a neutron bomb’s vaporized human life but left all the buildings standing’ (266); a friend at the fairground is 'laughing like Lord Satan in a mushroom cloud’ (324); an intimidating group of mods prompts Jason to reflect that '[a]fter the nuclear war, kids like them’ll rule what’s left. It’ll be hell.’ (236) Taken in isolation, these references and material metaphors may seem banal and everyday, but cumulatively they are disturbing symptoms of a pervasive nuclear fear in the 1980s that produces young subjects haunted by fantasies and nightmares of atomic fallout and radiation sickness:

I’m with the last bunch of survivors, after an atomic war. We're walking up a motorway. No cars, just weeds. Every time I look behind me, there’re fewer of us. One by one, you see, the radiation’s getting them. [...] It’s not that I’ll die that bothers me. It’s that I’ll be the last one. (10)

Even Jason’s reading material at his speech therapy sessions is implicated: he is set Robert C. O’Brien’s *Z for Zachariah* (1974), a dystopian tale of a child attempting to survive in the aftermath of World War III. (37) *Black Swan Green’s* focus on the Cold War is significant in other ways. Just like the weather report of strong winds blowing in from Russia, Jason’s narration and its nuclear undertow always subtly reinforce that the seemingly parochial
Black Swan Green – and Thatcherite Britain – is deeply enmeshed in global currents, political as well as meteorological: ‘Strange to think of a Red Army sentry on a barbed-wire watchtower shivering in this very same icy wind. Oxygen he’d breathed out might be oxygen I breathed in.’ (343)

The paranoid effect of the twists and turns of the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas conflict are also illustrated by the increasingly militaristic similes and metaphors through which Jason perceives and experiences his material surroundings. Innocently caught up in the patriotic fervour of the war’s early days – which he likens to the World Cup with fleet statistics for each side (121) – everyday things become opportunities for playful fantasies of idealised conflict: ‘Pudding was apple sponge. The syrup trail from my spoon was the path of our marines. [...] I bravely led our lads yomping over custard snow to ultimate victory in Port Stanley.’ (128) But with the sinking of the HMS Sheffield, the death of a local boy on the HMS Coventry that ‘killed the thrill of the war’ (140) and gossip that the conflict could escalate into a US-Soviet nuclear exchange, Jason’s growing awareness of the costs of conflict transforms his everyday environment into something much more threatening and equivocal: ‘birdsong strafed and morsed’ (137); ‘birds detonated out of the oak without warning and we jumped but didn’t laugh about it’ (138); ‘Rain began its blitz, tranging bullets off the roof and strafing the puddles round the barn.’ (102) Just as the war unconsciously ‘seep[s] in’ (184) to Jason’s poetry, none of his schoolboy possessions can escape the haunting association with global battles raging 8000 miles away:

Right now. That’s what freaks me. I dip my fountain pen into a pot of ink, and a Wessex helicopter crashes into a glacier on South Georgia. I line up my protractor on an angle in my maths book and a Sidewinder missile locks on to a Mirage III. I draw a circle with my compass and a Welsh guard stands up in a patch of burning gorse and gets a bullet through his eye. How can the world just go on, as if none of this is happening? (132)
M J. Harrison criticises *Black Swan Green* for divorcing objects from their cultural context: ‘in their own time [...] objects carry a cultural charge, which the novelist must surely retrieve and communicate if the past isn’t to become a combination of product placement and notebook entry, on the lines of “1982: remember to mention the Datsun Cherry”.’\textsuperscript{39} He is partly correct: the novel’s frameworks of retro-1980s signifiers are mostly inert. But Harrison ignores the distinction between this materialistic contemporary collective memory of the 1980s and the novel’s rich, suggestive, politicised presentation of the more mundane things through which Jason lives and perceives his life. These adolescent interactions are suffused with the shifting ideological currents of the period, and offer marginalised and often disturbing memories of the 1980s. *Black Swan Green* reflects Raphael Samuel’s belief that a closer attention to the meanings of ‘ordinary’ material objects can produce a ‘whole new family of alternative histories, which take as their starting point the bric-à-brac of material culture, the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life.’\textsuperscript{40} Materialistic retro-memory can be challenged (if not effaced) through the historiographic potential of our seemingly humdrum material environment. After all, as anthropologist Daniel Miller argues, a culture’s ‘whole system of things, with their internal order, make[s] us the people we are.’\textsuperscript{41} Contemporary fiction can use these systems of things, rather than metonymic or event-driven histories, to figure the subtleties of historical subject-formation: to textually remember who we were in the past, and imagine how that shaped who we are now. As Jason prepares to move away from *Black Swan Green* at the end of the novel, he takes with him a box full of emblematic objects encountered in each chapter. These accumulated objects materially represent the accumulation of experience on the way to socialisation that characterises the *bildungsroman* form. Significantly, none of his chosen objects are retro-signifiers:


\textsuperscript{40}Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Vol. 1*, p. 114.

In the Second World War this same OXO tin went to Singapore and back with my granddad. I used to press my ear against it and listen for Chinese rickshaw pullers or Japanese Zeros or a monsoon puffing away a village on stilts. [...] Granddad kept letters in it, and loose tobacco. Inside it now there's an ammonite called *Lytoceras fimbriatum*, a geologist's little hammer that used to be Dad's, the sponge bit of my only ever cigarette, *Le Grand Meaulnes* in French, [...] a woven wristband I nicked off the first girl I ever kissed, and the remains of an Omega Seamaster my granddad bought in Aden before I was born. Photos're better than nothing, but things're better than photos 'cause the things themselves were part of what was there. (368)

A brutal childhood

As I have argued, twenty-first century cultural production remembers the 1980s as an acutely formative period for contemporary Britain: its neoliberal childhood. *Black Swan Green* makes clear that childhood and adolescence are not pre-discursive, innocent states: that these periods of intense subject-formation cannot somehow be separated from ideology, politics and historical events. In doing so, the novel not only challenges retro-memory's nostalgia for the 1980s, but also the interrelated nostalgic cultural valorisation of childhood. Instead, the brutality of childhood and the militarism and social stratification of neoliberal Britain are presented as mutually constitutive. This dynamic is highlighted when Jason, out walking, is shocked by Harrier jump jets zooming over the Malvern Hills, and reflects on their association with the prospect of nuclear conflict:

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42 A useful American intertext is political journalist David Sirotta’s polemical survey of 1980s politics and popular culture. He argues that there is a direct link between the promotion of militarism in 1980s cultural production aimed at children and adolescents – much of which he asserts was a form of propaganda – and the increasing acceptance of militarism as a 'natural' element of American life. David Sirotta, *Back to Our Future: How the 1980s explain the world we live in now – our culture, our politics, our everything.* (New York: Ballatine Books, 2011), pp. 139-170.
When World War III comes, it'll be the MiGs stationed in Warsaw or East Germany screaming under NATO radar. Dropping bombs on people like us. On English cities, towns and villages like Worcester, Malvern and Black Swan Green, Dresden, the Blitz and Nagasaki. [...] 

Mrs Thatcher was on TV yesterday talking to a bunch of schoolkids about cruise missiles. ‘The only way to stop a playground bully,’ she said, as sure of her truth as the blue of her eyes, ‘is to show to the bully that if he thumps you, then you can jolly well thump him back a lot harder!’

But the threat of being thumped back never stopped Ross Wilcox and Grant Burch scrapping, did it? (113-114)

The politics of international conflict are presented as inextricable from the politics of childhood. The Thatcher government’s controversial agreement in 1980 that US cruise missiles able to be quickly launched against the Eastern bloc would be primed and ready on UK soil escalated global nuclear tensions and catalysed a revival of CND and the nuclear protest movement. On one level, Thatcher’s framing of a complex and potentially devastating geopolitical issue through the oversimplified schoolyard logic of deterrence and mutual ‘thumping’ suggests a crass, patronising and dangerously cavalier – indeed, to use its negative association, an adolescent – approach to the nuclear arms race. But this link to the politics of the playground scrap is not just abstract critique of Thatcherism: the reference to a specific fight between Jason’s schoolmates Grant Burch and Ross Wilcox suggests that violence structures both adolescent social relations and Black Swan Green’s broader (and arguably dystopian) conception of British society in the 1980s where ‘[h]ate doesn’t need a why. Who or even what is ample.’ (250)

Childhood is defined by harshness and alienation from the novel’s opening pages, as a game of British Bulldogs on a frozen pond starts with team-picking: ‘About twenty or twenty-five of us boys, plus Dawn Madden, stood in a bunch to be picked like slaves in a slave market’
(6). The game's violence makes Jason conclude that '[g]ames and sports aren't about taking part or even about winning. Games and sports're really about humiliating your enemies.'

(7) Childhood – like British society as presented – is brutal and militaristic: ‘It's all ranks, being a boy, like the army’ (4); ‘Human beings need to watch out for reasonless niceness [...] It's never reasonless and its reason's not usually nice.’ (90) It is also sharply stratified according to class: 'These gaps aren't easy to ignore. There are rules.' (108) Far from an idyll, childhood is a lonely and paranoid time: Jason may not understand a peer's joke, but, he realises '[t]here's no one I can trust to ask what it means.' (10) As the novel progresses, he becomes the subject of an intensifying campaign of bullying, which he tellingly figures through the same military metaphors and similes that define his experience of the Falklands campaign: a link between violence at an individual and societal level. After yet another cruel public barb about his stammer, ‘a fresh bomb of laughter blew [him] into tiny bits’ (206); following more mockery ‘[l]aughter acker-ack-acked after [him], like machine guns.’ (274)

It's no coincidence that the book a panicking Jason is forced to read aloud in class, despite his speech impediment, is William Golding's 1954 tale of adolescent savagery and civilizational regression Lord of the Flies. (264) Jason's headmaster may blithely assert 'that the victimization of the few – or even the one – by the many has no place in our school' (262) but the novel intimates that all levels of 1980s society are in fact structured by just this predatory logic.

Thatcherite rapacity is stereotypically embodied by Jason's boorish Uncle Brian, who condemns globalisation but revels in the mass bankruptcies that pay for his holidays to the Italian lakes: ‘Tell you, I'm grateful to that woman in Downing Street for this financial – what's the latest fad? – anorexia. Us number-crunchers are making a killing! And as partners’ bonuses are profit related, yours truly is sitting rather pretty.’ (57) Even his maxim for child rearing is capitalistic: 'Nothing beats the profit motive, right?' (59) The brutality of this increasingly unfettered capitalism eventually costs Jason's father his job, as
he is unfairly denounced by an ambitious protégée. From harshly competitive economic relations and the Falklands/Malvinas war to Jason’s bullying and the Black Swan Green villagers’ hysterical reaction to a planned travellers’ camp, individuals and groups at all levels of society are presented as deeply intolerant towards any perceived weakness or outsiders. Jason concludes that ‘perhaps mass gang-ups just have a will of their own that swallows up resistance. Maybe gang-ups’re as old as hunters in caves.’ (257) Fear and bigotry always have violent consequences: leaders – be they Mrs Thatcher, General Galtieri or the vicar’s wife whose anti-traveller invective leaves her basking in ‘a standing ovation like a cold man smiling into a bonfire’ (289) – ‘can sense what people’re afraid of and turn that fear into bows and arrows and muskets and grenades and nukes to use however they want. That’s power.’ (288-289)

Remembering Thatcherism as a corrosive force in British life is a common feature of twenty-first-century cultural production about the period. However, the tone of Black Swan Green’s sustained critique has contradictory political connotations. As this chapter has argued, the novel is keenly concerned with delineating the specific social and historical contexts of the 1980s through the minutiae of Jason’s adolescent life: undermining retro-memory’s idealised version of adolescence through remembering the anxieties and losses of modern Britain’s transition from welfare capitalism to Thatcherism in the early 1980s, the recessionary height of the ‘scorched earth phase of British neoliberalism.’ However, and echoing elements of Peace’s GB84, the text’s condemnations of collective violence and nationalistic/militaristic enactments of power are also framed in transhistorical terms: the brutal 1980s are a highpoint in the transhistorical cycle of venality and fear that defines

43 Jason rapidly comes to realise that ‘the villagers wanted the gypsies to be gross, so the grossness of what they’re not acts as a stencil for what the villagers are.’ (288) As Jones shrewdly notes in ‘Outfoxing Hangman’, Jason appears to have internalised the argument of Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978). While this theoretical sophistication certainly stretches credulity in a thirteen year-old narrator, it is representative of Mitchell’s theoretically aware (and highly overt) fiction.
44 Stuart Hall, ‘The neoliberal revolution: Thatcher, Blair, Cameron – the long march of neoliberalism continues.’ Soundings 48, (Summer 2011), 1-20 (p. 10).
Mitchell’s work. Thatcherism, with its divisive and authoritarian brand of neoliberalism, is presented as the logical political outcome of a perennially brutal society, or even more problematically of ‘human nature’ itself (defined as a timeless ‘mass gang up’ in which only the scale of the weapons changes) rather than as a specific hegemonic project achieved politically, ideologically and through state violence. Troublingly, this argument echoes that of neoliberalism’s proponents, who contend that their project is based on natural human values and is therefore inherently ethical. As Thatcher herself stated: ‘I willingly grant the influence of free market economists like Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. But the root of the approach we pursued in the 1980s lay deep in human nature, and more especially the nature of the British people.’ A central element of this Thatcherite narrative is the politically resonant figure of childhood:

[C]hildhood experience and upbringing, Mrs Thatcher’s favourite idiom, [...] offers the poignant, if illusory, promise, of a return to a security that has in later years been lost. As Mrs Thatcher put it in an early interview: ‘I want decent, fair, honest, citizen values, all the principles you were brought up with.’

Through Jason’s experiences and perceptions, Black Swan Green forcefully suggests that the principles twenty-first century Britain was ‘brought up with’ in the 1980s were anything but decent, fair and honest. Instead, it inverts the idyllic political resonances of childhood to signify insecurity, anxiety, and the constant threat and experience of violence: undermining idyllic retro-memory. However, the paradox is that by focalising its critique of

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45 This transhistorical vision of violence exemplifies the cyclical model of history that appears throughout Mitchell’s interconnected novels, notably in Cloud Atlas, which tracks capitalist predation and exploitation from the eighteenth century slave trade to a post-apocalyptic future. Typically for a Mitchell text, Jason actually encounters a character from Cloud Atlas during the course of Black Swan Green – Eva, who teaches him French and plays him the work of Robert Frobisher, a composer from the earlier novel who was obsessed with Nietzsche and reincarnation: ‘Recurrence is the heart of his music. We live exactly the same life, Robert believed, and die exactly the same death, again, again, again, to the same demi-semi-quaver. To eternity.’ (202)

46 The quotation is from Margaret Thatcher’s speech at the International Free Enterprise Dinner, 20th April 1999, and is sourced from The quotation is from Margaret Thatcher’s speech at the International Free Enterprise Dinner, 20th April 1999, and is sourced from Anthony Cartwright, How I Killed Margaret Thatcher (Birmingham: Tindal Street Press, 2012), p. 241.

Thatcherism through dehistoricised concepts of timeless human savagery, and childhood violence, the novel risks naturalising the very target of that critique. As Harvey suggests, neoliberalism can be understood as ‘as a failed utopian rhetoric masking a successful project for the restoration of ruling-class power.’

"Black Swan Green" problematically presents the roots of this ideological programme in a depoliticised notion of perennial ‘human nature’, albeit one that is dystopian rather than utopian.

Adolescence and critique

As with the simultaneous evocation/undermining of an idealised 1980s through rose-tinted retro-memory, the novel’s expression of historical critique in transhistorical terms highlights the contradictions that define "Black Swan Green." Its criticisms of the 1980s can seem incongruous alongside its obsessively materialistic form; and suggestions that Thatcherism is the logical product of society, rather than being in many ways imposed upon it, are questionable. As I have argued throughout this chapter so far, the novel is a sometimes uneasy and disjunctive blend of nostalgia and political critique. Another central contradiction is visible in the novel’s figuration of adolescence and the historiographic potential of the adolescent point-of-view. "Black Swan Green" is not alone in using adolescence to historicise twenty first century historical subjectivity, from Tim Binding’s *The Champion* (2011) and Cathi Unsworth’s *Weirdo* (2012); Helen Cross’s *My Summer of Love* (2001) a queer coming-of-age text set against the backdrop of the miners’ strike, and Nicola Barker’s humorous and subtly political *Five Miles from Outer Hope* (2001), to more programmatically ‘state-of-the-nation’ novels like Jonathan Coe’s *The Rotters’ Club* (2001) and Anthony Cartwright’s *How I Killed Margaret Thatcher* (2012). Films and television too deploy adolescent protagonists to figure the 1980s, as in *Billy Elliot* (dir. Stephen Daldry, 2000), *This is England* (2006) and its TV sequels *This is England ’86, This is England ’88* and

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48 Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, pp. 203-204.
This is England ‘90 (2010-2015). So what is the narrative appeal of the historical adolescent?

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood – two states that are themselves contentious and nearly impossible to define. Constitutively liminal and transformative, it is simultaneously understood to be ‘the best years of our life’ and a difficult, manic period of intense unfolding acculturation and pubescent sexual awakening. Eva’s description of Jason’s adolescence in Black Swan Green attempts to capture these contradictions: ‘Ackkk, a wonderful, miserable age. Not a boy, not a teenager. Impatience but timidity too. Emotional incontinence.’ (182) Any moment in time is inherently a point of transition, but histories and other cultural production often seek to frame the particular moment they are studying or figuring as an emblematic, uniquely important or misunderstood moment of particularly profound change. Adolescence offers a figure for such change that is rooted in perhaps the most widely understandable and enduring cultural metaphor for conceptualising the passage of time: the human life cycle. By association, figuring the past as adolescent can suggest a comfortingly teleological narrative that tacitly, uncritically presents the present as more progressive and developed than what came before. Crucially, adolescence also emphasises the messiness of historical change: the simultaneous co-existence of elements we may associate with ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’, events and determinants constantly in flux, without a decisive and neat ‘tipping point’ that represents a moment of transformation from one fixed state to another. So, adolescence is

James R. Kincaid argues that ‘the child’ is ‘both a fetish and a flexible construction that is, to a large extent, independent of outside standards like age. Adolescents are stuffed back in to childhood when it serves our purposes, as it often does when we are talking of molestation or crime. Victims of crime as old as eighteen or nineteen can be thought of as children, whereas perpetrators as young as six can be thought of and treated as adults. Such analogical playing with categories follows our needs. [...] The child is functional, a malleable part of discourse rather than a fixed stage; “the child” is a product of ways of perceiving, not something that is there. ‘Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 18-19. For an early and still highly influential examination of adolescence, see consider G. Stanley Hall, Adolescence (London: Appleton, 1916). A more recent analysis of the cultural uses of adolescence comes in Rachael McLennan, Adolescence, America, and Postwar Fiction: Developing figures (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
an evocative transitional motif through which one can figure a moment of broader historical upheaval such as the Thatcherite 1980s, the early years of which (the focus of Black Swan Green) are described by Andy Beckett as a true ‘revolution’ in its ‘early, hit-and-miss, most revealing stages – not the remorseless and in some ways predictable programme of consolidation that Thatcherism became after [the] first general election landslide in 1983.’

And adolescence is not just a resonant metaphor for historical change, but offers also a suggestive point-of-view through which it can be explored.

Arguably the most famous literary evocation of childhood (and certainly the most self-consciously virtuosic) is Henry James’s What Maisie Knew (1897), the narrative of a young girl’s immersion in a venal adult world in which the reader can never be entirely sure how much Maisie truly comprehends. In his preface to a later American edition of the novel, James describes his project’s transition from an initial plan to focus on what the child understood – which he quickly realised would make for a ‘limited consciousness’ that would stifle the novel – towards the text’s subtly different eventual focus on ‘what [James’s] wondering witness materially and inevitably saw, a great deal of which quantity she either wouldn’t understand at all or would quite misunderstand.’ This narratorial gulf between what Maisie sees and what she understands reflects James’s romantic idea of the aestheticising and universalising power of a child’s point-of-view for an adult reader:

I lose myself, truly, in appreciation of my theme on noting what she does by her ‘freshness’ for appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough. They become, as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art; she has simply to wonder, as I say, about them, and they begin to have meanings, aspects, solidities, connexions – connexions with the ‘universal!’ – that they could scarce have hoped for.

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50 Andy Beckett, UK80-82, xxi.
52 James, What Maisie Knew, p. 9.
Maisie and her naïveté denaturalise the world around her, exposing its petty pretensions, hypocrisies and evasions through the troublingly ‘universal’ and innocent lens. Adolescence, by contrast, is defined by the approach and accumulation of experience, knowledge and increasing understanding, both sexually and of the more nebulous exigencies of adult life. The figure of the adolescence is also bound up with the naturalised ‘ideology of transparency’ that Daniella Caselli critiques in relation to childhood. However, paradoxically, this naturalised figure offers a denaturalising point-of-view, in which the child's embodied tension between seeing and understanding the world is replaced by one between understanding the world and accepting its ideological ‘truths’ as self-evident or morally right. Adolescent narrators know more and understand more than younger children – they are more credible narrative perspectives through which to explore the unfamiliar worlds that define historical fiction. However, they are still discovering that world: experiencing and understanding its adult complexity for more or less the first time; correspondingly, through that point-of-view, the reader encounters that past world as something fresh and unfolding through the adolescent’s perspective. Adolescence in a post-war Western context arguably also offers the closest to a ‘universal’ experience we can consider. Lives diverge dramatically after compulsory education, but there is a common understanding – heightened by media/cultural reminiscences such as the Andrew Collins memoir considered earlier – that we all have a similar experience of the highs and lows of adolescence: acne, masturbation, puberty, first love, school bullies, clichés of the horrors of double maths etc. It offers a framework through which we can fantasise that we understand the past, and that our contemporary experiences do not diverge markedly from historical ones. However, adolescence represents a crucial moment in the process of socialisation – in

53 Daniela Caselli, ‘Attack of the Easter Bunnies: Walter Benjamin’s Youth Hour’, Parallax 22.4 (2016), 459-479, (p. 469). The ideological and political claims that structure the figure of the child will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.
54 Daniela Caselli argues that these transhistorical notions of childhood are politically dangerous, that they ‘come at the price of collapsing political self-reflectivity in favour of identifications that are troubling because posited beyond the realm of analysis.’ See Daniela Caselli, ‘Kindergarten theory: Childhood, affect, critical thought’, Feminist Theory 11.3 (2010), 241-254, (p. 246).
which a society’s values become normalised and internalised within subjects – that is seen as essential to political stability. James E. Block argues that this ideological ‘construction of consent’ defines social attitudes to childhood and adolescence: ‘Producing individuals convinced of their role as free individuals in a free society [...] depends on instilling early – and later inaccessible – patterns of preconscious adaptation and belief.’\textsuperscript{55} They are in the midst of what Brown sees as the neoliberal ‘production of citizens as individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives.’\textsuperscript{56} Accordingly, subjects poised in the middle of this process are arguably better placed to illuminate its workings. Historical values and ideologies are not fully internalised in adolescent subjects, denaturalising their historical setting, credibly alighting on details and illuminating situations that an adult may understand ‘preconsciously’ and therefore would pass unnoticed.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, critical perspectives and positions that may seem artificial or contrived in an adult narrator are more plausible from an adolescent’s perspective.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, \textit{Black Swan Green} insists that childhood and adolescence are defined by rather than abstracted from socio-political and ideological influences. Simultaneously, however, the adolescent perspective deployed to challenge this nostalgic retro-memory of the 1980s is rooted in a transhistorical conceptualisation of the child as natural, instinctive and ‘truthful’. The political and artistic implications of this double-signification are perhaps best illustrated through \textit{Black Swan Green}’s presentation of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, which so helped to consolidate Thatcherism as the dominant force in British politics, catalysed the Conservative’s 1983 election victory and transformed the personal popularity of Thatcher herself.\textsuperscript{58} Initially, the Argentine invasion

\textsuperscript{57} Block, \textit{The Crucible of Consent}, p. 5.
of an obscure and disputed archipelago in the South Atlantic was a crisis for the government, who were caught more or less unawares by the military action, and whose monetarist economic policies were also widely unpopular at the time. However, David Monaghan argues that the political and rhetorical potential of a bellicose military response from Britain was quickly realised:

Viewed in the context of Thatcher’s struggles to smooth over the gaps, contradictions and rough spots in her ‘Janus’-faced [Nairn, 1981] vision of the nation moving simultaneously into the past and the future, the Falklands War begins to look less a problem for the Conservative Government than a golden opportunity to repackage its ideological project into a more acceptable form.”

Ruinously expensive military conflict over a colonial hangover was immediately packaged through mostly compliant press coverage as a decisive and morally just opportunity for a declining Britain to ‘once again [don] the mantle of greatness and [regain] its destined position of moral preeminence amongst the nations of the world.’ However, Monaghan tracks another twist in the historical and political signification of the war, as it was also retooled to suggest the triumph of the neoliberal entrepreneurial subject:

Thatcher completes her reassessment of what the Falklands War means with the suggestion that, far from sparking a national revival, the war simply fanned a flame already kindled by prewar Conservative economic policies: “We have ceased to be a

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political legacies, both in terms of Thatcherism and the longer-term legacies for British militarism since the 1980s. For a distinctive critique that intercuts the crudeness and cartoonish politics of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict with its damaging effects on ordinary soldiers, which uses the visual form of the children’s picture book, see Raymond Briggs, The Tin-Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984). This is England explores racism and nationalism in early-1980s Britain through a protagonist whose father was killed in the war. The first narrative scene in the film opens with a broadcast of Margaret Thatcher expounding on Labour’s ‘offer to the young, a future wholly controlled by the socialist state’, coming from a radio on top of which a picture of this dead soldier looks out. Thatcherite futurity is juxtaposed with (and rooted in) this dead man’s sacrifice, and his son’s trauma. This is England, dir. by Shane Meadows (Film Four, 2006). Minefield, a piece of verbatim theatre, which reunites and is performed by British and Argentinian veterans, was performed at the London’s Royal Court Theatre in 2016 and toured internationally.


Monaghan, The Falklands War, p. 8.
nation in retreat. We have instead a new-found confidence – born in the economic battles at home and tested and found true 8000 miles away."\(^{61}\)

Jason’s changing perceptions of this overdetermined conflict highlight the critical potential of the adolescent narrator to move between seeing, understanding and accepting the ‘adult world.’ There is a difference between narration that allows the reader to readily understand the effects of ideology through its unconsciously internalised but still overt presence in the narrative voice, and the narrator offering an explicit diegetic critique of that ideology and historical conditions. Adolescent narrators like Jason allow a novel to have it both ways. At first, Jason passively accepts the simplified nationalistic narrative of the Falklands war, and his narration unsubtly evinces the highly mediated construction of that consensus:

Some Argie diplomat in New York, still harping on about the Belgrano being outside the zone, said Britain no longer rules the waves, it just waives the rules. The Daily Mail says it’s typical of some tinpot Latin paper-pusher to make stupid quips about life and death. The Daily Mail says the Argies should’ve thought about the consequences before they stuck their poxy blue-and-white flag on our sovereign colony. The Daily Mail’s dead right. The Daily Mail says that Leopoldo Galtieri only invaded the Falklands to distract attention from all his own people he’s tortured, murdered and pushed out of helicopters over the sea. The Daily Mail’s dead right again. The Daily Mail says Galtieri’s brand of patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. The Daily Mail’s as right as Margaret Thatcher. All England’s turned into a dynamo. (126)

A reader is in no doubt that Jason’s perspective on the war is shaped by the right-wing media, which he is initially unable to reflect upon: his passivity is childlike, but then by association so is the majority of a compliant adult Britain, exemplified by Jason’s parents and teachers (122). It also suggests, rather dubiously, that our retrospective understanding of the past offers a clearer, more developed perspective than those who lived through it: it

\(^{61}\) Monaghan, The Falklands War, p. 31.
flatteringly convinces twenty first century readers that we are able to see beyond the kinds of ideologies and rhetoric that Jason unthinkingly consumes. However, as I indicated earlier, Jason moves beyond this triumphant vision of the war as a heroic endeavour. His CND-supporting, Guardian-reading teenage sister Julia – one of the few politically oppositional characters in the text, if rather a stereotypical one – goes on to explain the role of propaganda to her incredulous younger brother:

"We're British," I told her. "Why would the government lie?" Julia replied that it was to assure us that our wonderful war is going swimmingly when in fact it's going down the toilet. "But," went my answer, "we're not being lied to." Julia said that's exactly what the Argentinian people'll be saying right now. (132)

Jason's age and his need for explanation and education, plausibly offer the text a didactic opportunity for communicating its political message. Following Britain's victory, Jason feels out of place in a nation behaving 'like it's Bonfire Night and Christmas Day and St George's Day and the Queen's Silver Jubilee all rolled into one.' (144). Instead, he reflects upon persuasive counter-narratives:

I should be really happy. Julia reads the Guardian, which has all sorts of stuff not in the Daily Mail. Most of the 30,000 enemy soldiers, she says, were just conscripts and Indians. Their elite troops all raced back to Port Stanley as the British paratroopers advanced. Some of the ones they left behind got killed by bayonets. Having your intestines pulled out through a slit in the belly! What a 1914 way to die in 1982. [...] Today's big story in the Daily Mail's about whether Cliff Richard the singer's having sex with Sue Barker the tennis player, or whether they're just good friends. (145)

Throughout the chapter that chronicles the Falklands/Malvinas conflict, Jason first exemplifies the passive consumption of the Falklands myth, and is then enabled to see through this smokescreen and glimpse the muddied, messy 'truth' about the war. Thus Black Swan Green tracks the changing impact of Thatcherite ideology from adolescence's liminal and idealised position: simultaneously outside and in-between the naïveté of
childhood one hand, and the compliance and compromises with which the text charges adulthood on the other. It remembers a spectrum of perspectives on the war that co-exist uncomfortably, while comfortably presenting the past as less developed and less critically aware than the contemporary reader.

Mitchell's novel can also be critiqued for drawing crude analogies between historical events and personal stories, as in the chapter 'Rocks', which counterpoints the Falklands conflict with an allegorical dispute over a rockery that reveals Jason's parents' disintegrating marriage. Given childhood's Romantic associations with truth and authenticity, Jason's age allows the text to display a trite morality, that would seem even cruder in an adult narrator: 'I want to bloody kick this moronic bloody world in the bloody teeth over and over till it bloody understands that not hurting bloody people is ten bloody thousand times more bloody important than being right.' (149) These examples suggest the limitations of Black Swan Green's adolescent narration: the inability to view complex historical events in anything other than intensely personal terms. However, this criticism should be balanced with the understanding that the novel's localising of global events is a means – arguably the only means – of figuring the personal effects of complex and seemingly abstract geopolitical issues, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. The novel's presentation of the minutiae of life in middle-England emphasises that this seemingly humdrum environment is in fact deeply enmeshed in Cold War politics and the global socio-economic shifts of neoliberalism. In this sense, Black Swan Green undercuts its own parochialism: the novel may be focalised through a solipsistic adolescent, but his narration collapses the neat opposition between local and global. It does this most effectively through its focus on Jason's historically determined experiences and perceptions of his 'everyday' environment. The

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62 Reviewers like Thomas Jones were critical of Mitchell's ventriloquism of a teenage narrator, and he argued that 'the supposed naturalism of Jason's voice is highly artificial and making romantic claims for its authenticity puts it under more strain than it is able to bear.' Jones, 'Outfoxing Hangman. However, I argue that the clearly retrospective and reflexive nature of Jason's narration goes some way to mitigate this criticism.
seemingly quotidian is revealed to be a politically resonant framework that novels can use to challenge idealised retro-memory and remember more complex and troubling dimensions of the 1980s.

**Conclusion: Perpetual Adolescence**

Mitchell’s ‘Preface’, the short story with which I opened this chapter, positions a 1980s childhood as simultaneously deterministic ‘Genesis’ and ‘Deuteronom[y]. It’s all written down there. And once writ, it can’t be unwrit’, and as narrative or origin myth that is always being rewritten to suit the changing needs of the present.63 *Black Swan Green* also combines both impulses: memory is unstable, and the past’s meaning is politicised, discursive and contestable, while, at the same time, adults continue to be determined by and embody their childhoods: ‘boys don’t become men. Boys just get papier-mâché inside a man’s mask. Sometimes you can tell the boy is still in there.’ (160) Violent parents beget scared, violent children, and history repeats itself. (365) Nevertheless, alongside the cyclical intimations of the novel’s thirteen-month structure (the first and last chapters are both called ‘January Man’ [1, 353]), the novel gestures forward to futurity and development beyond its pages. Leaving his childhood room behind, Jason is comforted by his sister: “It’ll be all right,” Julia’s gentleness makes it worse, “in the end, Jace.” “It doesn’t feel very all right.” “That’s because it’s not the end.” (371).

However, in twenty-first-century fictions about the neoliberal past, adolescents and children do not always grow up. *The Adult* (2012), Joe Stretch’s melancholy novel about a man unable or unwilling to come to terms with adult life and obsessed with his past, is divided into four parts: ‘Private life’, ‘Real life’, ‘Work life’ and ‘Love life.’ Tellingly, ‘Real life’ is the chronicle of his teenage years in the 1990s, and forms the core of the text; its determining discoveries, events and stark emotions are recalled with a lingering, nostalgic

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'unbearable sense of loss’ as the narrator spends the rest of the novel longing to recapture and prolong his adolescence. Its narrator is unable to progress or move beyond the paradigms of the recent past; having no agency or desire to challenge childhood’s determining influence or inhabit a future: being ‘stuck’ in a perpetual adolescence. Stretch’s novel is not a lone outlier. Within twenty-first-century cultural production about the 1980s, there is a pattern of arrested bildungen, lost and abused children, subjects stuck in or stalled by Thatcherism. In the next chapter, via theoretical analysis and readings of Denis Mina’s Field of Blood and David Peace’s Nineteen Eighty Three, I will argue that the figure of the abused or murdered child is an extreme metaphor for the historical relationship between neoliberal past and present, and for the senses of historicity and futurity articulable beyond the End of History.

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Chapter Four
Thatcher’s Children: Abusive Historicity

It is as if the child serves to sanction [the] concept of a pure origin
Because the child is seen as just such an origin in itself.
Jacqueline Rose

Isn’t home some place you have as a child, and spend the rest of your life
running from or failing to get back [to]?'
Blake Morrison

‘Never stops,’ says Mrs Myshkin. ‘Not round here.’ Not here –
‘You know that,’ she says, her hand squeezing your hand (your heart) – Here.
David Peace, Nineteen Eighty Three

Introduction: ‘Lost Boys’ and the arrested bildungsroman
Anthony Cartwright’s How I Killed Margaret Thatcher (2012), a coming-of-age novel that follows a nine-year-old boy’s life following Thatcher’s election in 1979, is set in an English Midlands in the process of being rapidly, traumatically deindustrialised. The novel is punctuated throughout by direct quotations from Margaret Thatcher, who Sean blames directly for the litany of misfortunes that afflict his now jobless working-class family, including alcoholism, prison and his father’s symbolically-freighted death by exsanguination while attempting to salvage ex-industrial machinery from an abandoned factory: ‘She tried to kill me, after all. She tried to kill all of us.’4 The integration of Thatcher’s

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This strategy of historicisation-through-quotatation (and the child’s neat embodiment of a particular account of historical change) is mirrored in Damian Barr’s memoir Maggie and Me (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), which traces Barr’s deprived childhood in a deindustrialising Scotland, and his early experiences and identity-formation as a queer man. As with Cartwright, the relation between a chapter’s content and its apparently apposite Thatcher quotation can be tenuous – a formal disjunction that testifies that it is a stretch to corral all of these childhood experiences within the explanatory paradigm of Thatcherism. Unlike Cartwright, Barr, despite his acknowledgement that the Thatcher government’s policies caused his community significant harm, credits Thatcherism with an aspirational and individualistic message that appealed to a queer boy in a working-class
speeches into the narrative as a structuring framework is a formal means of showing that Sean's unfolding experiences are directly caused by Thatcher, who neatly embodies for him Thatcherite and neoliberal ideas. At the end of the novel, following the '[t]hirty years or more' that Sean thinks 'you need if you really want to destroy something; community, society, whatever you want to call it',\textsuperscript{5} Sean characterises the still unemployed members of his community as stalled, infantilised figures: 'Johnny's still here, the same; he's past fifty now, thirty-odd years in and out of work; in out of something with Natalie. [...] Johnny's not the only one. You see them here all the time, lost boys, men.'\textsuperscript{6} This generation of 'lost boys', their development within a masculine paradigm of identity-through-work stalled by structural unemployment, are in the twenty-first-century still stuck as Thatcher's children: infantilised and still determined by the socio-economic transformations of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{7} Cartwright's adaptation of the bildungsroman form emphasises arrested development and stalled momentum, and its hyperbolically bleak narrative of traumatic childhood strangely mirrors the nostalgic narratives about adolescence discussed in the preceding chapter. Whether childhood is a lost idyll or horror story, both modes of narrative about the past position it as a determining and obsessively-narrativised point of 'pure origin', and one which subjects are unable or unwilling to conceptualise a future beyond.\textsuperscript{8} These narratives both represent a politically problematic 'perpetual adolescence', an articulation of both subjectivity and historicity that lacks agency or scope for meaningful political action in the present.

\textsuperscript{5} Cartwright, \textit{How I Killed Margaret Thatcher}, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{6} Cartwright, \textit{How I Killed Margaret Thatcher}, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{7} For an analysis of alternative forms of masculinity in post-industrial American fiction, see Sherry Lee Linkon, 'Men without Work: White Working-Class Masculinity in Deindustrialization Fiction', \textit{Contemporary Literature} 55.1 (Spring 2014), 148-167
\textsuperscript{8} Jacqueline Rose, \textit{The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 19.
Examples of the bildungsroman in which subjects are stalled or stuck, in which development and socialisation (the putative goals of the genre in its realist iteration of ‘reciprocal allegories of self-making and nation-building’) are frustrated or incomplete, are far from unprecedented. Jed Esty argues that the colonial and modernist bildungsroman use the figures of the youth who never grows up or the stalled adolescent to explore both uneven development within an increasingly reflexive colonial and imperialist world system, and represent an attempt to mediate formally the embodied experiences of capitalist modernity previously figured through narratives of ‘evolutionary historicism’: ‘the perpetration of adolescence displaces the plot of growth; the inability to make a fortune or stabilize the adult ego displaces the fulfilled vocational and sexual destiny.’ Esty suggests, in a fleeting conclusion focusing on the post-1945 European bildungsroman, that ‘in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher eras’, many so-called coming-of-age novels focus on ‘forms of unemployment and economic marginalization that produce arrested adolescence.’ The trope of the ‘youth out-of-joint – endlessly adolescent or suddenly aged, sophomoric or progeriac’, which ‘signifies both absent change (no growth) and constant change (continuous transformation)’ is a flexible, historically-determined way of figuring disrupted historical and temporal relationalities. This chapter explores the most extreme contemporary metaphor for arrested bildungen: the sexual abuse or murder of children.

In twenty-first century culture, narratives and metaphors of child sexual abuse are used to present revisionist histories, explore repressed or occluded elements of a deterministic

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9 Jed Esty, Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism and the Fiction of Development (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2. Esty intriguingly argues that the post-Goethe bildungsroman model itself, against which critics and exponents measure degrees of later experimentation and deviation, is somewhat of a phantom genre: modernists ‘violate a progressive logic that they presume to have existed, resist a linear historicism that is in part projected back onto Victorian realism by writers eager to assume the mantle of an experimental literary future.’ (p. 18)


11 Esty, Unseasonable Youth, p. 211. Esty cites Irvine Welsh as an example. See Chapter 1 for analysis of Skagboys and Trainspotting.

12 Esty, Unseasonable Youth, pp. 16-17.
past, and starkly embody the contradictions of living through a future beyond the End of History. The specifically historical significance of the figure of the abused child is significantly under-theorised. This final chapter will analyse two contemporary novels that represent Britain’s neoliberal restructuring in the 1980s through tropes of child sexual abuse and child murder: David Peace’s *Nineteen Eighty Three* (2002) and Denise Mina’s *The Field of Blood* (2005). The *Field of Blood* transposes the James Bulger murder from Liverpool in the 1990s to Glasgow in the early 1980s, putting that crime even more clearly in dialogue with Thatcherism. Its procedural narrative uncovers the adult influences that (in this novel, literally) drive two children to murder another, simultaneously rendering this fictional version of a real murder more palatable and ‘understandable’ and emphasising the social context – notably post-industrial poverty and deprivation – that help to warp two ten-year-old murderers. However, when child sexual abuse is revealed as a key factor in the case/narrative, it acts to efface these social and contextual factors, rendering a crime with complex social and political provenances the sole result of individual deviance, and resolving the ‘faultline narrative’ generated by this child murder. *Nineteen Eighty Three*, by contrast, positions sexual abuse as not only deeply implicated with social and economic history, but in fact an extreme example of the British social system in the 1970s and 1980s in which children (and, crucially for the novel and for the specific focus of this chapter, what the figure of the child and childhood represent) are precarious and unsafe. Corrupt policemen cover up the crimes of paedophiles with whom they have shared business interests – the agents of the state prioritise profit over protecting vulnerable children. Narratives of systemic child abuse bleakly (and hyperbolically) present society in the 1980s

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as defined by predation, division and apathy, and violently represent the end of any hopeful, progressive, let alone utopian, vision of political and collective life. Peace's work is formally innovative and bracingly anti-nostalgic, but its model of history as cycles of unbreakable determinism and the fundamental crisis of futurity it represents through sexual abuse suggests, to quote Erica Burman, an understanding of Thatcherism as a ‘traumatogenic place of origin’, and intimates forms of subjectivity and historicity that efface agency and “forget” present day sequelae/causative circumstances.'  

The historical child: uses and abuses  
In his survey of contemporary literature, Robert Eaglestone asks whether it is ‘the case that in the last ten years or so, years of turmoil, children have become a new way of evading or expressing something as yet unclear?’ The following section seeks to answer provisionally this question, specifically in relation to the figure of the abused child within historical narratives about the recent past. Contemporary British culture consumes more and more cultural production about child sexual abuse, from the luridly reported recent investigations into the crimes of celebrity abusers and alleged paedophile rings at the heart of government and the intelligence services, to the prolonged boom in ‘misery memoirs’ and trauma narratives, and the increasingly routine use of paedophilia and the figure of the missing or dead child as a ‘go-to’ plot device in film, fiction and television drama. However,

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15 Analysing the cultural or ideological work child abuse narratives do, or their signification within contemporary culture, could be misinterpreted as trivializing the very real suffering of victims or somehow undermining the veracity of their testimony. However, it is vitally important to be attentive to how and why the cultural ‘stories’ we collectively tell about abuse are constructed in particular ways, because the assumptions that underpin those stories are often highly conservative in their inattention to structural and social contexts for abuse, reliant on overly simplified and deterministic models of history and subjectivity and rooted in nostalgic fantasies about childhood and children.


17 Following revelations about the crimes of Jimmy Savile, Operation Yewtree was launched by the Metropolitan Police. See Anon, ‘Jimmy Savile abuse claims: Police pursue 120 lines of enquiry’, *BBC News*, 9 October 2012. Initially focusing on Savile, the enquiry later broadened its focus to include other alleged abusers, primarily celebrities and those in the entertainment industry. Operation Hydrant, a wide ranging national investigation into ‘historic’ child sex offences was later launched.
this dizzying proliferation of child abuse narratives does more than expose the suffering of real children and represent a long overdue recognition of the testimony of abuse victims. These narratives, and the patterns that they take, are structured by underlying, often conservative, political and historical discourses, which operate much less visibly, and are under-researched. So why do these cultural discourses around abuse and childhood exist in their contemporary forms, and what does the increasing ubiquity of the figure of the abused child in contemporary cultural production signify? As James R. Kincaid, quoted in Chapter Three, argues, 'the child is functional, a malleable part of discourse rather than a fixed stage; “the child” is a product of ways of perceiving, not something that is there.'\(^{18}\) For Kincaid, as for a range of critics including Erica Burman, Jacqueline Rose, Lee Edelman and Daniela Caselli, the child as a figure does constitutive political and ideological work. Rooted as they still are in the Romantic idealization of the child as a tabula rasa, contemporary figurations of the child become sites for intense adult investment and projection, which often efface the experiences of real, existing children:

[The] dominant imaginaries – the sets of cultural associations and affective relations mobilised around ‘the child’ – oppressively occlude the real conditions of children’s lives, with the complexity and diversity of children's lives typically reduced to and

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abstracted (especially from class and national identifiers) into some notional, highly symbolised and usually singular (and often young and/or female) child.\textsuperscript{19} David Peace, whose contemporary historical fictions are no stranger to child-as-metaphor, illustrates the incongruity between the material/corporeal and the abstracted/idealized child in typically grisly terms. When ten-year old Clare Kemplay is abducted and murdered in \textit{Nineteen Seventy Four} (1999), her killer sews wings hacked from a live swan onto her back to transform her into ‘an angel’: ‘skin so pale, hair so fair and wings so white.\textsuperscript{20}’ But Clare’s body cannot physically support the weight of the ‘angelic’ wings and they become detached, tearing the skin from her back: the intensity of her killer’s fetishistic investment in a pure, sacral childhood destroys her fragile young body.

These damaging ‘cultural associations and affective relations’ are of course historically specific and contingent, and discourses of childhood are not only transformed and delimited by historical change but, crucially given the focus of this thesis, are often a means of a registering and figuring anxiety about that historical change.\textsuperscript{21} Sociologist Chris Jenks argues that the rapid socio-economic changes of the last forty years have transformed the meaning of ‘the child’. He sketches a broad transition from ‘modern’ notions of childhood – embodying the promise of progress and futurity – to the figure of the ‘post-modern’ child – a fetishized symbol of stability and a focus for backward-looking nostalgia:

The vortex created by the quickening of social change and the alteration of our perceptions of such change means that, whereas children used to cling to us, in modernity, for guidance into their/our ‘futures’, now we, through late modernity, cling to them for ‘nostalgic’ groundings, because such change is both intolerable and

\textsuperscript{19} Burman, \textit{Developments}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{20} David Peace, \textit{Nineteen Seventy Four} (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999), p. 110.
\textsuperscript{21} Burman, \textit{Developments}, p. 11.
disorienting for us. They are lover, spouse, friend, workmate and, at a different level, symbolic representations of society itself.22

While Jenks’ analysis of the distinct impulses behind investments in futurity and nostalgia is persuasive (and has been generative in structuring this chapter’s reading of The Field of Blood and Nineteen Eighty Three), his suggestion that modernity’s investments in childhood have been simply superseded by postmodernity is unconvincing, relying as it does on neat epochal periodization. In fact, as Lee Edelman notes, the symbolic future child still ‘shapes the logic within which the political itself may be thought.’23 For Edelman, ‘thinking of the children’ is in fact a highly conservative form of social reproduction: a way for hegemonic forces to preclude radical social change or transformation through the regulatory figure of the child, for whom the supposedly ‘imperilled’ socio-political status quo must be shored up.24 Whether one agrees entirely with Edelman’s claims about this moralistic ‘reproductive futurism’, the fact that the figure of the child still structures discourses of social and political futurity is difficult to dispute.25 One example is the ongoing debates about austerity economics, which are framed by both sides through discussions of our collective abstracted future ‘children, and their children’s children’ either burdened with debt or stymied by inadequate public services for generations to come. Jenks argues that childhood’s association with collective futurity is a material as well as ideological concern for the nation state: ‘Individuals and collectivities reproduce themselves both biologically and culturally and children are practical embodiments of these processes. Children constitute the perpetual renewal of human relations. They are encoded bio-genetically but also imbued with social values and cultural capital through early socialisation and formal education.’26

Historian Hugh Cunningham also argues that from the early twentieth century onwards

24 Edelman, No Future, pp. 3-5.
25 See Chapter Two for analysis of Edelman’s critique of ‘reproductive futurism.’
26 Jenks, Childhood, p. 90.
'children were seen as the most valuable asset a nation had, one which, if not properly nurtured, would lead to a process of degeneration and to a loss of power and status relative to other countries.' Cunningham is specifically discussing historical forms of imperialism, but his logic regarding the socio-economic instrumentalisation of childhood can be just as easily applied to the late twentieth century, albeit with a different competitive goal: economic power and competitiveness in a globalised marketplace. Edelman, combining psychoanalytic and Foucauldian insights, persuasively defines the contemporary figure of the ‘child’ as a ‘disciplinary Image’ of both an ‘imaginary past’ and a ‘site of projective identification with an always impossible future’ In both material and ideological terms, the child simultaneously represents a myth of pure historical origin and a site for often fearful fantasy about collective futures.

So if, in many crucial ways, the child’s association with progressive futurity is still with us, what has changed in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century culture? Unlike Jenks’s neat periodization, the political philosopher Wendy Brown offers a more nuanced model of historical change, arguing that in contemporary neoliberal culture and politics, the ‘constitutive’ collective meta-narratives of modernity – specifically those of the sovereign subject, rights-based freedoms, and teleological/progressive models of history and temporality – have been destabilized but not replaced: they ‘remain those by which we live, even in their broken and less-than-legitimate-or-legitimating form.’ Essentially, there is a fundamental cognitive dissonance at play in contemporary culture: progressive narratives still structure the social and political imaginary, but they are no longer really believed.

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28 Edelman, No Future, p. 31. Children, the vehicle for social reproduction, do not only represent hope, they represent the transmission of their society into perpetuity, which may be one reason for the cultural desire to position them as pre-discursive and pre-social and in doing so keep the fragile fantasy of a progressive future in place.
Articulations of futurity rooted in conceptions of transformation are incongruous after the End of History, after which, for good or ill, capitalism apparently ‘seamlessly occupies the horizon of the thinkable.’ So even though societies are less confident – even incredulous – about the progressive future that the modern child represented, this model of childhood lingers and anxiously co-exists with very different nostalgic associations. Burman articulates these messy, multiple meanings:

[T]he child as signifier of either the ‘true’ self, or even the (biographically prior, or never experienced but longed for) ‘lost’ self, has coincided with a historical sensibility of even greater personal alienation and dislocation. [...] Hence childhood becomes a site for multiple emotional as well as political investments: a repository of hope yet a site of instrumentalisation for the future, but with an equal and opposite nostalgia for the past.

Late twentieth-century socio-economic and cultural change – whether it is conceptualized as post-Fordist, neoliberal, postmodern, or as a concatenation of those forces – does not just help produce this overloaded figuration of childhood. Contemporary cultural production also routinely figures these changes through stories and metaphors of childhood, particularly of child abuse. In Rupert Thomson’s novel Death of a Murderer (2007), which explores the cultural afterlife of the ‘Moors Murders’ in 1960s Greater Manchester, the very mention of Myra Hindley’s name forces one character to ‘[stare] through the tiles to what lay immediately beneath: the foundations of the house, the dark, damp earth – the end of everything.’ If the child is a powerful metaphor – however fraught – for both our idealized past and our hopes for a progressive future, child abuse not only damages real children’s lives, it destabilizes narratives that are foundational to society, revealing how precarious

31 Burman, Developments, p. 13.
they really are. Indeed, the trope or metaphor of the abused child articulates the fundamental dissonances that Brown argues define contemporary culture, which may account for the proliferation of cultural narratives about abuse from the late twentieth century onwards. Abused and murdered children like Hindley and Ian Brady’s victims in *Death of a Murderer* are routinely figured as ‘lost in time’. They are uneasy metaphors for a future that could or should have come to pass but did not; for transformation and development that was violently arrested.

As well as signifying an impossible or precarious future, the figure of the abused child is also increasingly popular as cultural shorthand for exploring a hidden, repressed or traumatically occluded past. This is evident in contemporary novels as diverse as Peace’s *Red Riding Quartet* (1999-2002), an explicitly revisionist series of crime novels that present the North of England in the 1970s and 1980s as endemically corrupt and criminal; Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* (2005) in which childhood sexual abuse catalyses a medium’s ability to communicate with the dead; and Patrick McCabe’s *Winterwood* (2006) in which child sexual abuse is the repressed reality of a rural past rapidly becoming an object of nostalgia in an Ireland transformed beyond recognition by neoliberalism. For cultural production that is revisionist and hostile towards a nostalgic view of the recent past like Cartwright, Peace, Mantel and McCabe’s fictions, the trope of child sexual abuse represents a logical fit

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34 Thomson, *Death of a Murderer*, p. 1.
35 Hilary Mantel, *Beyond Black* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010); Patrick McCabe, *Winterwood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007). I am not analysing *Winterwood* in depth here, because this thesis focuses on British cultural production. Nevertheless, it suggests that child abuse functions more widely as a socio-economic metaphor, albeit in very different national contexts. *Winterwood* shows how the cultural effects of late capitalism can serve to efface or neuter the power of the past. Ireland in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s is presented as a place that sentimentalises and commodifies its history just as neoliberalism and globalisation of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom fundamentally alter the nation's landscape, society and customs. The novel acts as a disquieting warning against that impulse: Ireland’s past – embodied here through its very specific history of child sexual abuse – is dangerous and dark. It cannot (and should not) be repressed, forgotten or garishly repackaged as heritage. *Winterwood* exemplifies the gothic horror of the past through a narrator who is literally haunted by a child abuser, and whose narrative voice becomes increasingly blurred with this revenant. McCabe’s fractured and allusive trauma-style can be productively compared with Peace’s very different stylistic experiments to represent the abused historical subject.
for exploring deleterious and determining historical legacies. They intensify the ferocity of the critique, ‘turning the screw’ in narrative terms.\textsuperscript{36} However, a model of the past defined by horror and trauma is not necessarily ‘anti-nostalgic’ or politically challenging. Rather, it can be considered as another form of nostalgia (from the Greek ‘algia’/painful longing for ‘nostos’/home) that positions the past as a stable, determining point of origin, albeit one that is disavowed rather than desired. As Blake Morrison asks in \textit{As If}, his non-fiction novel that uses the James Bulger murder as a prism to explore fetishisation and mythologisation of the figural child, ‘[i]sn’t home some place you have as a child, and spend the rest of your life running from or failing to get back [to]?’\textsuperscript{37}

Roger Luckhurst’s work on ‘trauma culture’ suggests the emergence from the 1990s onwards of a wide-ranging ‘articulation of subjectivity […] organized around the concept of trauma.’\textsuperscript{38} According to Luckhurst, subjects define themselves in relation to their own trauma, but they also yoke themselves to collective traumas and voyeuristically consume trauma narratives – particularly those of abusive childhoods. Perhaps paradoxically for something defined by its very lack of a ‘cohesive narrative, only fragments linked through ominous occlusions’, trauma offers a seemingly stable means of self-fashioning.\textsuperscript{39} As Alison Winter notes, following the memory ‘wars’ of the 1990s (the debates around the recovered memory/false memory scandals that exemplify the clash between models of memory-as-retrieval and memory-as-dynamic-narrative), the recovery of repressed childhood sexual abuse has become popular shorthand for memorial processes more generally.\textsuperscript{40} If, as, Middleton and Woods argue, twenty-first-century novels present memory rather than

\textsuperscript{36} In Henry James’s ‘The Turn of the Screw’ (1898), the framing narrative presents the presence of children as the focus of a ghost story as an intensifying effect: ‘If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to two children −?’ Henry James, \textit{The Turn of the Screw} (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{37} Blake Morrison, \textit{As If} (London: Granta, 1998), p. 103.

\textsuperscript{38} Roger Luckhurst, \textit{The Trauma Question} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 28.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

historical discourse as the ‘superhighway to the past’ and that the form of these texts engages with historically specific ‘collectively shared expectations about how memory works and what it can provide’, then it can be little surprise that historical fictions articulate pastness and historicity through ’traumatic’ childhood memories and experiences.\footnote{Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, \textit{Literatures of Memory: History, Time, and Space in Postwar Writing} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). pp. 90-91.}

Kincaid argues that too often child abuse offers this totalising explanatory power, it ‘explains so much, explains everything. It is the semiotic shorthand that tells us to look no further.’\footnote{Kincaid, \textit{Erotic Innocence}, p. 12.} Burman concurs that conceptions of sexual abuse often represent ‘the familiar problem that once the past is seen as the traumatogenic place of origin it is all too easy to conveniently “forget” present day sequelae/causative circumstances.’\footnote{Burman, \textit{Developments}, p. 104.} Abuse narratives often suggest models of contemporary subjectivity and historicity being produced and delimited by one ‘watershed’ event or moment in the past, undermining agency and the capacity for transformation in the present and future. The forms that these abuse narratives take, and the ideologies that underpin them, can also be deeply culturally conservative. Kincaid suggests that there is something beguilingly simplistic and attractive about the ‘stark moral drama’ of paedophilia, with its categories of inherent purity and evil, and that contemporary cultural production uses abuse to tell nostalgic and eschatological narratives of social and moral decline.\footnote{Kincaid, \textit{Erotic Innocence}, p. 11. For a right-wing journalistic take on the relationship between child abuse and perceived moral ’permissiveness’, in a more contemporary context see Melanie Phillips, ‘Why is the Left so blind to the link between today’s sex scandals and the cult of permissiveness?’ \textit{Daily Mail}, 12 May 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2323554/Why-Left-blind-link-todays-sex-scandals-cult-permissiveness.html#ixzz2ZoPY4B1H [accessed 21 July 2013]. Jenks argues that '[it] is not essentially that the character of our behaviour towards children has altered but that our threshold of tolerance for potentially “abusive” conduct has lowered.’ Jenks, \textit{Childhood}, p. 99. In this historical account, socio-cultural and discursive shifts formed ‘abuse’ as a category to conceptualise harmful behaviour towards children.} Narratives of ‘[s]exual abuse [allow] us to brandish our own virtue by locating for us a demon, a creature harder to find since the collapse of the ‘evil empire.’\footnote{Kincaid, \textit{Erotic Innocence}, p. 12.} Furthermore, the popular presentation of child abusers as highly \textit{individualized}
deviant monsters not only isolates their actions from implication in wider social and cultural systems, it ‘draws our attention away from [...] structural social problems and away from what may be more pressing pains in our culture.’ For Kincaid, these ‘structural social problems’ are particularly associated with and exacerbated by the neoliberal ‘revolution’ of the 1980s and beyond, the negative effects of which continue to affect disproportionately children and vulnerable people. To contextualise Mina and Peace’s literary historicisations of the 1980s through the figure of the abused child, I will turn briefly to Thomson’s *Death of a Murderer*. In this novel, ‘structural social problems’ are not elided by, but uneasily imbricated with a pattern of abused children and arrested development. In Thomson’s novel, British society seems to be structured by precarious investments in the future.

**Precarious futures: *Death of a Murderer***

Thomson’s *Death of a Murderer* destabilizes the constitutive cultural investment in the child as an embodiment of progress, possibility and futurity. It does this not only through exploring the murder and abuse that leaves children ‘lost in time’ (*DM*, 7) but through the pattern of children in the novel who are trapped in unstable lives or face uncertain futures. In *Death of a Murderer*, the figure of the abused child becomes an anxious metaphor for the power of the past – simultaneously determining and impossible to fully grasp and articulate – and the fear of a precarious and unknowable future. It seems as if all children face uncertain and precarious futures – victims of sexual abuse or child abduction are only the

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47 Kincaid polemically argues that, in the West ‘[w]e value children very little. That’s a crude statement, but why else should the Dow Jones average soar and the situation of children become worse and worse? Between 1985 and 1995 the number of children living below the poverty line grew by 26 percent, now numbering one child in four; the population of poor kids under age six boomed – up 43 percent. [...] We fix our eyes on sexual abuse, a comparatively minor problem, because it pleases us to talk about it.’ Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence*, p. 160. These are American statistics, but Cunningham’s analysis of the British figures are depressingly similar: during the 1980s and 1990s the proportion of children in poverty went from one in ten to about one in three.’ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 180.
most extreme examples of subjects unable to move beyond blighted and determining childhoods. Billy Tyler's job as a policeman, through which he guards the body of Myra Hindley in a hospital morgue, puts him into contact with a wide range of dysfunctional families, and he and his colleagues see their job as little more than ‘dealing with rubbish that no one else wanted to deal with. Most of them had gone into the job with good intentions, thinking they could be of use, but they soon realized that the task was well nigh impossible’ (DM, 91); ‘In all his time as a police officer, there were only one or two teenagers whose lives he could honestly claim to have changed for the better’ (DM, 69). This lack of faith in the possibility of progress is reflected in a model of the next generation ineluctably repeating the actions of their parents: ‘Recently a constable in his fifties had told Billy that he was now arresting the sons and grandsons of people he had arrested when he first started out. The crime figures might go up or down, but nothing changed, not really.’ (DM, 93) Missing teenager Rebecca Williams, who Billy fears is the victim of violence at home, is another example: ‘the look [she] had in the photograph still haunted him. I've tried, her face seemed to be saying, I really have, but it's no use.’ (DM, 92) Billy is depressed by this socio-economic determinism, and the realization that he can do nothing to intervene and challenge the lack of ‘possibilities’ Rebecca is stuck with, and the kind of limited future she seems doomed to inhabit. Her photograph may not be ‘old-fashioned, ham-fisted black-and-white’ like the ‘little faces’ of Brady and Hindley’s victims reproduced in the tabloids, but she too is a ‘victim’ (DM, 3). Further, seemingly random and inexplicable symbols of arrested development focalized through the figure of the child punctuate the text. Billy recalls attending the crime scene when ‘a dead baby had been found at the bottom of a bed’ (DM, 95) His memories of the suicide of Shena Coates are perhaps most haunting of all:

She was wearing a velvet dress and a pair of high heels, and […] locked herself in the garden shed, applied lipstick, rouge, eye-shadow and mascara herself, and then hanged herself. She was eleven years old. You could still see her handprints on the
window where she had tried to clean the glass. She had needed more light, in order to do her makeup properly... \((DM, 24-25)\).

Taken individually, these children are tragic or violent anomalies. But together, they form a pattern that defines childhood as either something you do not survive, or that traps you in an uncertain and precarious future. Yet the text also insists on the ways in which figures of childhood are inextricably bound up with a desire for futurity in the contemporary cultural and political imaginary. When Billy and his wife Sue move house, she feels ‘a kind of restlessness or hollowness, the sense that she hadn’t fully occupied the space around her. The space inside her too, […] she’d had a miscarriage and she was frightened she might not be able to have children. Words like “security” and "the future" crept into her conversation’ \((DM: 35)\). When Billy proposes marriage ‘a dreamy smile rose on to her face, as if he’d reminded her of something a long time ago, in her childhood’ \((36)\). The multiple temporalities invested in the figure of child in this quotation is suggestive: marriage, with its promises of ‘security’ and ‘future’ are rooted for Sue in dreams of childhood, in the double sense of her own past and her future child. Sue sees pregnancy as a way of ‘securing’ the future and ‘occupying’ the world. And eventually they do have a daughter, Emma, who is born with Down’s Syndrome. Her genetic disorder leaves her vulnerable, needing constant monitoring, and with a terrifying propensity to disappear. Exhausted and depressed on a cliff-side walk in Whitby, Sue even fleetingly considers killing her: ‘She stood in her daughter’s shadow, and she came so close to reaching out that her hands seemed to throb’ \((85)\). Rather than security, Emma symbolizes ‘the fragility of things. Their life together. Their foothold in the world’ \((86)\).

By the end of *Death of a Murderer*, Billy is able to cathartically slough off the presence and memory of Hindley, which seems to tentatively offer the promise of progress. However, the novel ends in a much more ambivalent way with Billy bathing his daughter and questioning Emma’s future:
He had wondered then what would become of her. What would he and Sue decide to do about her future? Would she always live at home, with them? Who would care for her when they were dead? Or would she, with her damaged heart, die first? (DM, 249-250).

The novel’s destabilization of Burman’s definition of childhood as a ‘repository of hope’ through its pattern of abused, fragile or dead children is further emphasized in these final pages. In *Death of a Murderer*, ‘[t]hings like that were always happening, it seemed, or on the point of happening’ (DM: 225). Childhood becomes an ambivalent metaphor not for progress and possibility, but for a lack of confidence in our unstable, stratified present, and an uncertain, precarious collective future. Billy concludes that the public hated Hindley not only for her crimes but because she ‘had reminded them of a truth that they had overlooked, or hidden from, or lied to themselves about’ (DM, 198). The ‘truth’ is that childhood is more complex, more threatened and more threatening than we can often stand to acknowledge, and that the stories we tell about it are inadequate, even obfuscatory. Those constitutive cultural narratives act, in Edelman’s words, as a ‘disciplinary image’ that delimits discourse and contemporary social and political horizons. Child abuse – a threat not only to real children’s lives, but to cultural investments in childhood – highlights our anxieties about childhood, and by association pastness, society and the shape of our collective future. But the stories we tell about abuse are often conservative, and simplistic – affirming structuring definitions and assumptions about ‘childhood’ through the figure of a monstrous external threat. By contrast, *Death of a Murderer* uses metaphors of child abuse to interrogate and undermine these stories and others – the neat narratives of nostalgia and futurity or the clear schema of the post-modern and the modern child. The novel presents the Moors Murders as not simply an aberrant event, but a brutal example of an underlying logic or social system in which children are insecure and unsafe. That logic is never systematized or

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clearly explained, but Thomson’s novel disquietingly forces readers and critics to question what is ‘overlooked, or hidden [...] or lied [...] about’ (DM, 198) in contemporary attachments to childhood. Building on this analysis of Thomson as an intertext, I will now turn to the specific ways in which The Field of Blood and Nineteen Eighty Three present the relationship between the abuse of children and the socio-political transformations of Thatcherite neoliberalism. Does figuring the 1980s as an abusive past undermine the scope for political change in the present and produce an infantilised conception of twenty-first-century subjects? Are the legacies and paradigms of that period therefore figured as final and insurmountable? And how do Mina and Peace’s fictions historicise the neoliberal past and present through the figure of the abused child?

**Re-writing the James Bulger murder: ‘faultline narratives’ and The Field of Blood**

The murder of James Bulger offers a cultural case study in the political and historical signification of child murder and abuse. Furthermore, understanding the contested significance of these events is crucial to analysing their reworking in the context of the early 1980s in Denise Mina’s The Field of Blood. In February 1993, the two-year-old James Bulger was abducted from a shopping centre in Liverpool, tortured and killed by two ten-year-old boys. Against a vituperative media backdrop, both boys were tried as adults and found guilty of murder. After their conviction, the trial judge took the unprecedented decision to release their names and images to the public: the previously anonymous ‘Child A’ and ‘Child B’ became Jon Venables and Robert Thompson, vilified by the press as ‘freaks’ who embodied an ‘evil beyond belief’ that transcended any mitigation: a ‘metaphysical evil’.

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50 Those quotes are, respectively, from The Sun, Today and The Times following Thompson and Venables’ trial in November 1993, and are sourced from Bob Franklin and Julian Petley, ‘Killing the Age of Innocence: Newspaper Reporting of the Death of James Bulger’, in Jane Pilcher and Stephen Wagg (eds.) Thatcher’s Children? Politics, Childhood and Society in the 1980s and 1990s (London: Falmer Press, 1996) pp. 134-154. Their article offers a helpful synthesis of the range of media debates sparked by the murder in 1993, but its critical analysis is lacking. More useful for this chapter’s argument is Jenks’ sociological discussion of the media coverage. He argues that positioning Venables and Thompson as simply ‘aberrant’ sidelined social and contextual factors and placed them outside of the Romantic/modern ideology of childhood, leaving it unchallenged. See pp. 117-136. Thomson’s Death of a Murderer explores similar issues when the novel’s protagonist Billy reflects upon the ways
The conduct of the trial and the decision to publicise the boys' identities were criticised in a 1999 European Courts of Human Rights ruling as 'presenting the appearance of an exercise in the vindication of public outrage.' Yet political responses at the time largely kept step with the national outcry, fuelled by newspapers that 'used the occasion to reiterate the crude notions of "evil" and individual culpability and to place in the dock the whole idea of extenuating social circumstance.' The then Prime Minister John Major, beleaguered by recession and government instability over Britain's relationship with the European Union, seized the opportunity to indict post-1960s moral 'permissiveness', arguing that 'society needs to condemn a little more, and understand a little less', while then Shadow Home Secretary Tony Blair made shrewd political capital out of the crime by describing it as 'a hammer blow against the sleeping conscience of the nation, an ugly manifestation of a society no longer worthy of the name.' In his autobiography, Blair is explicit about how he politicised the murder through a specifically causal historical narrative that specifically indicted Thatcherism:

in which Hindley, who was involved in child murder, is excluded from the category of childhood itself: 'He tried to imagine the woman as a little girl, but it made him feel uncomfortable. It was as if he were placing her on the same footing as her victims; it seemed insensitive at best, at worst a kind of violation. Yet there must have been a time, mustn’t there, when she was innocent? People didn’t want to think about that of course. There was one image of her in the popular mind – the dyed-blonde hair, the brooding gaze – and that was it. There was no before, no after. [...] And as he sat there at the table it suddenly occurred to him that he had never seen a picture of her as a child, not even one. Didn’t her mother have any? If not, what had happened to them? Had they been suppressed? Destroyed? It was a strange absence, unsettling, almost unjust, though he thought he understood the need for it.' Thomson, Death of a Murderer, pp. 180-181. Billy understands that there is a 'need' for Hindley to stand outside the fundamental category of 'the child', because dominant cultural understandings of childhood as an inherently 'innocent' time cannot really withstand her incorporation. Abusers like Hindley constitute 'childhood' by being its aberrant opposite: monstrous others who, through their abuse, subvert everything childhood stands for in contemporary culture: purity, futurity, safety, home. Yet, as Billy’s realization makes clear, Hindley manifestly was a child too; she did not arrive as a fully formed 'monster'.

The tragedy became representative of social breakdown. The ten-year-olds were, needless to say, from broken families. [...] Very effectively I made it into a symbol of a Tory Britain in which, for all the efficiency that Thatcherism had achieved, the bonds of social and community well-being had been loosed, dangerously so.\textsuperscript{54}

Two different and competing historical analyses were in play. At the risk of misappropriating Patricia Waugh’s terminology, the Bulger murder either exemplified the harvest of the Sixties (decaying family values and traditional morality) or the harvest of the Eighties (a brutal government that no longer cared about society and had abandoned whole communities). Either way, as Burman notes:

The press accounts of the boys’ lives, habits and hobbies were structured by a discourse of predestination that exonerated us, as citizens, professionals and parents, onlookers who saw little 2-year-old Jamie [sic] Bulger being dragged away, from blame. The responsibility was firmly located with ‘them’ not ‘us’: that is, with the boys, their mothers and their working-class homes. Even in the ‘quality’ British press, the discourse of ‘environmental deprivation’ soon gave way to a thoroughly personal pathologisation of these children, those families and that place, Liverpool, icon of inner city desolation and deprivation. Thus our responsibilities are confined, repudiated.\textsuperscript{55}

If the murder signified personal or moral failure, there was no wider fault; if it signified social failure, the perpetrators were part of an underclass and so far from ‘mainstream’ society that even sympathetic readers were nevertheless insulated from contamination or introspection. Nevertheless, Marina Warner argued in the mid-1990s that ‘[the] phantom face of James Bulger has become the most haunting image of present horrors and social

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. Blair goes on to argue in his autobiography that although this analysis was ‘sincere’ at the time, it was an ‘ultimately flawed conclusion that our society had broken down; [...] of course it hadn’t as a whole, only in part.’ (p204). This characterisation chimes with his later prescription of targeted social policies: ‘rather than policy being analysed and then prescribed in the context of general “society”, it should be instead be absolutely, specifically focused on the exception.’ (p. 645)

\textsuperscript{55} Burman, \textit{Developments}, p. 158.
failure – his innocence an appeal and an accusation.’\textsuperscript{56} Over a decade later, \textit{Andrew Marr’s History of Modern Britain} similarly argued that James Bulger’s death has come to culturally represent a turning-point in the early-1990s when ‘Britain’s self-doubt took on a specific and horrible shape’.\textsuperscript{57}

Just occasionally, we seem to decide that a particular killing says something about the moral state of the nation generally. Thirty years after the Moors Murders, the killing of James Bulger had the same inflaming effect, only this time the debate was about the condition of British childhood, particularly among – new word, ugly word – the underclass.\textsuperscript{58}

The James Bulger murder is a contested symbol of 1990s Britain and our recent past and cannot be neatly explicated in terms of the nature/nurture or structure/agency debates, whatever the cultural desire to ‘understand’ what happened. Both the vilification of the two child murderers and the details of their anxious, impoverished and unhappy lives undermine the notion that they were inherently, naturally ‘evil’. Equally, the idea that the cause of the crime is neatly reducible to socio-cultural influences, either permissiveness or the effects of neoliberalism on former industrial and manufacturing communities, does not stand up. As Morrison notes in \textit{As If}, after surveying the decaying Liverpool the boys inhabited: ‘somewhere, even now, in houses much like these, there must be boys not so different. What is the difference? Why did it go wrong for [Thompson and Venables]?’\textsuperscript{59} The Bulger case is not explicable; its ‘facts’ are incompatible with existing ideological and social paradigms. Society vilifies child-murderers as the worst-of-the-worst, but what happens when these child murderers are themselves children? Our culture obsessively valorises the child, but how can we valorise children who commit ‘adult’ horrors? Our ideological

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Andrew Marr’s History of Modern Britain} (Episode 5/5, BBC, 19 June 2007). The programme narrativises the early 1990s as defined by a deep recession, weak government, and ‘morale panics’ over crime and social breakdown.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Morrison, \textit{As If}, p. 80.
‘investment in a utopian childhood state’ is undermined at the same time as our need for children to ‘confirm our agency through their passivity’ is challenged.

What follows explores the ways in which _The Field of Blood_ and its representation of the 1980s fictionally negotiate the fraught ideological, historical and political debates generated by the Bulger case, which can be understood through Alan Sinfield’s notion of the ‘faultline narrative’:

> When a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we re-organise and retell its story, trying to get it into shape – back into the old shape if we are conservative-minded, or in to a new shape if we are more adventurous. [...] Those faultline stories are the ones that require the most assiduous and continuous reworking; they address the awkward, unresolved issues, the ones in which the conditions of plausibility are in dispute. [...] The task for political criticism, then, is to observe how stories negotiate the faultlines that distress the prevailing conditions of plausibility.

The murder of James Bulger disrupted contemporary conceptions of the child, prompting the historical and cultural debates that this section has attempted to synthesise. Cultural representations of this event necessarily ‘re-organise and retell its story, trying to get it into [a] shape’ that is socially and culturally legible. How these representations variously attempt that process is politically significant. Aside from Mina’s novel, the only explicit fictional retelling of the Bulger murder comes in Jonathan Trigell’s _Boy A_ (2004) and its film adaptation, starring Andrew Garfield (2007). Its narrative follows a child child-murderer’s release from prison under a false identity in his later teens, but the Bulger murder is reworked in the novel and film of _Boy A_ to make it more culturally ‘plausible.’ Details of the...

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60 Warner, _Managing Monsters_, p. 35.
63 Jonathan Trigell, _Boy A_ (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2004); and _Boy A_, dir. John Crowley (Weinstein Company and Film Four: 2007)
crime are changed to eliminate the gap in age between perpetrator and victim, the other killer is clearly presented as the instigator of the violence and never given a voice in the narrative, and historical and political context is almost completely effaced.\(^{64}\) By contrast, *The Field of Blood* relocates the murder to the recessionary Thatcherite early-1980s, accentuating its relationship to neoliberal economics. The ways in which social and political forces context determine violence towards and from children is, at least at first, central to the novel’s approach.

Mina’s novel presents Glasgow in 1981 as defined by deindustrialisation and recession.\(^{65}\) It is a collection of ‘dying industrial [valleys]’ where poverty is on the rise and the rate of workplace closures mean ‘every morning brought news of brand-new endings. The proud city was dying.’\(^{66}\) The lack of a progressive future in the modern/industrial sense is also highlighted by the text’s presentation of the urban environment as a historical palimpsest, with ‘the silhouette of short-headed shipyard cranes, once busy but now still, dinosaur skeletons against the orange sky.’ (FOB, 360) The decaying hulks of municipal modern architecture figure the death of sixties utopianism amidst the gloom of 1980s Britain: ‘paragons of architectural crime, built on the top of barren hills.’ (FOB, 175) Council estates and ‘engineering works which had supplied train carriages to half the Empire [...] went into decline hand in hand and gradually the surrounding land was abandoned, left littered with chemical residues and bits of scrap, contaminated and useless.’ (FOB, 279) Young people, an elderly man argues, will be the ‘generation who’ll end up on the rubbish heap’ (FOB, 42) in these brutal new times. And indeed, the novel deploys the child as a historical symbol for the city and its uncertain future.

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\(^{64}\) The television adaptation of *Field of Blood* (BBC, 2011) also removes most of the novel’s associations with the Bulger killing.

\(^{65}\) In 1981, the economy was still in a sharp recession, inflation averaged 11.9% and recorded unemployment averaged 2.7 million people. See Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 271.

\(^{66}\) Denise Mina, *The Field of Blood* (London: Orion Books, 2005), p. 303. All future citations from this text will be taken from this edition and be indicated parenthetically within the body of this chapter.
At the beginning of the text, two young boys (with one, as in Boy A, presented as a clear ringleader) brutally murder ‘Baby Brian’, so christened by a cynical media and echoing the sentimentalising tabloid moniker of ‘Jamie’ Bulger: ‘the child was pretty and it was a welcome break from the tales of galloping unemployment, the Yorkshire Ripper or Lady Diana Spencer’s simper.’ (FOB, 18) Trainee journalist Paddy Meehan, the protagonist of the novel, can see inconsistencies in the police story and becomes convinced that no one is ‘looking for the men behind’ the crime. (FOB, 60) Paddy, with her proudly ‘solid working class background’ (FOB, 70) is able to ‘read the scheme’ of urban Glasgow, discerning ‘patterns that [others] were blind to’ (FOB, 67), particularly in the relationship between different kinds of housing and subtle gradations within the segregated working classes. Through Paddy's 'readings', The Field of Blood explores the tangible effects of poverty. Not only did 'the recent recession show in [the] area' of Barnhill, a 'brutal landscape', 'barren' and 'cowering', 'built with asbestos, tissue and spit', a true 'architectural crime', where Callum (the less 'guilty' of the two boys, and consequently the one the novel explores most thoroughly) lives, but he is visibly marked by malnutrition and neglect: ‘his teeth [...], speckled black, grey to the verge of green and set on long gums.’ (FOB, 74) The collective abnegation of any responsibility to intervene in his dysfunctional family life is also illustrated: despite 'trying desperately to get attention' at his father's funeral (FOB, 75), in a house 'dark and dank and poor' (FOB, 124), with an unwell and dysfunctional mother, Callum was ‘just left behind’, with his community, extended family and the state ‘making hollow promises to see [him] again soon.’ (FOB, 75) Paddy and the novel’s search for adult responsibility is literal, as it emerges that an adult did actually ‘drive’ the boys to the crime scene, and metaphorical as a search for the social and economic forces ‘driving’ the actions of an individual, in this case a child whose agency is further circumscribed: ‘All three of them had been driven to this spot by someone. It was obvious to her, and should have been
obvious to anyone who looked. But no-one was looking. As it stood, the Baby Brian story was a good story, a clean story.' (*FOB*, 179)

However, the uneasy tensions between structure and agency, and the challenges to models of childhood that the boys’ murder of Baby Brian generate – in Sinfield’s terms the ideological ‘faultlines’ it exposes – are resolved in the text’s procedural narrative when child sexual abuse is exposed as a determinant. Meeting Callum in a secure hospital, a ‘recent build, all straight lines and pragmatic compromises’, but overshadowed by an ‘abandoned old gothic building’ (*FOB*, 351), the novel figures the supposedly deviant child in inhuman and temporally-unstable terms. Paddy observes that ‘he looks frightening and skinny, like a shrivelled, ancient, evil genius’ (*FOB*, 354), and that he sits ‘still as a doll, his face bare to the room, his mouth a black oval’ (*FOB*, 355). However, the similes that displace and undermine his childhood vanish from the narrative when he discloses his sexual abuse: ‘the whole room changed character. Callum was just a wee skinny boy in a bed’ (*FOB*, 356), a ‘tiny child in a bed’ (*FOB*, 359). Callum is transformed because his crimes are made legible by his abuse. An adult is indeed revealed to be ‘behind’ the boys’ crime, but he occupies the doubly ideologically acceptable role of a deviant paedophile and murderer who is himself explicable as the cyclical product of familial abuse: ‘You teach me about things [...] And now I can teach you things’ (*FOB*, 197); ‘He did it to you and you did it to them? Is that how it is between men?’ (*FOB*, 384) His paedophile father is a visibly anachronistic figure with ‘sharp sideburns and a mini-quiff’, in an ‘old-fashioned van’ with a peeling sticker ‘declaring FRIEND OF BILLY GRAHAM’ (*FOB*, 119): ‘I am a Teddy Boy [...] Ye don’t stop being what ye are because it’s out of fashion.’ (*FOB*, 120) Thus the cycle of child sexual abuse, now positioned as the cause and explanation of the disturbing violence rather than more diffuse determinants, is figured as utterly outside of and other to the historical and cultural context of the early 1980s. These historical concerns vanish from the novel as soon as child sexual abuse appears, explaining ‘so much, explain[ing] everything. It is the semiotic shorthand
that tells us to look no further.'\textsuperscript{67} Mina’s novel is operating within the generic conventions of crime fiction, but even given that consideration, the speed with which the crime narrative is solved and the faultline resolved produces a rushed and unsatisfying ending that effaces the social issues that are elegantly figured through architectural metaphors and embodied through damaged children earlier in the novel, as Paddy ‘reads’ the urban environment of Glasgow. In \textit{The Field of Blood}’s rewriting of the James Bulger murder, a politicised engagement with Thatcherism and its legacies is not expressed through narratives of child abuse, but undermined by them. As Burman argues, ‘individualised, family-oriented explanations frequently function to exonerate state-neglect or deprivations.’\textsuperscript{68}

\textbf{Cycles of abuse: Nineteen Eighty Three}

\textit{Nineteen Eighty Three}, the climax of Peace’s \textit{Red Riding Quartet}, complicates his earlier novels’ figuration of the abused child. In \textit{Nineteen Seventy Four}, a series of child murders are investigated: the murdered child is a powerful, emotive but comparatively simple allegorical symbol, signifying the violent, final extinguishing of a life that embodies innocence and pure possibility. By contrast, \textit{Nineteen Eighty Three} explores temporal and historical relations primarily through the figures of surviving abuse victims, who embody the tensions between the hard determinism and totalising explanatory power of abuse narratives, and the unfolding possibilities of agency and transformation. Unlike \textit{The Field of Blood}, this novel deploys child sexual abuse as a metaphor to explore historical and political relationalities. In the dystopian Yorkshire of the \textit{Quartet}, social relations in the 1970s and 1980s are saturated and structured by exploitation and abuse. Corrupt policemen have long covered up the crimes of paedophiles with whom they have shared business interests – agents of the state in all spheres prioritise profit over protecting vulnerable children: ‘\textit{everybody knows and – [...] Nobody cares.’} (1983, 404-405) Of the novel’s three narrators,
two are the now adult victims of paedophile rings, and one is a senior police officer seeking to atone for years of inaction and implicit culpability. Peace's explicit rejection of nostalgia for the recent past or the fantasy of a prelapsarian period before the 1970s and 1980s, is evident from the novel's prologue: 'Yorkshire – The Summer of Love: Jimmy's dog is barking and the boys are crying. Michael screaming; Martin slaps him across his face and says: “Do you want to be next?” The boys close their eyes. He is going to teach me a lesson.’ (1983, vii) Sexual abuse is used to figure history as a series of traumatic repetitions. Clare Kemplay's murder in Nineteen Seventy Four is uncannily mirrored in Nineteen Eighty Three when Hazel Atkins disappears. Eventually, Hazel’s killer is unmasked as the son and victim of the paedophile who murdered Clare. The victim/perpetrator binary is muddled, as his abusive past irrevocably defines and drives him and, given Peace's aforementioned propensity for grisly corporeal metaphors, is literally inscribed on his body: ‘His chest in bloody scars, it reads: 0 LUV.’ (1983, 397) 'You put the hammer down. “No-one even looked,” he whispers. “I know,” you nod. "No-one." You wipe the tears from his cheek. You kiss his head. You say: “I know.”' (1983, 398) In this repetition of familial abuse, and its explanatory role within the crime plot, there are clear parallels between Nineteen Eighty Three and The Field of Blood.69 However, reworking the terms of Burman's analysis, ‘family-oriented explanations’ do not function here to efface complex historical determinants, ‘state-neglect or deprivations.’70 Instead, the victims are abused by diffuse, often labyrinthine networks of perpetrators, many of whom occupy powerful positions in local society: the family is less a distinct and discrete unit and more a crucible for the transmission of wider historical forces. And, despite, the epigraph by Voltaire at the start of the novel that, ‘History does not repeat itself,

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69 For an analysis of the ways in which tropes from the crime genre work politically in Peace, see Joseph Brooker, ‘Orgreave Revisited: David Peace’s GB84 and the return to the 1980s’, Radical Philosophy 133 (September/October 2005), 39-51. He argues that Peace’s engagement with the hardboiled ‘crime genre is a sign that society is under suspicion: its deployment implies an attention that is both forensic (the claims of the contending parties will not be accepted at face value; it will be assumed that the decisive events of the period are secret and concealed) and judgemental (the investigation will implicitly have a moral dimension; someone, somewhere is going to be guilty) [...] crime tends to be political and politics to be criminal.’(pp. 45-46).
70 Burman, Developments, p. 104.
only man’ (1983, 2), there is little scope for agency in the novel’s conception of the subject’s deterministic relationship with historical forces.

BJ, sex worker, abuse victim and a narrator of the novel, is stuck throughout in an often stylistically disjointed and futureless perpetual present tense: 'BJ suddenly shaking and crying and BJ can't stop shaking and crying because of all things BJ seen and all things BJ done, things they've made BJ see and things they've made BJ do [...]. Fucked Forever’ (1983, 17) The first person ‘I’ is replaced with the proper name ‘BJ’, combining his initials with slang for oral sex, and in doing so labelling him in perpetually sexual terms. Verbs are often not conjugated correctly in his narration, pointing to a disjunction between subject, experience and temporality: ‘fucked it all, fucked it all: All because of who BJ be.’ (1983, 53)

The narration of John Piggot, another victim whose paedophile father was also a local police officer, and who deals with trauma by damagingly excessive consumption of food and alcohol, deploys a disturbingly inclusive second person point-of-view: ”Never stops,” says Mrs Myshkin. “Not round here.” Not here – “You know that,” she says, her hand squeezing your hand (your heart) – Here.’ (1983, 31) The catharsis offered by either violent revenge or suicide are the only futures that the novel can conceptualise outside of the cycles of traumatic repetition and self-harm.

The relationship between Thatcherism and the novel’s conspiracy/abuse narratives is complex. As Nineteen Eighty Three unfolds, the earlier crimes of Nineteen Seventy Four are simultaneously uncovered and explained through analepsis and uncannily repeated in the diegetic present of 1983, demonstrating ‘a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition.’71 However, the novel is also counting down to 'Thursday 9 June 1983 – D-Day’ (1983, 408): the general election. Radio news bulletins punctuate the text that

juxtapose the vicissitudes of the campaign with wider patterns of crime and violence, much of it against young people: ‘Parliament dissolves amidst excitement and relief ahead of 9 June poll; [...] body of a boy aged three found on Northampton tip; 18 year-old found hanged in a police cell; Nilsen to be charged with more murders…’ (1983, 6) On one level, the election is presented as a spectacular distraction from urgent, immediate issues of corruption and crime: ‘The papers, your paper, everybody's paper – Thatcher, Thatcher, Thatcher – Fuck 'em all and watch their Rome burn.’ (1983, 86) However, the triumph of Thatcherism is also positioned as the transmission and elevation of the systemic (but publically disavowed) abusive values of corrupt elites in Yorkshire into a hegemonic position in British culture. In 1969, policeman Maurice Jobson characterises Yorkshire’s systemic personal and professional corruption as ‘a lullaby in a local tongue – Hate.’ (1983, 151) By 1983, that lullaby is inscribed in the bleak post-industrial landscapes that dominate the text: ‘the boarded-up pubs and closed-down shops, the burnt-out bus stops and the graffiti that hates everything, everywhere and everyone.’ (1983, 26) In the novel’s final pages, on Election Day, this ‘hate’ has reached its Orwellian apogee, as the Tory slogan ‘New Hope for Britain’ (Peace: 2002, 8) is starkly refigured:

You get out of bed. You walk across the floor upon your knees. You switch off the radio. The TV too –

The Hate:

‘Where there is discord, may we bring harmony –’

The Hate:

‘Where there is error, may we bring truth –’

The Hate:

Where there is doubt, may we bring faith –

The Hate:

‘Where there is despair, may we bring hope.’

Radio off. The TV too –
The branches have smashed the pane.

The rain pouring in –

*No hope for Britain.*

(1983, 404)

Thatcher's electoral triumph in 1983 is figured as the moment that 'hope for Britain' and progressive futurity ended decisively. However, the novel also challenges simplistic periodisation. Thatcherite discourse – represented by the Prime Minister's unlikely recitation of Francis of Assisi when first elected in 1979 – is underscored and punctuated by 'hate', but the novel suggest that this 'hate' structured British society long before the 1980s. Thatcherism translates 'the hate' into hegemony, and functions is its political culmination rather than its cause. *Nineteen Eighty Three* questions the deeper provenance of the political transformations we associate with the 1980s. Andy Beckett argues that in Peace's *Nineteen Eighty* and *Nineteen Eighty Three*, 'the workings of British politics and society in the 1980s seem stuck in the mid-1970s: the same corruption, the same grimness, Thatcherism still little more than a rumour, at least in West Yorkshire'. However, Peace's novel suggests instead that British politics and culture in the 1970s and 1980s were part of an unfolding process. If, as Stuart Hall argues, Thatcherism worked 'on the ground of already constituted social practices and lived ideologies', the political terrain of the *Quartet's Yorkshire* is the absolute opposite of nostalgic visions of Northern collectivism where there 'should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have care for one another' (1983, 223). Instead, child sexual abuse is the most extreme example of its violent and exploitative cultural logic. Furthermore, victims of historical abuse offer a metaphor for a subjectivity predicated on seemingly inescapable historical determinism and embodying a profound crisis in futurity. Peace's *Nineteen Eighty Three*, as with the novel

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that followed it, *GB84*, disturbingly positions ‘Thatcher’s Children’ in contemporary Britain, like BJ, as ‘fucked forever.’ (1983, 87)

**Conclusion: Abusive Historicity**

Both dystopian and nostalgic figurations of the 1980s can seductively position the decade as the stable, determining foundation of contemporary life: twenty-first-century Britain’s origin-myth. Thatcherism did radically transform Britain and historicising its ideological claims and ongoing legacies is politically important. However, dystopian presentations of the decade as a traumatically formative childhood not only emphasise the continuities of neoliberal politics, they risk effacing post-1990 history. They might offer welcome respite from an apolitical retro-1980s, but their starkly dystopian narratives are problematic as well as politically alluring. Furthermore, imbuing the 1980s with inescapable, deterministic power undermines agency and the scope for twenty-first-century politics. In its re-writing of the ‘faultline narrative’ that the James Bulger murder represents, *The Field of Blood* exemplifies the ways in which individualised narratives of abuse can efface complex socio-economic questions. *Nineteen Eighty-Three*, by contrast, explores the Thatcherite past and historical processes through narratives and metaphors of abused children. It not only figures Thatcherism as an End of History, but as a force responding to and darkly interrelated with British society. Its profound hopelessness is an extreme example of the ways in which the figure of the child can be used by cultural production to articulate a highly circumscribed sense of contemporary historicity.
Conclusion
Dissonance and Critique

After the end of history, what?
Fredric Jameson

What Thatcherism poses, in its radical way, is not ‘what can we go back to?’ but rather, ‘along which route are we to go forward?’ In front of us is the historic choice: capitulate to the Thatcherite future or find another way of imagining it.
Stuart Hall

Twenty-first-century Britain is not simply the product of the radical restructurings of the 1980s. The unfolding present is determined by multiple, messily intersecting historical genealogies and socio-economic and cultural processes. Contemporary subjects are not only, singularly, Thatcher’s children. Nevertheless, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the legacies of Britain’s often violent, often contested transition to what became the neoliberal socio-economic status quo continues to define and delimit what appears politically and economically possible now.

Neoliberal forms of governmentality in Britain have changed since the 1980s, embracing certain totems of social liberalism like gay marriage that were an anathema to the Thatcherite right. However, key elements of the ‘Thatcherite future’ that Stuart Hall wrote about in 1987 – the effacement of structural determinants through the figure of the entrepreneurial subject, the penetration of ‘economic rationality into more and more new territories’, the ever-increasing dominance of financialisation and unprecedented levels of consumer and governmental indebtedness – remain the structuring principles of the present, albeit principles that exist now in

3 It is worth noting that even the putatively anti-elitist political upheavals in the Global North such as Brexit and the presidency of Donald J. Trump, underneath a veneer of economic populism, advance an agenda of enriching elites, deregulating economies and advancing market logics to erode modest redistribution, environmental and welfare programmes.
profound, constitutive crisis. The financial crisis a decade ago has not catalysed the radical structural reforms and transformations within the political imaginary that followed the global crises of the 1930s, even as catastrophic climate change caused by capitalist modernity becomes increasingly impossible to ignore. The neoliberal model that achieved hegemony in the 1980s remains hegemonic but is increasingly brittle, a constitutive cultural framework through which subjects continue to ‘live, even in [its] broken and less-than-legitimate-or-legitimating form.’ The End of History never meant the end of events, conflict or crisis – it signifies a fundamental absence of imaginable alternatives to the neoliberal world system, and a more diffuse alteration in the perception and lived experience of futurity in which transformation and radical difference themselves are unimaginable, in which technology and the lived environment alter at disorientating speed but we remain ‘stuck’ in a deterministic relationship with the bankrupt orthodoxies of the 1980s. This ‘neoliberal future’ is governed by a fundamental cognitive dissonance: it is systemically unsustainable and yet it endures.

The twenty-first-century fictions about the British 1980s explored in this thesis are themselves structured by dissonance, contradiction, by competing impulses and strategies of historicisation that engage with the dynamics of historicity after the End of History. Peace’s GB84 presents the miners’ strike as the End of History but unravels the conjunctural forces driving this historical defeat in an apocalyptic denouement; the novel historicises the strike but also naturalises it within a depoliticised model of history as ceaseless cyclical violence; and amidst the millenarian presentation of the 1980s, the text’s sonic

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deconstruction of the subject as inextricably constituted by fragments of historical voices undermines ideologies of historical endings and epistemic breaks. Hollinghurst’s *Line of Beauty* writes a history of financialisation and hyper-consumption through the futureless queer male body, using the cultural association between queerness and fatality, further heightened during the AIDS crisis, to subtly indict an entire economic system as unsustainable. The queer body may be scapegoated by the Thatcherite elite, but it exemplifies the financialisation that drives its limited economic success story. The novel also figures unfolding historical changes as embodied and affectively experienced rather than rationally comprehended, foregrounding the complex aesthetic potential of the historical novel form to reimagine, represent and critique what is experienced in fleeting, impressionistic ways. Mitchell’s *Black Swan Green* both deploys a nostalgic retro-memory of the 1980s and uses it as a framework to advance a much more critical take on the brutality of social relations in the period; adolescence becomes a metaphor for the period’s crude neoliberalism, but the possibilities for ‘growing up’ are limited; the adolescent point-of-view is used to denaturalise Thatcherite ideology, but it is a manoeuvre that rests in the naturalising ideology of the child as outside of discourse. Both Peace’s *Nineteen Eighty Three* and Mina’s *The Field of Blood* are bracingly anti-nostalgic and revisionist meditations on the Thatcherite past but nevertheless position the period as a stable, knowable point of pure origin; one uses tropes of child sexual abuse to sidestep complex questions of socio-economic determinism, the other makes sexual abuse the central metaphor for 1980s society and the relationship between neoliberal past and present; both novels, however, advance problematically deterministic models of historicity and subjectivity that position the twenty-first-century present as ‘fucked forever’ by the Thatcherite past.8

Perry Anderson argues that the historical novel is ‘the most consistently political’ form in the ‘prose multiverse’, even as it departs from its nineteenth-century antecedents by

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exploring history not as ‘progress or emancipation, but [as] impending or consummated catastrophe.’ However, the historical fictions I have explored in this thesis are political in highly ambivalent, complex ways. As novels, they do not straightforwardly ‘undo the inevitability or givenness of the present’, which Wendy Brown argues is the political imperative of radical historiography and cultural production. These varied texts historicise the 1980s and explore the ways in which that past has produced and continues to contour twenty-first-century Britain, and in doing so historicise the present too. But the often overdetermined and competing articulations of history-as-a-process in these fictions complicate Jameson’s oft-cited neat injunction in the Political Unconscious to ‘Always historicise!’ The precise articulations and models of history that implicitly structure such fictional and critical historicisations are often insufficiently critically interrogated. In one sense then, this thesis functions as a case study, analysing the forms of historicity produced by and circulating in contemporary cultural production, a methodological approach that supplements existing scholarly frameworks (Lukacsian, postmodern, cultural memory) for analysing the historical novel. My analysis of the political ambivalences that underlie texts and their strategies of historicisation does not imply criticism of these fictions for being ‘insufficiently’ political, or political in the ‘wrong way’. Aesthetic forms should not be subjected to political instrumentalisation by critics or writers. After all, it is neither the novel’s responsibility to propose alternative futures, nor to produce politically-palatable origin myths for the present. Instead, what has emerged as a central focus of this project is the critical potential of contemporary historical fiction. Jameson argues that ‘one of the great indispensable functions of ideological analysis [is] to show [the] contradictions in which we are ourselves imprisoned.’

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narrative, formal and stylistic contradictions that they stage and explore, reveal the political, economic and ideological contradictions that structure neoliberal subjectivity and political economy, and, crucially, historicise the emergence of these contradictions in the recent past. Indeed, these fictions do not just possess critical potential, they *perform critical work*, and tease out the complex, unfolding historical dynamics between neoliberal past and present.

What does it *feel* like to live after the end of history? What forms of historicity, temporality and subjectivity structure an apparently post-historical contemporary culture? This thesis argues that historical fictions are a resonant theoretical resource through which these central questions can be explored. Jameson contends that the boom in contemporary historical fiction is a ‘symbolic compensation’ for a ‘present-day enfeeblement in historical consciousness and a sense of the past.’ However, I argue that what he judges an ‘enfeeblement’ is an alteration in historical, political and existential circumstances, which the novel as a form responds to, works through, teases out: aestheticising the contradictions and competing impulses that define early twenty-first-century relationships to imagined pasts and futures. For instance, the texts examined here complicate Jameson’s diagnosis of a contemporary ‘end of temporality’: a ‘historical tendency of late capitalism’ defined by the ‘reduction to the present and the reduction to the body.’ They use metaphors and tropes of embodied crisis to *figure*, not to efface, temporal and historical relationalities. From miners being subsumed into a historical collective voice through the experience of violence, to the fatalistic embodied economics of the queer body, to the abusive historicity and perpetual neoliberal adolescence embodied by nostalgic and dystopian Thatcher’s children, contemporary historicity is written on and written through the body. These forms of embodiment represent tentative aesthetic answers to the question: how can we write

historical fiction after the End of History, when certain senses of historicity and futurity as well as the efficacy of totalising forms of historical narrativization have unravelled? Figurations of futureless and determining neoliberal pasts register and reveal to readers both the paradoxes and the power of forms of historicity that seem, for now, to define imaginative and political possibilities after the End.
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