

THE OBSCURE SUBJECT: WORKING-CLASS MASCULINE IDENTITY
UNDER NEOLIBERALISM IN THREE BRITISH NOVELS (1985-2009)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the socio-political engagements with concepts of masculine working class identity in three British novels written between 1985 and 2009 by James Kelman, Magnus Mills and Monica Ali. It argues that the three primary texts each differently explore a similar conceptualization of masculine identity tied to forms of industrial work. With reference to Jacques Rancière's writings, this thesis applies the interrelated concepts of 'politics', 'police' and 'radical equality' to the primary texts in an attempt to consider why and in what ways British novels produced during the neoliberal era represent and explore such an anachronistic masculine working-class identity. To aid that discussion, the thesis contemplates Rancière's critique of the concept of the proletariat and considers the historical development in Britain of the masculine 'worker' persona in order to foreground my central argument that the protagonists in each text represent an obscure subject resisting the reach of the proletariat and worker identities, and whose very obscurity enables the different engagements played out within each text. This thesis aims to emphasize the importance for literature studies to reconsider the figure of the proletariat-styled 'workingman' in contemporary literature for rethinking politics within an era shaped by advanced neoliberal capitalism.

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1. Introduction

The three primary texts studied in this thesis are *A Chancer* (1985) by James Kelman, *The Scheme for Full Employment* (2002) by Magnus Mills, and *In the Kitchen* (2009) by Monica Ali. This thesis attempts to argue that the protagonist in each of the three primary texts represents an obscure masculine working class subject that resists succumbing to the worker identity of the idealized workingman that permeates (and in two of the texts, dominates) his workplace culture. That these novels were produced during a politico-economic era of neoliberalism in Britain marks their concerns with the proletariat and ‘worker’ categories of male working class identity as anachronistic. This anachronism is accentuated when we consider the fact that one effect of the neoliberal regime has been the normalization of a new discourse of worker identity, one that is commonly referred to in social science and arts criticism¹ as the entrepreneurial or flexible worker. The prevalence of the flexible worker concept in critical discourses highlights the fact that the male working class ‘worker’ identity has become an obscure one amid the neoliberal landscape. Motivated by this obscurity, this study explores the concept of working class masculine identity within three recent British novels, and argues that the protagonist in each of the three primary texts resists the proletariat and ‘worker’ identities influencing their communities. In this thesis, the forms of resistance practiced by each protagonist are interpreted using Jacques Rancière’s theories of ‘police’, ‘politics’ and ‘radical equality’².

The subsequent sections within my Introduction aim to illuminate my argument by way, initially, of an outline of the political and cultural climate that engendered the neoliberal idea

¹ See, for examples, the following works which address the politico-economic matter of subjectification within the workplace under neoliberalism, and which refer to the entrepreneurial or flexible worker identities: Colin Gray, *Enterprise and Culture*, (ed) David Storey, London & New York: Routledge, 1998; Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Cris Shore and Susan Wright (eds.), *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*, London: Routledge, 1997; Brian Holmes, ‘The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique’, in *Hieroglyphs of the Future*, Zagreb: WHW, 2003, <available online at <http://ejcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en>> [accessed: 04 Sep 2014].

² I shall discuss Rancière’s concepts in detail below, in Section 1.2.

of worker identity. Following on from this shall be a discussion of Rancière's concepts of 'politics', 'police' and 'radical equality', followed by an overview of the theoretical concerns of each text regarding worker identity. The introduction ends with a brief discussion of the proletariat and 'the worker' categories of identity, since these are evoked by the protagonists in each of the primary texts and their presence at all in the novels is substantive for reasons which ought, I hope, to be clearer by the close of this chapter. After having introduced those three major concerns of the thesis, I move on to present my analysis of the three primary texts, in order of their publication.

1.1 Historical background of the primary texts

In order to understand the obscurity of the proletariat and 'the worker' identities, it shall be important to briefly consider the socio-political landscape of the 1980s and 1990s in Britain. Margaret Thatcher's first term as leader of the Conservative Party in 1979 has come retrospectively to define a watershed in modern British history, marking a paradigm shift between consensus-era economic practices and the neoliberal financialization of the economy (Brooker, 2010: 2). Enterprise culture was one significant part of the process of financialization, and was driven initially by the implementation of mass training programmes by Thatcher's government (Gray, 1998: 27). One of the early aims of enterprise training was to persuade the public to perceive business as an occupation, and a concomitant goal was the promotion of an ideal type of person who could rise to the challenge set out in the training programmes. This ideal type was initially articulated as entrepreneurial spirit (ibid); during the 1990s it began to be referred to as the flexible worker, a name which remains today, although variations include the flexible personality³.

As is acknowledged by both supporters and critics, Thatcher's Conservative government speedily and with great effect altered the ideological and cultural climate in Britain, notably in its discourses of the free market. Stuart Hall, commenting on this period, spotlights the Conservative Party's pretence to being liberators of the electorate:

³ Sources can be found in the footnote on page 7.

The popular theme of “choice” has no “necessary belongingness” to Thatcherism. ... “choice” is as much part of the political repertoire of popular radicalism as it is of the populist radical right. The problem is that Thatcherism articulated this popular desire to the “free market” and the very powerful idea of “freedom”- which in reality can only satisfy it in a certain form, at a certain price (Hall, 1988: 278).

The idea promoted by enterprise culture during the 1980s that one could be ‘free’ by starting a business was encouraged by the government’s promotion of the so-called ‘free market’. Clearly, the mythology of the lone self-starter establishing a successful business *ex nihilo* offers some appeal. Joe Brooker comments in a passage looking at this period: ‘The captain of industry would once again be a social hero’ (Brooker, 2010: 17). But, as Hall perceptively averred, this social hero came in a ‘certain form’ and at a ‘certain price’; the discourse of enterprise culture was a political tool to repackage an economic downturn as the dawn of an optimistic era reserved for those who would concede to the hegemony of Thatcherism⁴.

In response to criticism from the Left concerning the government’s monetarist plans on inflation, its intent to privatise national industries and to deregulate corporate finance, an official statement was made that ‘There is no alternative’ (Butler & Butler, 2006: 357). Apparently alternatives did exist, but were not supported by any section of ‘British capital’, thereby undermining the credibility of any alternative programmes put forward by the Opposition and critics of the government (Gamble, 1994: 222). In addition to the active support of British capital for the government’s plans, Andrew Gamble identifies the majority of the national press as ‘very important in sustaining the momentum of Thatcherism and projecting its policies as the only right and possible ones’ (ibid). One aspect of this influence can be seen, for example, in the two knighthoods given to tabloid editors Larry Lamb and David English (ibid).

A final element of early neoliberal culture worth considering, contributing to what has been termed the hegemony of Thatcherism (Morgan, 2001: 438), is the influence of petit-

⁴ When we consider the popular perception of Margaret Thatcher– ‘The image of the ruthlessly successful woman, achieving individual goals’ (Brooker, 2010: 175) - a resemblance can be seen with the figure of the enterprising social hero. I aver that the ideal neoliberal worker identity was made in the image of Margaret Thatcher. I will return to this point in Chapter 1.4 where I shall discuss the proletariat identity.

bourgeois ‘self-made men committed to enterprise and commerce’ - rather than traditional Tories - in Conservative Party think tanks, who organized ‘a renewal of social and economic thinking on the Right’ (Brooker, 2010: 5). These points indicate the extent of the mutually beneficial relations being fostered between the national press, powerful business and the government during this period, and their potential interests in promoting the ideology of enterprise culture.

Such a climate, facilitated by the close links between the national press, British capital and government, engendered particular changes to the ways in which individuals conceived their personal character in relation to their work. Colin Gray states that the new work discourses in Britain, or ‘enterprise culture’, were ‘spearheaded by a series of fundamental changes to fiscal policy and industrial relations legislation’ (Gray, 1998: 17). Additionally, he points out that enterprise culture has also been characterized by attempts to foster individualism as the dominant ideology, and that indeed, individualism was fundamental to the development of enterprise culture. Thus, the neoliberal worker identity is characterized strongly by individualism. And as we have already seen, this identity is also shaped by the ideas of freedom and choice, which connect it to contemporaneous discourses of democracy. Sandra Fredman, in her paper on labour law and ideology in the Thatcher years, claims that Thatcher’s concept of an ideal worker derives from her neoliberal model of democracy:

Despite its general popular appeal, the concept of democracy utilized in the Thatcher legislation is based on a specific, essentially individualistic, model. Drawing on well-established traditions, this model depicts the pursuit of self-interest as the overriding goal of individuals (Fredman, 1992: 29).

Indeed, as Fredman suggests, the neoliberal concept of the self-interested entrepreneurial/flexible worker identity reflects the individualism driving the neoliberal model of democracy. This is made clearer by looking at the classic definition of neoliberalism provided by David Harvey: neoliberalism promotes ‘political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade’ (Harvey, 2007: 22). In the same paper, ‘Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction’, David Harvey asserts that the proponents of neoliberalism are

foremost concerned with controlling ‘the crucial role played by class struggle in either checking or restoring class power’ (ibid: 44). Obviously, if the agents of neoliberalism found it necessary to control conceptualizations of worker identity, then it follows that the category of the entrepreneurial/flexible worker was mobilized to help check or restore class power. This is one of the ways in which the neoliberal worker identity contrasts with those of the proletariat and ‘the worker’, which shall be explored below; the *state* is responsible for projecting the neoliberal worker identity upon its citizens, whereas the subaltern groups represented by the Communist Party and the various British labour movements were the principal influences on the figures of the proletariat and ‘the worker’.

Furthermore, Harvey invokes the past importance of working class labour movements, when he insists that neoliberalism has disguised the efforts of the upper strata to restore or, in the case of China and Russia, to construct class dominance. This, Harvey claims, was achieved by neoliberalism’s fierce assault of ‘those institutions from which struggle had hitherto been waged on behalf of the working classes’ and thereby ‘many progressives were theoretically persuaded that class was a meaningless category’ (ibid: 41). In ostensibly denying the category of class, neoliberalism attempted to remove the threat posed by a potential resurgence of class solidarity – achieved through identification with the figure of the proletariat and/or ‘the worker’. The flexible worker superseded the proletariat and ‘the worker’.

If the dismissal of class logic politically weakens those with least power, then it is not a triumph if the three primary texts – which have been selected precisely for this reason - represent a protagonist who disavows the working class category of identity stemming from the proletariat and ‘the worker’. This problem can be mitigated by considering that through their protagonists the three texts explore the advantageous qualities of the proletariat and ‘worker’ identities, and concurrently critically engage with their injurious elements and consequences as well.

By dismissing the notion that the way beyond the impasse of neoliberalism’s destruction of working class institutions might be one requiring an appeal to ‘some lost golden age when the proletariat was in motion’ (ibid: 42), Harvey acknowledges one of the major faults in the past mythology of the proletariat identity: ‘Nor does [the question of class struggle for the

working classes] necessarily mean (if it ever should have) that we can appeal to some simple conception of the proletariat as the primary (let alone exclusive) agent of historical transformation' (ibid). Indeed, this thesis shall explore the ways in which the three primary texts critically negotiate the concepts of the proletariat and idealized workingman. Like Harvey, the three primary texts studied in this thesis display skepticism about the value of the proletariat and 'the worker' figures for their working class male protagonists. However, the three texts do not totally dismiss or entirely criticize that figure; each text responds in a singular style and argument with the imaginary of the proletariat-influenced 'worker' (this point shall be elaborated upon in Section 1.3).

1.2 Jacques Rancière's politics, police and equality

The introductory references made thus far to the terms 'police', 'politics' and 'radical equality' developed by Rancière demand elaboration for their role in this study. For Rancière, 'At its root, politics is dissensus' (Chambers, 2010: 200). Most of what we commonly consider to be politics comes, for Rancière, within the remit of policing concerned with 'shoring up the allocation of roles, the distribution of bodies' in society (ibid: 199). Rancière links this meaning of the police with the Platonic philosophy of order within which in society all subjects are organized hierarchically into their proper place.

Such an assertion derives from Rancière's early student period under Louis Althusser in Paris, and from his later doctoral archival research on the French history of nineteenth century activist-workers - research in which he contends that the Althusserian attempt to maintain unalloyed categories of the worker and the intellectual renders Althusserianism into a Platonic 'philosophy of order' (ibid: 195). In this light, Rancière sees Althusserianism as a policing kind of philosophy. Politics occurs when the policed boundaries circumscribing specific subject positions are challenged by voices foreign to the police order:

Politics exists when the figure of a specific subject is constituted, a supernumerary subject in relation to the calculated number of groups, places and functions in a society (Rancière, 2006: 51).

How a specific subject comes to be constituted as a supernumerary subject can be explained in the example of radical activist workers – who become such through having been policed into specific, oppressive functions and roles that they later seek to disavow. Chambers says:

If the police order determines the distribution of parts, then politics will name that insurrectionary force that disrupts this order and challenges this distribution (Chambers, 2010: 199).

In a simpler interpretation, when the subject stands up to be counted, they create a confrontation with the logic of domination (the police), thereby instantiating an act of politics.

Rancière's conceptualization of equality is inseparable from his conceptualization of politics. He states that equality is a 'presupposition' - 'It is not, let it be understood, a founding ontological principle but a condition that only functions when it is put into action' (Rancière: 2006: 52). When workers refuse to continue to live within the positions imposed upon them, when they dissent, they challenge the status quo, and assert their equality (which is to say that by the very act of dissenting they assert their ability to think politics - which is something that the police order refuses). Rancière states: 'Equality is actually the condition required for being able to think politics' (ibid). And just to make absolutely clear, 'equality is not, to begin with, political in itself. It takes effect in lots of circumstances that have nothing political about them (in the simple fact, for example, that two interlocutors can understand one another)' (ibid). So equality is an assumption, an assertion, and can now hopefully be understood as a presupposition, which becomes a *radical* – that is to say political - form of equality when mobilized by a subject in an act of dissent against the police order: '[E]quality only *generates politics* when it is implemented in the specific form of a particular case of dissension' (ibid – my emphasis). I interpret the critical inquiries of worker identity developed in the three primary texts to demonstrate recognition of a policed identity of 'the worker' and of the complexity and heterogeneity of 'the worker'. In that way these three novels can be seen to enact a Rancièrian heteronomic politics of radical equality; this is one of the conclusions of this thesis.

1.3 Theoretical concerns in the primary texts

The texts are presented in order of publication. The three authors respond to the proletariat-influenced figure of the working class male 'worker' in differing ways. Kelman's novel adapts two forms of realism, derived from Glasgow realist novels of the late 1970s and the concrete realism of Alain Robbe-Grillet of the late 1950s, in an original method that supports the text's contestation of 'the worker' identity performed at the level of content. By isolating the working class male protagonist from his community and peers, Kelman highlights the constrictive effects of the idealized workingman identity, and his innovative aesthetic appeals for a new literary language with which to create a new articulation of working class male experience. Importantly, the isolation of the protagonist is not an index of

his superiority over his peers; utilizing Rancière's concepts of radical equality and politics, I shall argue that the isolation of the protagonist in *A Chancer* is indicative of Kelman's pioneering struggle to create a new voice for a new form of masculine working class subject.

Mills' novel provides a challenge to the idea, prevalent for example in orthodox labour process theory⁵, that the working class industrial worker is a powerless victim of capitalism. Through comedy, *The Scheme for Full Employment* critiques its fictional state's fetishization of 'the worker' identity. As we shall later see, I relate that critique to Rancière's attack on Althusser's category of the proletariat identity. Mills' choice of allegory for the novel's mode of expression lends weight to the text's undermining of moralizing discourses of 'the worker'. Taking these points together, I contend that *The Scheme for Full Employment* performs a deliberate contamination of what Rancière has termed 'police' and 'politics', resulting in the text's providing only an ambivalent conclusion. Nevertheless, Mills demonstrates hostility to a number of forms of theorizing 'the worker'.

Ali's novel traverses two categorical identities of workers through the perspective of the protagonist, culminating in an appeal to create a new imaginary of a working class masculinity that amalgamates the finer qualities of the proletariat identity with those of the neoliberal flexible worker. In common with Kelman, Ali situates her protagonist in the shadows of the novel's world, literally and figuratively, so that the protagonist's state of being liminal is a strong motif within her text, and it indicates the absence in the text of a positive, meaningful and historically relevant category of identity for the working class male protagonist. The clash that takes place continually between the identities of the idealized workingman (represented

⁵ Once the chief source for social science researchers looking at labour process theory, Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974) wrote within a Marxist, economic and 'objective' tradition to analyze the experience of work from the industrial worker's perspective. Responses in the 1980s to Braverman contended that his 'missing subject' (what Thomson termed the absence of substantive theories of subjectivity in the labour process) needs to be theorized for social theory to better articulate the nature of organizational power. To examine why Braverman defended his omission of the subjective elements, see P Thompson 'Crawling from the Wreckage: The Labour Process and the Politics of Production' in: David Knights and Hugh Willmott (eds) *Labour Process Theory*, London: Macmillan; and Knights and Willmott 'Power and Subjectivity at Work: From Degradation to Subjugation in Social Relations' *Sociology* 1989 23:535-558. Variants of this 'missing subject' are of course explored by the protagonist in each of the primary texts: Tammas in *A Chancer*, Mills' anonymous protagonist in *The Scheme*, and Gabriel in *In the Kitchen*.

by the protagonist's father) and neoliberal worker (defended by the protagonist) generates an angry energy, but the discord between the protagonist and his father matures and mellows into mutual understanding. In this way, Ali deploys biographical narrative to metaphorically illustrate a potential dramatic narrative of worker identity that would dissolve the discord and shape it into a new and more positive identity. Such interrelationships between the three texts made them interesting candidates for case studies in this thesis.

Tammas, the protagonist of James Kelman's *A Chancer* (1985), demonstrates how singular voices can contest the logic of the category of 'class'. Aaron Kelly contends that the ideological identity of the working class is a contradiction that reinforces the hegemonic oppression of working class people:

Any attempt to offer some given working-class authenticity is already to secure the positions of all classes in capitalist society, to use a version of working-class life as the ideological glue that binds all classes to their places of privilege or subordination. Instead a more radical working-class culture would only ever find its authenticity in the paradox of its own inauthenticity, in the antinomy of being required to find its own reality in the illusion of someone else's (Kelly, 2012: 39).

Kelly's point that the working class is an illogical identity leads to the uncomfortable fact that even the labour movements and Communist Party – ostensible advocates of the working class – are complicit in preserving existing economic structures that tie the working class down. In this way, Kelly's point leads to Tammas, whose acts of dissensus I read as a result of Tammas' presupposition of what Rancière terms 'radical equality', which this thesis proposes underscores the politics of *A Chancer*. Tammas reveals the antinomy of working class identity in his refusal to acknowledge the ideals of the proletariat-influenced 'worker' which the men in his community value – in Kelly's phrase, Tammas refuses 'being required to find [his] own reality in the illusion of someone else's' (ibid). Only, in *A Chancer*, the 'someone else' is the working class community in which he lives; his peers and family perpetuate the 'illusion': for Tammas to accept that would also be to accept the existing positions of all classes in capitalist society, and thus to perpetuate the structural inequalities within that. In this way, Tammas' self-directed isolation from his community is not an act of disavowal, but is instead a refusal to participate in his own oppression which he forecasts would be his destiny should he become

like his brother-in-law, Robert, and moreover, is a refusal to accept the distinction of classes according to capitalism's structures of inequality.

Not only is Tammas disinclined to follow the lead of his working-class peers, he also steers his life away from the petit-bourgeois habits and middle class aspirations of acquaintances he meets through gambling. Tammas ploughs his own furrow where his only motivation and passion is gambling. Through gambling, his persona enacts a parody of capitalism's logic, as gambling and the stock market are both founded on speculation and chance. Gambling in *A Chancer* is a way for Tammas to repudiate the class solidarity binding the other male characters to forms of work that are not economically liberating. Gambling also provides Tammas with his own work ethic, since it functions using an alternative etiquette managing the exchange of money. These two aspects of gambling suggest that Tammas subverts the logic of capitalism. In this way it can be seen that the novel contests 'the worker' role model that influences his peers to submit themselves to exploitation by capitalism's strictures, and in doing so, I argue that the text contradicts the principles regulating existing class logic which is another way of saying that the text practices what Rancière terms radical equality.

In form, Kelman's novel inverts Georg Lukàcs' prescription for the historical novel by portraying an atypical protagonist who concentrates in his uniqueness the atypical, unrepresentative features of the connections fluidly linking the social foundations of politics with 'living human destinies' (Lukàcs, 1969: 158). Kelman's use of a third-person narrator whose voice describes the immediate surroundings and dialogue of characters obstructs from the reader the interior experience of the protagonist as well as of the other characters. This peculiar treatment invokes the concrete realism of the Nouveau Roman of the late 1950s/early 1960s, but in *A Chancer* Kelman achieves a different result. I read his unusual combination of social realism, concrete realism and Modernism as the formal counterpart to the socio-political content of *A Chancer*, and both are striking in their originality of expression, appealing for a reconsideration of the value of thinking of people in terms of class logic. Ultimately, Kelman's novel cannot broach the fissure that he creates between community and class, because there is not a language or an imaginary to think what his text insists: a new logic for thinking 'people'

that can exist beyond the stale capitalist categories of ‘working class’ or the ‘middle class’ or the ‘elite’. Nevertheless, I interpret that insistence as an appeal to what Rancière terms ‘radical equality’.

Magnus Mills’ *The Scheme for Full Employment* (2002) parodies the idealization of the proletariat category of worker identity and demonstrates the intertwining of what Rancière defines as ‘police’ and ‘politics’. Rancière’s insistence on the impurity of the police and of agents of politics is manifest in Mills’ text through the guise of diverse male characters who feature as working class workers and managerial staff. The anonymous first person narrator is the voice of the protagonist; the prologue and epilogue are recounted by this voice from a retrospective perspective. The central body of the narration is sometimes punctuated by an affectless ambiguous tone which signals the narrator’s retrospective critical accompaniment to his account of events. Constitutive of Mills’ parody is his portrayal of the workers as exploitative of their capitalist statist regime. This chimes with contemporary social science criticism arguing against its favoured discourse of workers as victims of neoliberal labour practices, in which workers are treated ‘as the disoriented victims of some hypostasised individualization’, and instead insists upon rethinking workers ‘as industrial sociologists in their own right, with their own theories of the social order and of the potentials attached to their own place within it’ (Armstrong, 2011: 2). Mills’ exploitative workers take liberties with their workplace regulations so as to make space and time for personally favoured activities such as contract work for other employers, participating in a snooker league, or obtaining a signature authorizing an early end to the working day.

In this way, Mills’ text echoes Rancière’s denial of ‘a necessary link between the idea of emancipation and the narrative of a universal wrong and a universal victim’ (Rancière, 1995: 64). The workers emancipate themselves by identifying ‘their own theories of the social order and of the potentials attached to their own place within it’ (Armstrong, 2011: 2). This denial of a necessary link between workers’ emancipation and their victimhood emphasizes the impurity of the ‘police’ and ‘politics’ that Rancière keenly insists upon, which is further underscored when we consider that the managerial staff in the novel break official regulations as much as the workers do. The impurity challenges the unalloyed category of identity of ‘the

worker', and suggests the lack of interest of Mills' text in making space for any alternative language of worker identity, thereby indicating distrust in the concept of identity.

In the Kitchen, meanwhile, is aesthetically conservative in being presented through a realist form that attempts to provide a state of the nation portrait. For all its formal conventionalism, however, the text expresses a radical proposition. Through the engagements of its protagonist, portrayed as a model neoliberal worker, with the qualities of his father who was an industrial worker presented as an idealized 'worker', the text intimates that a new category of identity for working class men might combine the best elements of both types of worker. Consequently, the text suggests that a new form of working class masculinity might be defined by creativity (skilled manual processes; inventiveness) and commitment (long-term employment; local communities of people living cooperatively). Nevertheless, the text's pervasive appeal to idealized aspects of the proletariat stereotype combines with the glossing of the protagonist's iniquities to unsatisfactorily promote a romanticized view of a uniform worker identity. However, certain interesting points can be retrieved; its identification of the value of creativity and commitment resonates with the impulse of Kelman's text. Taking that into consideration together with the modulating effects of Mills' novel upon concepts of identity could lead to a provocative and political reconsideration of the meaning of contemporary working class identity, with an emphasis on the value of maintaining a degree of obscurity.

1.4 The troubling 'proletariat' and the origins of 'the worker' in Britain

The so-called grand narrative of the people and the proletariat was in fact made of a multiplicity of language games and demonstrations (Rancière, 1995: 68).

[F]rom the outset the collective [*Les Révoltes Logiques*] was explicit about its desire to complicate and fragment monolithic accounts of the history of subversion and its commitment to seeking recognition for the seriousness, the multiplicity and dynamizing complexity of 'thought from below' (Davis, 2010: 41).

These two quotations both refer to historical writings produced by working class people – ‘grand narrative of the people and the proletariat’ and the ‘thought from below’. These writings formed the object of Rancière’s archival studies which he discussed in his doctoral thesis, *La Parole Ouvrière*⁶, the principle of which he soon revised when shortly afterwards he worked with the collective and journal *Les Révoltes Logiques*. The mistake he saw was his initial assumption that workers would possess a unitary voice, ‘la parole’, that would be heard in the various writings of working class activists in the period 1830-51 (ibid). The contention of the journal and his own later work was instead that there was no unitary voice but rather a multiplicity of arguments: ‘[T]here is no voice of the people. There are fragmented, polemical, voices which split the identity they put forward every time they speak’ (Rancière qtd in Davis, 2010: 41). This history helps explain why Rancière became hostile to Althusser’s discourse of the proletariat.

In at least one striking parallel, the ‘Absolute Subject’ is to Althusser as the proletariat is to Marx and Engels: the Althusserian Subject is theorized within a similar structure of relations to that of the proletariat (most clearly articulated in the *Communist Manifesto*). Althusser posited the existence or creation within ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ of a ‘Unique and Absolute Subject’ which:

... means that all ideology is *centred*, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each can contemplate its own image (past and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him, and that since everything takes place in the Family (the Holy Family: the Family is in essence Holy), “God will *recognize* his own in it” i.e. those who have recognized God, and have recognized themselves in Him, will be saved (Althusser, 1984: 54 – original emphasis).

Taking Christian religion as the quintessential ideology, Althusser transposes its Holy Family structure onto a paternalistic human society, to describe a masculine authority at its head offering redemption and destiny in return for obedience and uniformity. His description of a

⁶ *La Parole Ouvrière* was published in 1976 but was devised during 1973-1975, before the first issue of *Les Révoltes Logiques* came out. In 1981 an English translation was published as *Nights of Labor* [sic].

spiritual mission recalls Marx's 'Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law' (1844), wherein philosophy and the proletarian mission became 'fatefully twinned in Marx's mind' (Harding, 1998: 18). Althusser considered Marxism to be a science and not an ideology, and so would not have intended his ideological Absolute Subject to bear any relation to Marx and Engels' proletariat (claimed to be empirically derived). Meanwhile, Marx and Engels repeatedly argued against German critical criticism for taking man as an idealized Subject dwelling outside of time and space (Harding, 1998: 16), and yet later in their work writing the *Communist Manifesto* and taking charge of the Communist Party they created an Absolute Subject in the guise of their 'proletariat'.

In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels 'had invested the working class with grandiose tasks and a heroic historical mission that radically distinguished it from Engels' [empirically derived] humane and nuanced portrait in the *Condition of the Working Class in England*' (Harding, 1998: 18). Interestingly, the word proletariat is etymologically rooted in a Latin term meaning 'children' (ibid: 14), thus we can see how the familial structure of the Communist Party can be likened to an Althusserian 'Ideological State Apparatus'. The politics professor Neil Harding contends that 'the proletarian Subject is no less than Marx and Engels writ large', for reasons which he explicates in the course of his analysis of Marx and Engels' discourses of the proletariat that Harding shows were inextricable from their idea that they were the only people capable of steering the Communist Party towards a destiny that could deliver their 'proletariat' to victory (ibid: 40). Instead of God or a father at the head of the Communist Party there is Marx and Engels. That is to say, that Marx and Engels compare to Althusser's 'Absolute Subject'⁷. Harding's essay points out how Marx and Engels deliberately suppressed other intellectuals' proposals in order to secure their positions as leaders of the Party. This problem of censorship extended beyond politicking to include the control of all discourses of working class consciousness and programmes:

It is from Marx himself that marxism acquired its overweening certainty that all other formulations of working class objectives or proletarian purpose were

⁷ In section 1.1, page 9, I suggested that the neoliberal enterprising flexible worker concept was made in the image of Margaret Thatcher: this in turn suggests that Margaret Thatcher was neoliberalism's Absolute Subject in Britain.

outmoded, sectarian, and therefore dangerous. Marxism from first to last has been unitary, it could not accommodate pluralism (Harding, 1998: 36).

Clearly, the proletarian identity carries ideological and theoretical baggage. Such substantial problems pertaining to the concept of the proletariat – its ideological origins bearing little relation to workers’ realities, its manipulation by intellectuals with powerful personal ambitions – are involved in the primary texts’ engagements with working class masculine identity, which are mobilized via their protagonists. In subsequent chapters of this thesis, I hope to show how the primary texts complicate and fragment the monolithic Absolute Subject posed by the proletariat and ‘worker’ figures, and in doing so how they express distrust of ideological drives to ascribe a categorical identity to people.

A different, though self-evidently related history of masculine working class identity contributes to the arguments in this thesis. The sense of that identity in Britain was born of the efforts of early trade unions, from the Industrial Revolution onwards, to educate workers. This approach was also taken up by the Chartists in the early to mid-nineteenth century, who together with the trade unions articulated a working class identity through a variety of activities and publications. In order to aid our understanding of the characterizations of male workers in the primary texts, I shall attempt to spotlight the substantive qualities of ‘the worker’⁸ identity through a brief overview of sources which illustrate the rhetorical ‘worker’ developed in three regions of Britain: London, the north of England, and Glasgow.

Reflecting the peaceful philosophy of the Chartists, publications like the London-based *Poor Man's Guardian* (1831-35) adopted a moral rather than radical strand of discourse in order to promote the working class character as one intelligent yet conforming enough to warrant consideration as a full citizen (Breton, 2011); perhaps the most important Chartist goal, of course, was to obtain the vote for all men over 21 years of age. However, the *Poor Man's Guardian* (PMG) became troubled over the question of whether to promote moral or violent force as the means by which the working class might realize their goals. The publisher, Henry

⁸ I use the term ‘the worker’ to denote the worker imaginary developed by the diverse activities of British trade union, Chartist and labour movements which created their discourses of the workingman, whereas the proletariat denotes Marx and Engels’ ideology of the workingman.

Hetherington, explicitly defined the PMG and himself as opposed to violence and became one of the main proponents of moral force Chartism (Breton, 2011: 24). But as Breton proposes, the contradiction inherent in the two discourses reflects ‘more than alternate desires for moderation and revolution; they record competing iconographies of the working class as respectable, law-abiding, and vote ready on the one hand and a powerful threat on the other’ (ibid: 26). Over the nineteenth century the diverse, regional labour movement groups adopted one or the other discourse of ‘the worker’, or created their own version of that ideal. As we shall later see, these ‘competing iconographies’ of the working class in Britain are a complex mix in relation to the identity of the proletariat in the three primary texts studied in this dissertation.

In Martha Vicinus’ extensive survey of working class literature in the nineteenth century we find a chronological documentation of publications featuring characterizations of working class men in the north of England (Vicinus, 1974: 60). In the mid-nineteenth century, Northumbrian miners were feared by the general public who considered the men to be animalistic, brutish, and prone to drunkenness on days off in the towns:

It was necessary, on the one hand, to educate the public to the similarity between the hopes and ideals of the miners and other men, and on the other, to instruct miners to behave more like other men and less like “terrible savage pitmen” (Thomas Wilson, in a preface written in 1843 to his collected poems, *The Pitman’s Pay and other Poems*, London: George Routledge and Sons, 1872, p.vii) (Vicinus, 1974: 61).

The patronizing animalistic characterization of the miners was not aided by their association with the raucous fictional Bob Cranky who figured in popular folk songs. As a corrective, the trade unions and later the Chartists provided education for workers in order to gain respect and empathy from the general public, which would be a crucial early step in the articulation of a class-based ideology. Appealing to the intellectual sensibility of the educated classes:

Trade unions used both songs and printed material as propaganda in their campaign to dispel the Bob Cranky image of the working man. The gullible, carousing braggart had to be transformed both in actuality and in the public’s mind, to the sober, self-disciplined, literate, union man. ... As one trade unionist declared, ‘Literary pursuits ... tend to diminish and remove the coarseness and

violence which are characteristic of ignorance, and to substitute in their stead politeness and civility' ('The Effects of Literature on the Moral Character', *Miners' Advocate*, 6 April 1844) (Vicinus, 1974: 60-1).

Improved public image was the principal goal of the trade union leaders in their struggle for political representation and workers' rights. Aiding that goal, as the quotation hints, was the concomitant moral instruction and self-improvement attending the public image reforms. Towards inculcating a literary culture among workers that would felicitously give expression to their experience and promote class-consciousness, a new type of artistic literature was developed in the form of the Chartist novel. According to Gustav Klaus, the best Chartist novels 'are informed by the aim of contributing to the consolidation of the movement and driving a wedge into the hegemony of aristocratic and bourgeois culture. This they achieve by validating in aesthetic form the collective experiences of the working masses' (Klaus, 1985: 60). His comment indicates the significant part played by literary representations in developing a language and imaginary of 'the worker', (thus providing that figure with a place and voice within the forum of art if not yet in government), and he alludes to the importance of style in achieving that creation. During my discussion of the primary texts I shall refer back to this point; I hope to show how the styles in which the working class male protagonists are represented bears an important effect on the novels' engagements with political ideologies regarding work, the individual male worker, and social class, and especially how such styles signal a resistance to the sort of politics which Klaus claims motivated the Chartist novels.

Returning to the development of 'the worker' concept, by the end of the nineteenth century the characterization of working class people had taken a sober, serious turn as a result of the self-improvement and moralistic tendencies of the propaganda drives and educational reforms, and aided by the creation of a new literary tradition. Disciplinarian values of temperance, intelligence, diligence, cleanliness and modesty defined the new characterization of 'the worker'. Thus, a new kind of idealized worker came into being that shared some qualities and ambitions in common with the craftsman ideal⁹ of William Morris. More specifically, however,

⁹ Historian Eileen Boris coined the phrase 'craftsman ideal' in her study *Art and Labor* (1986) to describe the Arts and Craft archetype which 'fused two particular notions that Morris believed had been trampled by the factory system: first, an aesthetic ideal - that natural beauty, simplicity, and usefulness should characterize all

religious symbols became intertwined with union rhetoric, presaging subsequent forms of radicalism that appeared throughout Britain. Vicinus reports that ‘Methodist hymns with union words were used at nearly every meeting and rally. Biblical tales and characters appear repeatedly as symbols of injustice and righteousness’ (Vicinus, 1974: 61-2). (That sense of the workers having been wronged is a matter taken up in Magnus Mills’ novel, as we shall later see.) The influence of radicalism became crucial in the drive to organize workers:

Radical ideas of equality, natural rights and liberty provided an ideological framework for building the self-respect and unity of members, and gave men courage to pursue social justice in the face of powerful opponents. Radical heroes such as Tom Paine, Henry Hunt and William Cobbett provided the language and imagery of class struggle (ibid).

Like the unitary, heroic discourse of Marx and Engel’s proletariat in the *Manifesto*, the imaginary of ‘the worker’ relied on people’s appetites for dramatic narrative, thus the heroes of Britain’s radical past became the role models for male workers. The Methodist contribution to worker discourses gave the men a sense of purpose (ibid), like the mission writ into the role of the proletariat. However, unlike the concept of the proletariat, ‘the worker’ discourse was not appropriated by any single, influential philosopher with an ulterior intellectual motive. For that reason, ‘the worker’ did not become a unitary, absolute category of identity.

To illustrate typical imagery used in the literature, below are examples of covers and illustrations within Scottish (and some English) labour movement literature printed between 1909 and 1924. These materials are in a Scottish collection, entitled ‘Red Clydeside’, held at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow¹⁰.

objects and permeate everyday life; and second, a theory of labor - a commitment to work that brings joy, dignity, and personal satisfaction to laborers’ (Christen, 2008: 511).

¹⁰ Available online at: <http://gd1.cd1r.strath.ac.uk/redclyde/> [Accessed: 19 Aug 2014]

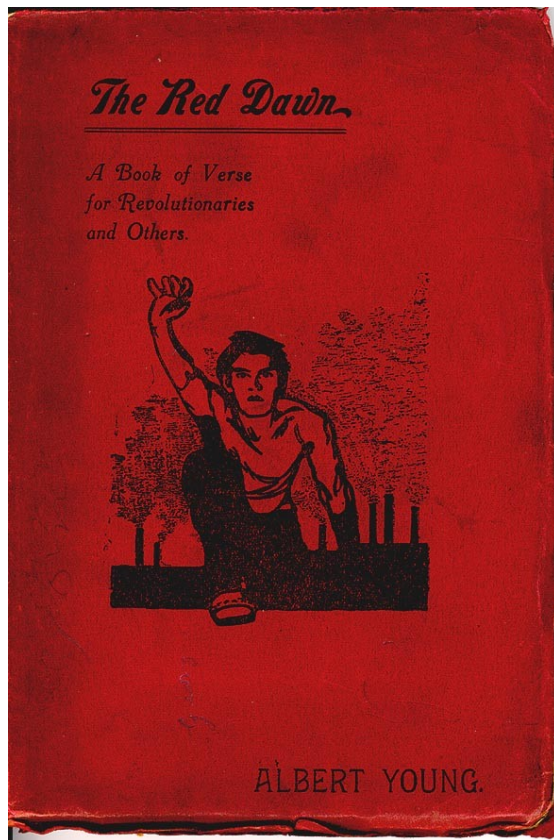


Figure 1 - The Red Dawn, September 1915. A magazine for young workers; this issue entitled 'A book of verse for revolutionaries and others' by Albert Young, the cover depicting militant worker figure tropes: aggressive young man in simple clothing climbing over a wall with hand raised, smoking chimneys of industry in the background.



Figure 2 - The Red Dawn, February 1920. The masthead design is based on the September 1915 cover, while the main image shows a capitalist holding on to bags marked 'militarism', 'slavery', 'war', 'banking', and 'capital', and a worker whose overalls and cartoon hammer are marked with 'knowledge', and 'labor organized and united'.

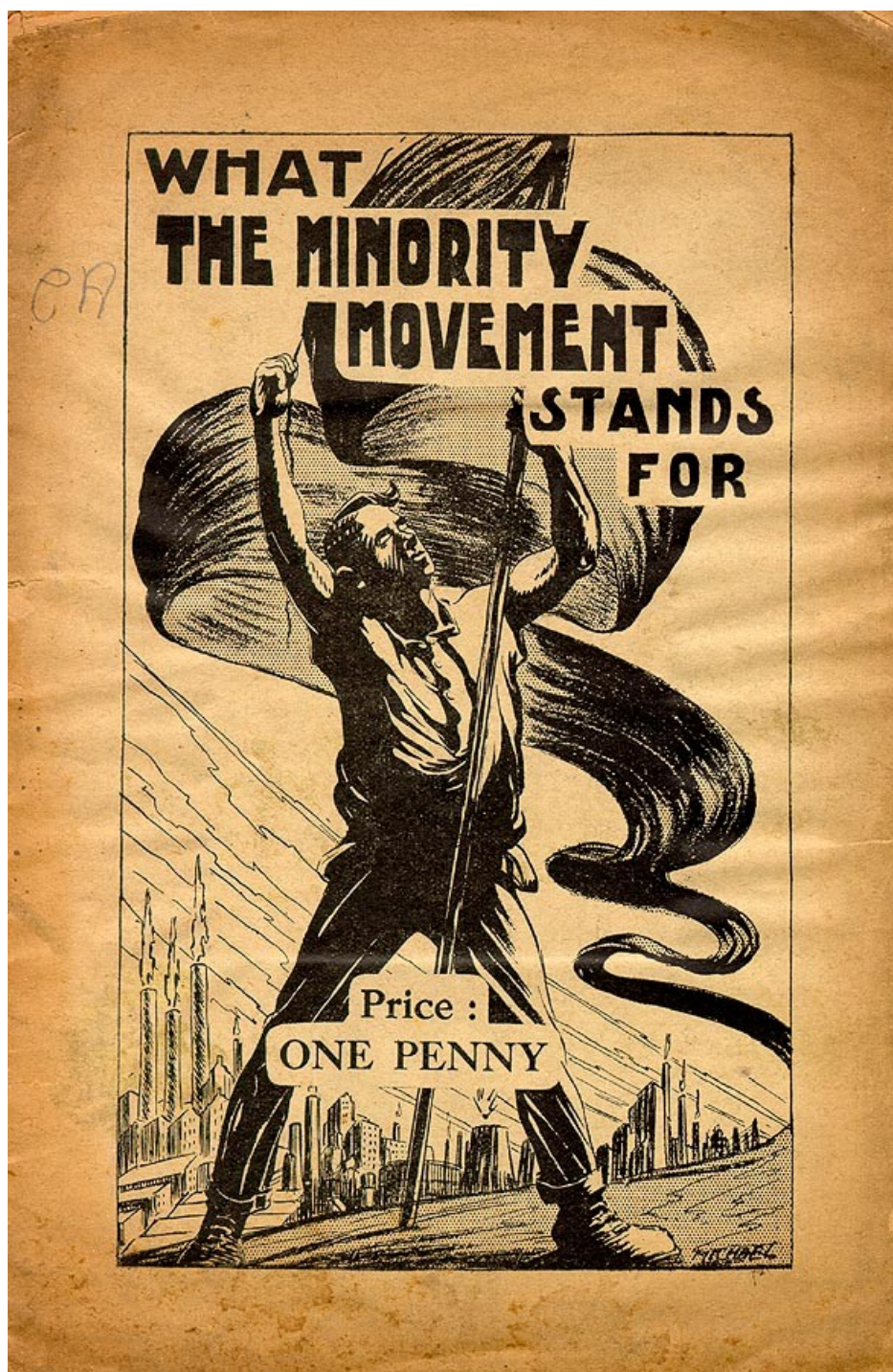


Figure 3 - National Minority Movement, 1924. The cover depicts worker figure tropes: a triumphant worker planting a flag on a hill in the foreground, with a utopian urban landscape behind him.

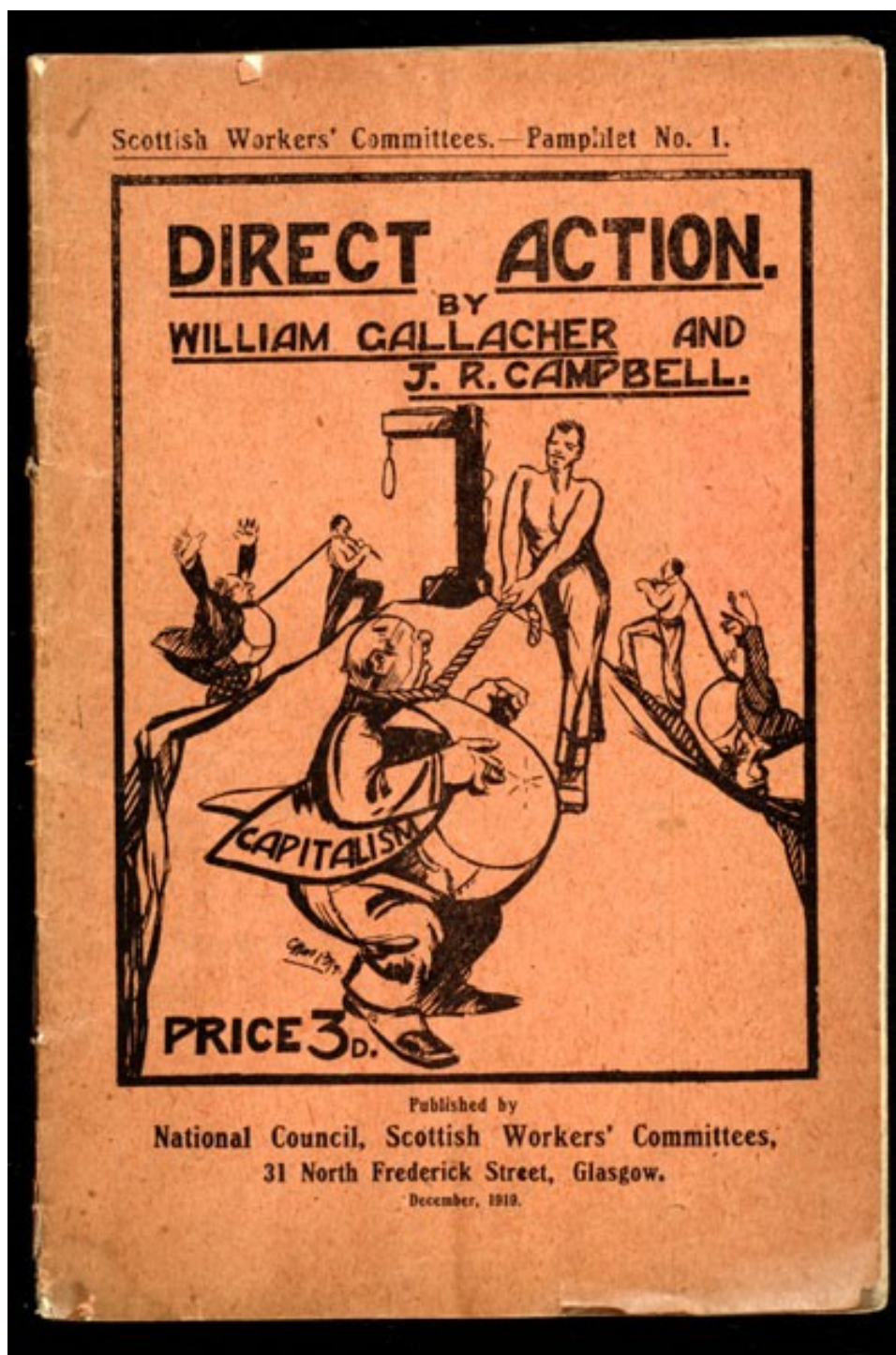


Figure 4 - Direct Action, December, 1919; published by the Scottish Workers' Committees. In this cover image, obese, old capitalists are forced to the gallows by muscular, shirtless young men. This pamphlet advocates workers' adoption of syndicalist tactics in their industrial struggles.

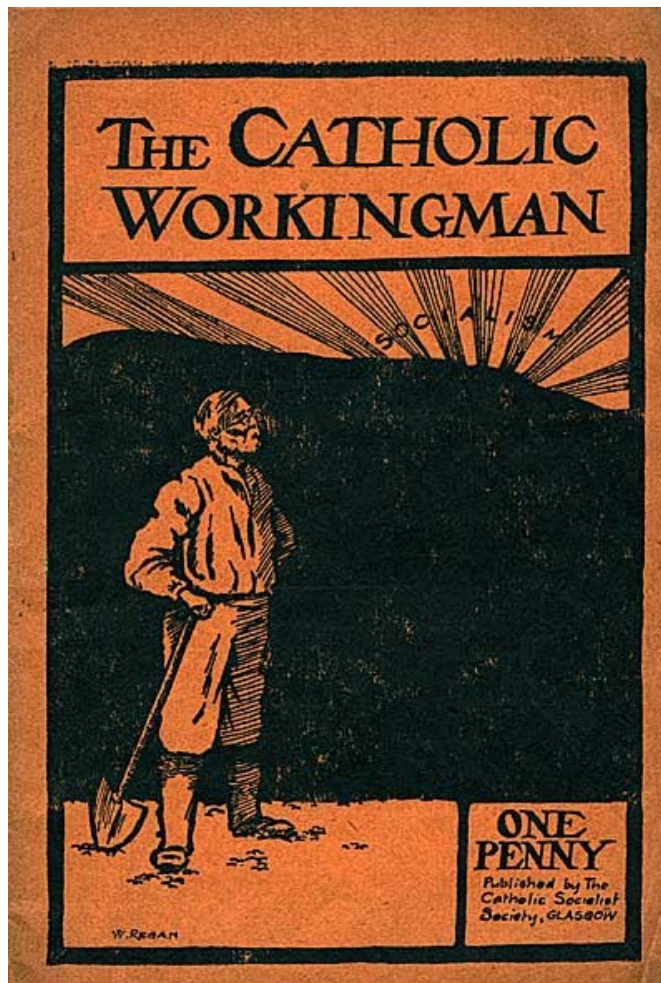


Figure 5 – The Catholic Workingman, 1906; published by the Catholic Socialist Society in Glasgow. Influenced by Francesco Nitti's book 'Catholic Socialism', the author of this pamphlet, John Wheatley was converted to socialism and formed the Society with William Regan, who illustrated this issue.

This cover shows the trope of the new dawn but this time in an agricultural landscape, targeting farmers and land workers. Note the contrast between this phlegmatic, sober image and the dynamism of the modernistic urban scene of the Minority Movement cover (Fig. 3).

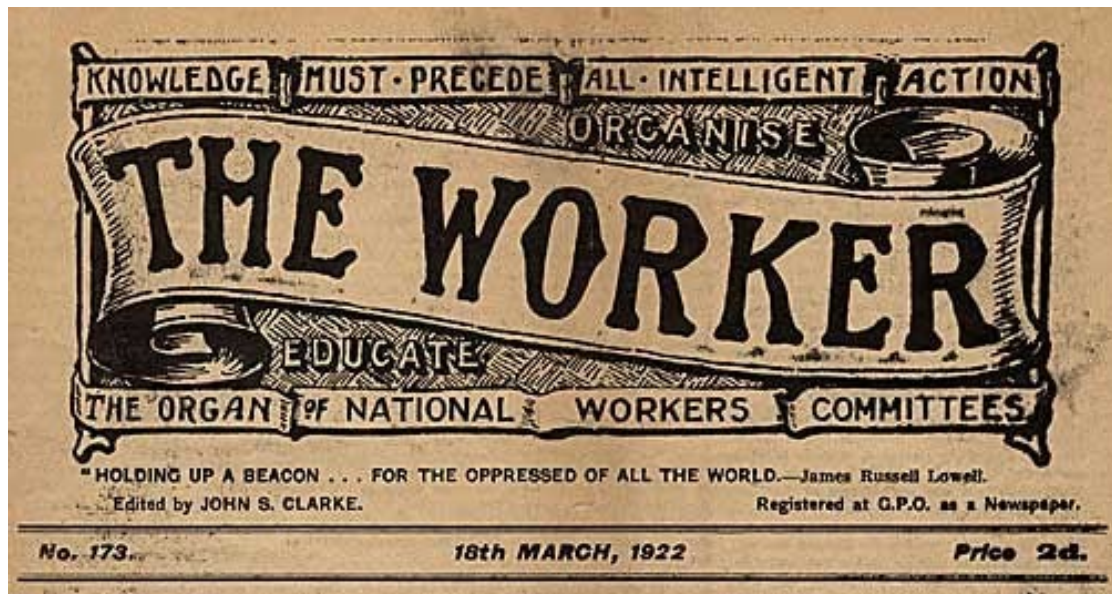


Figure 6 - Masthead of *The Worker*, the weekly newspaper of the Clyde Workers' Committee, 18 March 1922. *The Worker* was first published in 1916 following the government's suppression of both *Forward* and John Madean's publication *Vanguard*.

These contradictory worker portraits of threatening strength and righteousness drew from the traditions of Radicalism and Methodism, which contributed to the labour movement discourses throughout the nineteenth century, as discussed by Vicinus, Klaus and Breton. Of course, the language and imagery of 'the worker' was developed during the same period that Marx and Engels were active in their work relating to the Communist Party. However, an analysis of the theoretical and historical imbrications of the Chartists, British labour movements, and the Communist Party demands more time and space than this dissertation allows. My concern here is to indicate, firstly, the fact that the two discourses – of 'the worker' and the proletariat – originate in different sources and were subject to diverse influences; secondly, that the concept of the proletariat poses specific intellectual challenges that are not raised by 'the worker', and thirdly, that both conceptualizations of the working class man are differently relevant to the primary texts.

1.5 Working class masculinity under neoliberalism

As has been discussed above, the three novels problematize idealized versions of working class masculinity. The texts' primary method of mobilizing this critical approach is to contrast

the idealized working class type with a ‘flawed’ working class male protagonist who resists the idealized model. Two versions of idealized working class masculinity feature in the texts: the first is a hyper-masculine model stemming from the figures previously outlined - the proletarian and the ‘worker’ of British labour movement discourses; the second is the Craftsman Ideal which appears in Ali’s novel as an alternative model. Importantly, the close relation between masculine identity and work in the three novels is shown to be complicated by neoliberalism’s changes to former modes of working class work.

The backdrop of neoliberalism in each novel’s economic landscape is characterized by processes associated with de-industrialisation: amid the underemployment of staff and loss of contracts, Tammas’ factory is undergoing rationalization in *A Chancer*; the Scheme is a solution to post-industrial working class unemployment in *The Scheme for Full Employment*; the rise of call centres and the industrial heritage sector in *In the Kitchen*. Each alludes to the dissolution of former modes of working class labour, and such events contextualise the texts’ critiques of idealized models of working class masculinity.

Characterised by aggression, physicality, endurance and control, the dominant version of working class masculinity surfacing in the texts is the hyper-masculine model. Attending this hyper-masculine model is a critical paradigm that considers the site of industrial labour to be the site of men at their most physical, powerful and ‘natural’. However, this idea was countered by Andrew Ure¹¹, who claimed the obverse: that the site of labour was unnatural and the site of men’s alienation.

Kelman’s *A Chancer* responds to the hyper-masculine model through Robert and Tammas. Robert represents the version of masculinity that finds its truest expression in the locus of labour; he gains a sense of strength through righteousness in his belief that working in the factory is the best choice a man in his community can make, given the dearth of alternatives. Interestingly, although Tammas challenges Robert’s position by opting for unemployment and gambling, he does so for reasons that are not antagonistic. While Tammas does not derive a

¹¹ See Marx’s discussion of this matter and of Andrew Ure’s views in Chapter 15, Section 4 ‘The Factory’ of *Capital* (London: Penguin, 1990, p.544).

sense of power, as Robert does, from his factory job, neither does he experience alienation there.

Similarly, in Mills' *The Scheme for Full Employment*, key characters (the faux-naïf narrator and George, for examples) possess comically anti-heroic qualities, which make absurd the hyper-masculine model that qua the Long Reach mural they are supposed to emulate. Concomitantly, these characters' antics serve to invalidate the above ideas that propose, respectively, that work is the site of men's power or, conversely, their alienation.

Differently, Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* subscribes to the idea that work is the site of men at their most natural and powerful. The protagonist's father, Ted, is portrayed as a Craftsman Ideal kind of hyper-masculine industrial worker who derives his secure sense of self from his experience of a former, industrial world of work where routine and skill provided him with a sense of control over his life. Throughout the first half of the novel, Gabriel mocks his father's version of masculinity for its ineptitude with emotions; Ted claims that identity comes with doing, not feeling. Furthermore, Ali's novel tacitly aligns Ted's masculinity (doing) with the hyper-masculine model and Gabriel's masculinity (affect) with the neoliberal world that he inhabits. By initially embracing the neoliberal world, but later discovering that its liberal approach to financial and employment regulation has led to disturbing crimes, Gabriel's narrative dramatizes the texts' tribute to industrial work and its refusal to admire the new, neoliberal world.

The fact that each novel *resists* the hyper-masculine model of working class male identity indicates their skepticism of that model's assumption that maleness is characterized by power. On that point, the texts have an affinity with each other. The male protagonists of these novels are not interested in positions of power – only in positions of agency. Therefore, the working class masculine subject in each novel becomes obscure, resisting old and new models of working class maleness.

2. “Individual destinies”: James Kelman’s *A Chancer* (1985)

2.1 Introduction

Literature ... must disclose the social foundations of politics by portraying living human destinies, individual destinies which concentrate in their individual uniqueness the typical, representative features of these connexions (Lukàcs, 1969: 158).

In this excerpt from his influential study *The Historical Novel* (1969), the Marxist literary historian Georg Lukàcs encapsulates his work’s titular subject. In the first part of the quoted statement, literature, society and the individual are constellated, reminding the reader of their interconnectivity. The second part suggests that the individual in literature should be portrayed as a distillate of the socio-political zeitgeist of her/his era. James Kelman’s *A Chancer* (1985) is concerned with exploring the ‘living human destinies, individual destinies’ which Lukàcs insists upon.

However, *A Chancer* departs from Lukàcs’ hypothetical historical novel in one important move: it positions the protagonist of the novel as *atypical* rather than typical. The individual destiny of the protagonist in *A Chancer* is *not* presented as concentrating in his uniqueness the typical features of his socio-political, historical time. Rather, he ‘discloses the social foundations of politics’ and the connections of these with lived, ‘individual destinies’ via a process of throwing into relief the lives of the minor characters against his own. For it is the minor characters who concentrate the typical features of their socio-political context, whilst the protagonist is shown to explore an altogether atypical individual destiny. This tactic alienates the protagonist from his peer group and thereby accentuates the sociopolitical tensions flowing between the protagonist and the novel’s minor characters.

In order to clarify my use above of the term typical, since the concept of the stereotype is so relevant to this study, I need to point out that the minor characters in *A Chancer* are not

stereotypes although they do reflect certain attributes of the ideological ‘worker’ model which forms the cornerstone of this study. In that way, the minor characters are typical of their community, but not portrayed as caricatures of their society. Elsewhere, Simon Kővesi has argued that all Kelman heroes embody ‘a reconsideration of Glaswegian masculine stereotypes’ (Kővesi, 2007: 182). Kővesi does not elaborate on what he assumes to be ‘Glaswegian masculine stereotypes’¹². However, his comment about Kelman’s heroes suggests that although the protagonists are obviously from Glasgow, and working class, their particular presentation in Kelman’s novels yet manages to subvert any preconceived expectations of their character. This subversion of expected characterisations of working class Glaswegian men is one of the defining characteristics of Kelman’s novels. Certainly, it is in this way that the protagonist of *A Chancer* is atypical.

That point leads to the crux of the matter for this chapter, in which I shall argue that *A Chancer* portrays a protagonist resisting a prescribed identity of the male working class ‘worker’. In addition, I contend that the novel implies that a prescribed identity of the male working class ‘worker’ is implicated in the political, social and economic oppression of the protagonist and his community. Furthermore, I believe *A Chancer*’s resistance to the ‘worker’ model is Kelman’s attempt to inculcate in literature (and thereby culture) a new expression of working class male identity, and I believe this attempt is supported by the novel’s unique mode of realism. Together, these factors strongly invoke Jacques Rancière’s concept of radical equality (discussed in the thesis introduction) to the extent that I perceive Tammas, the protagonist to be an embodiment of radical equality.

To illustrate my argument, this chapter shall be organized around the following structure. Firstly, I shall discuss how Tammas rejects the work ethic presented via his brother-in-law and

¹² Although a brief look at Kelman’s output reveals that seven of his novels (that is, all but his latest, *Mo Said She Was Quirky*, 2012) feature a male working class protagonist whose Glaswegian dialect connects him to Glasgow. That city has violent sectarian, gangland, and labour histories significantly constitutive of Glasgow’s working class cultural identity. I shall assume then that the Glaswegian masculine stereotypes of which Kővesi speaks are those of aggressive working class men.

peers, which indicates his atypicality. Following this shall be an analysis of Tammas' gambling activity which I shall argue is his chosen source of self-identification and therefore self-determination, and it demonstrates Tammas' resistance to the ideological characterisations of working class men embodied by his brother-in-law and peers. An examination of the novel's narrative form and use of realism will complement the section on gambling to demonstrate how the game is a political act of subversion for Tammas, while the novel's form is likewise rebellious. These points shall culminate in a conclusion wherein I will relate my analysis of *A Chancer* to Rancière's theory of dissensus as both politics and an appeal for 'radical equality'. In my conclusion, I shall also explain why Kelman's aesthetic in *A Chancer* can therefore be considered as a Rancièrian challenge to what he terms the 'police order'. I understand Kelman's literary activism in writing *A Chancer* to gesture towards the possibility of a new political space and identity for working class men.

2.2 The social politics of work in A Chancer

Tammas is the twenty-year old protagonist of *A Chancer*. He lives with his sister, Margaret and her husband, Robert in their own flat in a working class district of Glasgow. As a result of several arguments, Tammas has a tense relationship with his brother-in-law. Significantly, their relationship provides a number of the novel's key insights concerning male working class identity. The novel situates that identity in a nexus with money, gambling and work, where work takes precedence in shaping Robert and Tammas' sense of identity. Robert attempts to respond positively to the limitations put upon him by work, with mixed results, but Tammas on the other hand is affected quite negatively by his experiences of work.

The first negative element of work we see impacting on Tammas is the scarcity of tasks to do in his job, and that absence of work even when *in* work is one of the 'horrible things speaking for itself' in *A Chancer* (McLean, 1985: 79). Several depictions of men at their workplaces, but with no real work to do, and talking about time and the loss of contracts and shifts, together create a burgeoning feeling of despair. At the start of the novel, Tammas works

as a machinist in a factory where, after an order from Belgium falls through for his section, ‘Yous’ve lost the Belgian order eh! Pity, pity’ (Kelman, 1985: 23), there is nothing to do: ‘The men were eating, or smoking, reading the morning newspapers or staring at the floor or the wall or the ceiling’ (Kelman, 1985: 27) and Tammas complains to his sister, Margaret about it ‘All I’m doing in the factory these days is walking about’ (Kelman, 1985: 56). The foreman supervising Tammas and his colleagues gives them whatever tasks remain, such as burning broken up pallets in a derelict yard (Kelman, 1985: 34). The older man working with Tammas is surprised to learn that he has been working with him for just seven months so far, ‘Is that all? ... [I] thought it was longer’; Tammas exclaims ‘it just seems like it!’ (Kelman, 1985: 35). After being given the task of burning up the broken pallets, we notice how unbearable the boredom is for Tammas: ‘Thank Christ, I was beginning to wish he’d stick us back on the machine. Anything’s fucking better than nothing’ (Kelman, 1985: 34). Time stretches out. Later that same day, after burning the pallets, Tammas and Ralphie (the older man) sit down for a cigarette with the boiler maintenance engineer, Benny, who starts the conversation by discussing the lack of work, ‘So, your nightshift’s been halved?’ (Kelman, 1985: 35). The older men maintain a sense of humour about the difficulties of the situation, and their long length of their employment, saying to Tammas:

Wait till you’ve been here the same as us.

God forbid ... chuckled Ralphie.

Tammas shook his head. No point worrying about that auld yin – last in first out. I’ll be heading the line soon as the redundancies start (Kelman, 1985: 35).

Tammas heard the rumour of imminent redundancy before the above conversation, and he resigns soon after this point (Kelman, 1985: 63). Hereafter, his relationships with friends and family begin to break down, because people cannot understand his choice to quit when the employment situation in Glasgow is desperate. The situation is referred indirectly to by Auld Roper when he resentfully criticizes a rare friend with a steady job in the pub - ‘You shut up and all... taking days off your work when the rest of the country cant [sic] fucking get any!’

(ibid: 300). The novel stresses the desperation of such a climate in showing the reader that while there is nothing to do on the job for Tammas in the factory, there are no jobs outside the factory either. The double absence of work is established at the start of the novel, having the effect of inviting pity from the reader when subsequently portrayals of Robert's Protestant work ethic appear.

The following example of a heated argument between Robert and Tammas provides the reader with an understanding of Robert's work ethic, as well as insight into the two men's contrasting attitudes towards money. Although after work Robert and Margaret are left with little time or money to enjoy other activities, they are yet generous to Tammas by occasionally giving him pocket money. Eventually, these modest acts of charity become a sour topic of disagreement when Robert feels humiliated by Tammas. The following passage marks a low point for the two men when Tammas asks to borrow a pound:

You must be joking.

Tammas looked at him.

The way you've been carrying on! Hh! Think I don't know the score or something!

What d'you mean?

You know fine well what I mean. You must think I'm a right bloody monkey.

Aw please yourself then.

Aye you're bloody right I'll please myself. Working all sorts of hours to try and save a few quid while you're out wining and dining! Eh? You must think I'm a bloody idiot!

For Christ sake! Tammas sat back on his chair, folded his arms.

You listen son ... Robert stood up, one hand on the edge of the table and pointing at Tammás with the other. You want to go and ask that sister of yours how much I take to myself out the bloody wages!

What you on about? I'm no interested in your bloody pocket money. All I did was ask you for a loan of a pound, that's all. If you don't have it then fine, fine- but what you handing me all this stuff for? Jesus Christ!

I'll Jesus Christ you! Don't use that kind of language in this house!

(Kelman, 1985: 96)

Clearly, financial management is an ethical value to Robert, who pours his energies into 'Working all sorts of hours to try and save a few quid'. The measure of his sacrifice is made clear to Tammás in how Robert contrasts the disproportionate reward of 'a few quid' against working 'all sorts of hours'. He resentfully perceives Tammás to be exploiting his and his wife's generosity and taking their charity for granted. However, Tammás' reaction hints at how he does not consider his request to be problematic, and he misunderstands the cause of Robert's wrath. Robert considers the very gesture of asking for financial help to be insulting given that Tammás uses it for socialising, but Tammás does not recognize why he is being offensive because he does not relate to money in the same way as Robert. In this scene, Robert's emotional relationship with money is presented as being a direct result of the conditions of his working life. It is placed in contrast to Tammás' detached attitude and Tammás does not at this stage connect Robert's stressed outburst with the working routine he keeps ('what you handing me all this stuff for?').

Another important point about the above exchange is that it is an indication of Robert's sense of propriety. He implies, by his own example, that a respectable man works hard and saves his money, even if the long hard work wears him down, and he does not waste the hard-won income on 'wining and dining'. By that, he does not mean going out for dinner and a glass of wine; rather, the idiom means to be spending money (on dining out in restaurants) disproportionate to one's means. His use of that phrase reveals how he both resents and

respects order and propriety: while his sarcasm shows he resents the order of society excluding him from its richer material experiences, his point is that he wants Tammas to replicate his own example as a means of showing respect to Robert's sacrifice. Robert's sense of moral duty to work shapes his identity, thereby work becomes personal, and this development makes him sensitive to any injury. Consequently, the above exchange establishes a link between Robert's sense of male identity, the 'worker' ideology and capitalism, whereby working class labour under capitalism shapes personal identity in such a way as suits capitalist work practices.

From a moral perspective, as minute an incident the excerpt above is, nevertheless it reveals the importance of religion in the formation of Robert's work ethic. His admonishment when Tammas says 'Jesus Christ' indicates Robert's religious belief as well as a conservative strain in his moral code. Clearly, Robert represents a conservative Protestant work ethic in the novel, the value of which is challenged by its opposite – the unemployed gambler, Tammas, who seems to enjoy life more exuberantly than his brother-in-law. The dour Robert may take solace in doing the right thing, but the novel demonstrates to us that it is Tammas who really lives (more of which later).

Indeed, a major development in *A Chancer* is how much Tammas becomes a perfect foil for Robert, a dynamic regularly situating Robert's work ethic in opposition to Tammas' gambling. The following extract is one of several instances presenting Robert's distrust of gambling:

I'm no thieving.

I know you're no thieving. If I thought you were you'd be out the door in two seconds flat, never mind what your sister had to say about it.

Tammas sniffed.

Listen, I'm no thick; I go in for a pint to *Simpson's* now and again myself. Aye! Some strange places you're running about these days – according to what I hear anyway! Gambling dens?

They're no as bad as they're made out to be.

Robert was gazing at him.

Honest, they're no.

What d'you sing hymns or what! Robert shook his head then he smiled briefly.

(Kelman, 1985: 160-161)

Tammas defends the gambling dens against widespread ('as they're made out to be') prejudice, as articulated by Robert, who is rendered dumbstruck by such a defence. When Robert does respond, he sarcastically comments on their dubious reputation by comparing them with something sacred - the Christian practice of singing hymns. Of course, he implies by this that gambling dens are immoral, and the final ironic smile reinforcing his point indicates once more his respect (drawn from his religious sympathies) for order and propriety.

Since Robert's views on work are in accord with other male characters, such as Auld Roper, Mr McQuorquodale, and Gus, Tammas remains alone in his attitude towards life. Adding to the list of those voicing the status quo is Billy, who in this excerpt chats to Tammas in the pub:

Ach! Billy shook his head. What a life. I'm fucking sick of these horses man I'm no kidding ye, honest, fucking terrible. ... Naw, I'm definitely going after a full-time job. A nice warm factory or something.

Ha ha.

Naw I'm no kidding ye Tammas you were mad jacking yours.

Shite.

Naw, honest (Kelman, 1985: 103).

Tammas does not attempt to justify his choice to become unemployed, even though the reader is made aware of the problems Tammas encountered in his factory job at the start. His silence on the matter contributes to the feeling evoked by the novel that Tammas cannot identify as the idealized ‘worker’ that all of his male associates seek to abide by. For instance, unlike Billy, Tammas does not idealize the conditions of factory work (‘nice warm factory’, *ibid*) – for Tammas has had the experience of being instructed to spend one rainy day collecting litter outdoors behind the factory as a result of there being no work to do inside the building. Tammas perceives the dull reality that for his peers is obscured by the illusory idea of a steady, safe job in the local factory.

In *A Chancer*, an absence of work for the male protagonist means that he cannot identify with the masculine role model (Robert) he is expected to adopt since that model depends upon an abundance of work. As Kövesi has commented, ‘The masculine work ethic is irretrievably dwindling to irrelevancy [for Tammas in *A Chancer*] because the heavy industries which produced it are no longer dependable’ (Kövesi, 80). Moreover, Tammas faults the male role model of Robert because he perceives it as being formed out of unhealthy work – what is required is rewarding work that does not dominate the individual’s life. In the face of what is hardly a choice, between unemployment and an unhealthy factory job, men like Robert and Billy choose the job, because, in their minds, it provides a steady income (Robert’s view) and is reliable (Billy). However, in the course of reading *A Chancer* the reader knows that the factory jobs do neither: the wages are so low that Robert has to continually do overtime in order to meet his basic living costs, while the factory is certainly not a ‘nice warm’ place for Tammas, who experiences the threat of redundancy, and risk to his health, in the factories where he works briefly. Therefore, the reader can see that the cultural stereotyped identity of the working class male ‘worker’ is partly the reason why the men, such as Robert, contribute to their economically limited destinies. When the protagonist rejects the work ethic of his community he is incidentally challenging the masculine identity accepted and embodied by his

brother-in-law and other peers. With each social interaction Tammás reinforces his atypical position and lends greater impetus to the novel's critique of the hegemonic order.

2.2.1 Robert's trapped destiny

The work available in *A Chancer* is presented as inherently paradoxical, because of its destructive effects upon the working class people that capitalist economies require to create their profits. Although the men want to work, the only work which is available significantly diminishes their freedom to enjoy life. Indeed, conversations throughout the novel between Tammás and Robert leave the strong impression that Tammás considers Robert's approach to life to be partly responsible for Robert's economic vulnerability and emotional frustration. Accordingly, Robert's trapped destiny is a narrative vehicle for the novel's critique of capitalism. For example, Tammás imparts enthusiastically to Robert his news of a potential new job:

He's an electrician and he says he'll get me laboring to him. Big wages. Bonus it is they're on.

That's nice, said Robert.

Tammás paused. He looked at the floor to where his cigarette packet and matches were lying. Ah, he said, eh, the... He rubbed his eyelids before continuing. A place near the site, where you sleep and that.

A hostel.

Naw, it's no a hostel I dont think I think it's a eh...

A hotel? Five star probably... Robert had turned his head to look at Tammás while speaking to him. (Kelman, 1985: 211)

Robert's sarcasm belies his awareness of the absurdity of the conditions of his working life. A witty presence throughout the book, his humour is playful except when discussing money or work with Tammás, and then the ludic element changes into something darkly ironic. Dark,

because we know from our first introduction to him that Robert is unhappy in his work when we see that he and Tammas share a dislike of the backshift leg of the factory job:

I dont fancy doing that backshift, said Tammas. Even worse than the nightshift.

I know, you're right, it's the worst of the three. Robert lifted his book upwards and he looked at it closely, then he glanced at Tammas. Naw, he said, I dont like it myself (Kelman, 1985: 32).

This exchange strongly suggests that all three of the job's shifts are unenjoyable: 'the worst of the three' – as if not one of the three offers something to look forward to. Since the two men work in different factories, it must be the case that both factories operate identical shift rotas for their workers, meaning that Robert and Tammas share in their experiences of work, albeit from within different companies. Therefore, when Tammas later resigns from his factory job, and even later on quits his second factory job, he is indirectly at the same time severing the connection he had with Robert. So when Robert makes sarcastic jokes to Tammas about work or money, he is belittling Tammas for having humiliated him by criticizing his own choice in life (to work in the factory). And, Robert is also demonstrating his awareness of the dispiriting and disappointing nature of his working life.

In this way, the 'five star' joke is also Kelman's wry aside on the nature of working class work. Robert works long hours and is loyal to his employer insofar as he works honestly and hard, yet he will never be able to afford five star hotels, while the men who own the factory might well stay in such hotels on their annual holidays. In other words, this passage indirectly comments on the exploitation of labour inherent within a capitalist economy, implying it disorders the working class community, as depicted by contrasting Tammas' innocent naivety with Robert's disaffected sarcasm amidst a backdrop of capitalism's bounty (five star hotels). As the discourses of the labour movement, which created the idealized conceptualization of the 'worker' are paradoxically dependent upon capitalism's exploitation of labour, the 'worker' model is inextricably part of the social problems brought about by capitalism's exploitation of labour, and this is mediated in the novel by Robert and Tammas' relationship.

The connection between identity and capitalism's exploitation of labour is further nuanced by the presentation of Robert as a 'successful' individual. Through his example, the novel implies (critically so) that the social consensus agrees that working class men can be successful if they acquiesce to the capitalist economic order. Although in his own eyes Robert achieves moral success through his diligence, the sense of loss he articulates in a conversation with Tammas suggests Robert mourns the life he is losing to monotonous work. In fact, Robert's self-martyrdom is a sublimation of the humiliation he suffers for continuing to comply with his own economic exploitation. It is deeply ironic that Robert feels morally superior for his acquiescence to a form of work that limits his freedom and makes him unhappy. Nevertheless, his masculinity depends on his sense of rectitude, as is seen in his exchanges with Tammas. Robert's example conveys the message that a real man will sacrifice his freedom and enjoyment of life if that is the only legitimate option. (Legitimacy is important to Robert, because as we have seen, he casts aspersions on the illegal gambling dens.) Hence, Robert's presentation in *A Chancer* as an ideal 'worker' model suggests that the idealized identity of the 'worker' contributes to the disenfranchisement of the actual workers who embody it.

Despite Robert's dialogue indirectly positing Tammas as a failure and as the antithesis to Robert, ironically it is Robert and the other working class men in *A Chancer* who exemplify failure for their passive acceptance of the status quo. For example, Billy, Mr McCorquodale, and Robert each criticise Tammas's choice to quit his job without asking him why he did it. By passing judgment without inquiring as to the possible causes of Tammas's choice they imply that their opinion is standard and beyond doubt. From another angle, the factory workers at the start of the novel are an example of two kinds of passivity. They appear emotionally passive for not putting up a fight against the rationalisation occurring in their workplace, and since it deprives them of work to do it imposes a physical passivity upon them as well (they have little to do). Amongst the workers one nameless man protests, but his anger is met by apathy, which gets the last word.

I'm talking about redundancies, he said, that's what I'm talking about. And you better get bloody used to the idea.

One of the men shrugged: Ach well, we knew it was coming.

That's as maybe but they should've gave us notice. Formal. It's no as if they've told us anything. I mean all we're doing's fucking guessing and we shouldn't have to be fucking guessing!

Aye but they might no know for sure yet (Kelman, 1985: 2).

Aye well you trying to tell me we should fucking stand back and watch them steaming into the fucking O.T. when we're getting fucking laid off!

Nobody's getting laid off (Kelman, 1985: 50).

The workers' passivity stands in direct opposition to Tammas' resistance to becoming like the men who surround him. Kövesi comments on the connection between passivity and work in *A Chancer*, and, furthermore, comments on the contrast between passivity and Tammas:

In *A Chancer*, gambling is not a mere metaphorical device for revealing the melancholic ironies of working-class life lacking control, or a sentimental toll to expose the fragility and fatalistic passivity of working-class life. *In fact, if working-class passivity is anywhere in this novel, it is at work.* Gambling by contrast is an arena for the active managing of risk (Kövesi, 2007: 72 – emphasis added).

As discussed at the start of this chapter, the men working in the factory have no work to do, and as Kövesi describes, they appear fatalistic in their passivity - because they do not speak of taking action in response to the cancellation of an essential contract. They accept the news and continue as they were. However, this passivity brings pathos to the novel through Robert's struggle to square his recognition of the unfair conditions ordering his life with the need to go

on living that life with dignity. Kóvesi considers Tammas to be active as opposed to passive, since his gambling requires ‘active managing of risk’, to borrow Kóvesi’s phrase. Robert hardly considers Tammas’ gambling to be a positive career move, and yet when Tammas comes alive during the gambling passages, the novel indicates that Tammas is doing and feeling more than Robert, who labours all day in a factory.

Clearly, the conflict between Tammas and Robert arises out of the men’s different ways of viewing the world, but their views reveal the way in which their personal identities relate to their choice of work. Tammas possesses a sense of personal identity that *precedes* his work, in contradistinction to Robert, whose sense of personal identity *derives* from his experiences as a factory worker. Consequently, Kelman draws attention to the claustrophobic and complicated conditions of existence for working class men in Glasgow who do not ‘fit the mould’, and critically portrays the interdependency of working class men’s identity with their experiences of work.

2.3 Gambling

2.3.1 Repudiating gambling's class politics

The political¹³ dimension of gambling has not been given much space (if at all) hitherto in the critical literature on *A Chancer*, but Sarah Engledow writing in the *Edinburgh Review* (2001) is a notable exception. Her points concerning the positive, self-determining and politically subversive aspects of Tammas' gambling are worth considering in relation to this study. She considers the novel's title to be an ironic reference to those aspects of gambling which incorporate class hierarchies. The phenomenon is succinctly encapsulated in the phrase 'I invest, you bet, he gambles'¹⁴ in which the upper or middle class investor or bettor represented by the personal pronouns of 'I' and 'you' would not be described as 'a chancer', 'because this term implies someone who is attempting to get a break without pursuing success through socio-politically endorsed and controlled avenues' (Engledow, 2001: 80). In that case, the 'he'¹⁵ who gambles is on a par with Tammas who explores the business of gambling as a means to *circumvent* 'socio-politically endorsed and controlled avenues' of earning a living. In his case, being a chancer is an opportunity to resist ideologies and to control his own destiny.

However, Tammas is aware of gambling's class politics, as seen in his interactions with the character, Joe Erskine (more of which below). Engledow reads Tammas' participation in gambling as an indication of 'if not conscious resistance to, then at least a certain site of liberation from, the capitalist system and other ideologies' (Engledow, 2001: 73). Citing the example of sectarian factions, she explains that in Glasgow it has often been claimed that 'a disproportionate number of bookmakers were Irish Catholics' but the difference in religion

¹³ Use of 'political' shall be as per its commonly accepted meaning, unless specifically flagged up as referring to the Rancièrian kind.

¹⁴ Quoted in Engledow, but taken from Chinn, Carl. *Better Betting with a Decent Feller: Bookmaking, Betting and the British Working Class 1750-1990*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. p. 84.

¹⁵ Just as it is impolite to address somebody using the third-person if they are in your presence, likewise Chinn's succinct phrase implies class dismissal or disapproval of the 'he' who gambles.

between the bookmaker and the punter was ignored in the exceptional arena of gambling (ibid). Although I agree with Engledow that in *A Chancer*, Tammas' practice of gambling is an indication of its providing 'a certain site of liberation' from various ideologies, the distinction between actual site and conceptual site needs to be made, because certain gambling places in the novel replicate ideological class hierarchies, whereas others such as the betting shop provide respite from them.

Numerous betting shops feature in the novel, generically referred to as the 'betting shop' (17 times)¹⁶, the "bookie's" (6 times) or the "bookmaker's" (6 times)'. When Tammas is in the betting shop, the novel describes his calculations, the results on the boards and his betting transactions and so they feature as spaces exclusively for speculation, which is the intellectual element of gambling. In *A Chancer*, betting shops are situated in urban streets, next to pubs or snooker halls; they are unassuming, nondescript and ubiquitous spaces wherein nothing happens except pure betting. In contrast, the horseracing track and the casino are the peacocks of gambling venues, where attractively decorated premises offer lounge and bar areas where people can mingle and where visitors must abide by a smart dress code. In *A Chancer*, women go to the horseraces and casino, but they don't go to the betting shop, which is an indication of the major difference between the two kinds of gambling places. The horseraces and the casino encourage socialising, whereas the betting shop, being technically an office space, caters to the individual. In this way, in *A Chancer*, the betting shop is a site that offers Tammas freedom from society's strictures.

The casino (*The Royal*) and Ayr Races are the novel's two examples of gambling places where class hierarchies in society are replicated, particularly through Joe's brandishing of his class affiliations using symbolic accessories such as brandy and cigars (Kelman, 1985: 148). Joe Erskine is presented as an ostensibly middle class gambler through whom the novel parodies the shallowness of class aspirations and gambling's incorporation of class ideologies.

¹⁶ Using the eBook edition, a search for the phrase 'betting shop' returns 17 instances

For instance, at Ayr Races Tammas is portrayed as an outsider to Joe and his friends who are older and richer than Tammas. Joe drinks brandy (Kelman, 1985: 122) and advises Tammas snobbishly of the dress code for the casino: ‘Eh son, if you’re fancying coming along to the casino with us you’ll need to get a shirt and tie. He laughed briefly: It’s not like eh . . . He cleared his throat in a significant way’ (Kelman, 1985: 125). Despite the group’s apparent superior social class they speak the same dialect, and use the same grammatical structures and vocabulary as Tammas (as seen in Joe’s comment), and of course they are also gambling in the same game in the same place. In contrast to the group, Tammas has superior knowledge of horseracing (Kelman, 1985: 123). When Charlie aggressively harangues Tammas to explain what made him choose Rimini, a winning horse, Charlie merely exposes his own lack of intellectual initiative: ‘You trying to tell me you thought Rimini was form horse? . . . Granted it had a chance but God sake, if you’re going to try and tell me it had the beating of the favourite on the book then ha ha, I don’t know, I just don’t know’ (Kelman, 1985: 123). Indeed, he does not know, and has mistakenly (or lazily) relied on the favourite to live up to its name. Charlie’s ignorance serves to highlight Tammas’ intelligence, indicating that the novel criticizes the artificial pomp (Joe) and ignorance (Charlie) attending the gambling scene. Consequently the novel points out that gambling is not subversive *per se*; the Ayr Races passage subtly points out that Tammas’ gambling is only subversive in its intellectual dimension, a point later reinforced by the novel’s apparent respect for the ‘rolling, shifting figures and results, probabilities and possibilities which mathematically determine and conceptualise multiple outcomes’ (Kővesi: 72) that form the fabric of Tammas’ mind. Indeed, the novel’s gambling passages (of which we shall see more detail later) show him to be like a stockbroker, speedily calculating probabilities, revealing an agile, impressive intellect, which is by far a greater asset to him than could be the work ethic of his brother-in-law and friends.

His pursuit of gambling alienates him from his social peers, but it also reflects his active resistance to various social pressures. He does not comment on Joe’s request for a brandy at Ayr, and he remains mute when Joe appears to humiliate him. I read the scenes of indifference to Joe’s class politics as part of Tammas’ practice of resistance to ideological formations of

male working class identity: Tamas does not wish to emulate Joe's example, despite Joe's apparent wealth and conventional markers of success (a big house (Kelman, 1985: 178), a car (Kelman, 1985: 125), consumer goods (Kelman, 1985: 178)). Through his resistance to the differing kinds of society around him, the protagonist mobilizes a critique of the socio-political and economic status quo.

2.3.2 Tammas' alternative work ethic

Tammas often wins enough money by gambling to subsist on, and even to afford luxuries such as drinks and an occasional restaurant meal. However, his winnings are variable in both frequency and amount, which creates tension between him and his sister, who would prefer a reliable tenant who paid regular amounts. The unpredictability of income from gambling voids it as a career option in a capitalist economy wherein financial regularity structures lives (weekly/monthly/annual bills). In a post-Fordist economy, life is organized by the necessity of a regular availability of money. Engledow elaborates upon the central place which money takes in the novel. Drawing on Kelman's comment that '[n]inety percent of literature in Great Britain concerns people who never have to worry about money' (qtd. in Engledow, 2001: 77), she considers most of the working class characters close to Tammas, whether family or friends, as embodying the 'fear of failure and social redundancy that is essential to the operation of the capitalist system' (Engledow, 2001: 81) for how they attempt to persuade Tammas to take up an ordinary job instead of gambling. In doing so, they support the 'ideologically promoted argument that in a culture of high unemployment a job must be secured and retained at any cost' (Engledow, 2001: 81). For Engledow, Tammas' gambling can be understood as 'What Tammas sees as the ethics of a viable mode of subsistence' (Engledow, 2001: 77). Further, she advances the resonating proposal that:

...the uneasiness Tammas' family members feel towards his gambling is animated subconsciously by a number of quite explicitly political ideologies. For instance, their opposition can partly be seen as a legacy of left politics of the early years of the [twentieth] century (ibid).

Engledow refers to the analyses of two contemporary historians¹⁷ studying attitudes towards gambling, which reveal both socialist and religious origins for society's suspicion of that

¹⁷ Chinn, Carl. *Better Betting with a Decent Feller: Bookmaking, Betting and the British Working Class 1750-1990*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; Clapson, Mark. *A Bit of a Flutter: Popular Gambling and English Society c.1823-1961*, *International Studies in the History of Sport*. Ed. J.A. Mangan, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.

speculative financial activity. For example, Chinn reports that ‘[m]ost socialists believed that betting was a pernicious habit which diverted the attention of workers away from involvement in the struggle to change society’ (qtd. in Engledow: 77). While Clapson states that:

[T]he Protestant church was worried about the humiliating erosion of the profile and power of the Empire as gambling behavior increased, and many in the reforming middle class were persuaded that gambling was responsible for dwindling industry and British failures in the Boer War (qtd. in Engledow: 77).

Therefore, socialists and Protestants were united in their distrust of gambling’s effects. While Protestantism does not explicitly feature in *A Chancer*, Robert’s work ethic is founded on a moral position influenced by religion as discussed above on some occasions to indirectly criticize Tammis for lacking moral values. Of course, Tammis is made to feel alienated from his peers for not showing solidarity with their approach to life when he quits two jobs despite high unemployment in the area. By refusing to do the jobs that his peers do or want to do, Tammis cannot help but be seen as unlike them. The truth is, he is different, and he wishes to be so. He is not portrayed as suffering from classical alienation or ennui; his alienation is rather a social fact more than a philosophical condition.

As well as being suspicious of gambling for its anti-solidarity and immoral connotations, Tammis’ family are suspicious of the hazy grey zone of social conventions amongst gamblers. It is clear to Robert that gamblers do not follow the same rules as the rest of society. This is demonstrated in the passage where Tammis boasts of being gifted some money by Auld Phil, a veteran gambler who works in the local betting shop:

O goody, it’s always nice to know people who give you their money. I’ve always thought that myself – eh Margaret? Nice that isn’t it! People who go about dishing their money every time you’re skint. Wish to heaven he’d stick down their names and addresses so we could get paying off the mortgage on this bloody house!

Margaret was staring at the television.

...

Well, Margaret, I think he must be talking about the big timers. Eh son? Is that who you're talking about? The big timers?

Exactly. Aye – he used to be. Won and done more cash than you'll ever see anyhow!

Right then that's enough! cried Margaret.

Naw it's alright. Robert had raised his hand and he smiled. I want to hear about the people that give away their money.

I'm talking about auld Phil over the road in the betting shop. He doesn't have to work in there you know he just likes to do it, to keep in touch with the game.

O, I see.

Aye, he doesn't need to work.

Mm, just like you... Robert frowned and he shifted round on his seat to be facing away from him. Away and grow up son.

I might and I might no - have to watch it in case I turn out like you.

Tammas! Margaret was staring at him (Kelman, 1985: 102).

The altercation provides insight as to Tammas' observation of Robert and shows how Tammas connects being a *man* with Robert's example - a role model that Tammas rejects. His rejection of Robert's example therefore alludes to the novel's critical view of working class masculinity, which is shaped by the 'worker' model discussed in the thesis introduction. The poverty suffered by Robert is not what Tammas wishes to adopt. In contrast to the opinion of his family, Tammas clearly considers the pursuit of gambling a plausible moneymaking option. The fact that gambling has the ability to produce large sums of money out of unquantifiable, invisible intellectual speculation as opposed to physical and quantifiable effort enshrouds it in mystery and an intoxicating allure, both qualities which Robert distrusts. For him, (as discussed above) gambling exists outside the safe bounds of 'a known and catalogued world'

that is 'thus somehow in order' (Jameson qtd. in Engledow, 2001: 81). Indeed, to Robert, gambling is anarchic and out of order.

2.3.3 From the flâneur to Tammas: speculation's profane pleasure

Robert's repeated criticism of Tammas for his gambling discloses his feeling that gambling is improper. Tammas' 'wining and dining' permitted by the income from gambling, combined with the free money from Auld Phil offend Robert's moral sensibilities. But gambling is not merely a means to material indulgence for Tammas. In looking at the passages depicting Tammas gambling on a dog or horse race, the reader is, at last, privy to his thoughts. That Kelman portrays Tammas' emotional pleasures *only* in tandem with a representation of his intellectual acrobatics signals that there is pleasure in the forecasting process for Tammas. Indeed, gambling's speculative moment is for Tammas his only form of spiritual pleasure and at times (when he wins) even ecstasy: and this fact is scandalous, for Robert and Margaret who subscribe to the phlegmatic Protestant work ethic.

Supplementary to Tammas' gambling activity is its necessitation of his geographical wandering of the city; between factory and betting shop, or bookie's and pub, or gambling club and home, or friends' homes and Shawfield greyhound track. Tammas leads an itinerant lifestyle. He is also a habitual smoker; descriptions of his affair with cigarettes exist on nearly every page. Next to gambling, smoking is his main activity, which is something to do when you do not want to do anything, but you want to not do the nothing that you are doing already. Activity is put off, forestalled, and deferred as he attends to borrowing, lighting up or putting out the next cigarette. Just as his peripatetic gambling behaviour signals his resistance to staying put in the factory job in the mould of Robert, similarly his smoking is a metaphor for how he defers commitment to friends, his lover, and relatives. But, ideas motivate his deferrals and resistances, meaning that while he smokes, he also thinks. He speculates. In this he resembles the figure of Charles Baudelaire's proto-Modernist flâneur, who wisps like cigarette smoke through the Parisian streets, observing the world as he drifts through it.

Kelman is often considered to practice a form of Modernist technique in his later novels for their dependence on interior monologue and stream of consciousness narrative modes. Amongst Kelman's novels, *A Chancer* is however uniquely not Modernist because its reliance

on a closed protagonist from whose shoulder we view what happens externally, but not inside his mind has much in common with French Nouveau Roman concrete realism, and little to do with the aesthetics characteristic of Modernist novels (taking Joyce and Woolf as examples). Kelman has striven to dissociate *A Chancer* from social realist politics, more of which we shall come to later.

Walter Benjamin's arcades project further suggests the parallel between the scandalous speculator that is Charles Baudelaire's flâneur and Tammás, all of which adds to our reading of the gambling activity in *A Chancer*. Tammás is to the gambling den, racetrack, casino and betting shop as Baudelaire's flâneur is to the Parisian arcades. 'The arcades were a cross between a street and an *intérieur* ... The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home amongst the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls' (Benjamin, 1999: 37). Indeed, Tammás feels more comfortable on gambling premises than in his four walls where he is likely to encounter Robert. Tammás is forever leaving places (work, the flat, the bar, the gambling club, his lovers' homes, his friends' parties), but not going places, and in this state of roaming limbo resembles the itinerant flâneur who feels at home when on the move and walking in the arcades.

The two figures also share in speculative activity. The speculative function of the flâneur is explained by way of a genre of *feuilletons* known as the physiologies, which became a popular petty-bourgeois phenomenon of street literature in Paris from the 1830s onwards. The physiologies 'investigated types that might be encountered by a person entering the marketplace' (Benjamin, 1983: 35) that is to say, typical Parisian characters (the market trader, the proletariat, the smoker, the musician etc). These physiologies were extremely popular and Benjamin refers to a number of writers and commentators discussing the 'types' observable in a Parisian street crowd. For example, he quotes Baudelaire: 'Most observant people ... are able to tell the profession of a passerby as they see him approach' (Benjamin, 1999: 437). The flâneur was therefore, amongst other things, a speculator of character, guessing the profession

and nature of each stranger he passed in the crowd amongst the arcades based on physical appearance, and dress.

Adorno, writing to Benjamin in 1939, makes a link between the consumer who window-shops and speculates as to the price of the displayed goods, with the flâneur, who street-shops and speculates as to the profession of the passerby - 'The "speculative" moment is common to both procedures' (Adorno & Benjamin, 1999: 302). In extension of that speculative commonality, it follows that where the flâneur reads physiognomies, the gambler reads form. The flâneur may silently bet on the profession of a stranger passed by in the arcades, and the gambler bets on the capability of the horse, dog, dealer, or player. The connection between the flâneur, the shopper and the gambler belies their common link to the capitalist market economy.

Lukàcs' 'connexions' between the individual and their historical moment are evoked by the flâneur and the gambler insofar as they are vectors transmitting financial information in commercial transactions typical of their differing eras of capitalism. The promenading flâneur buys new goods in the new arcades, while Tammas the gambler pays money to the bookmakers and racetracks. Both are associated with capitalism's market flows of financial information. Tammas' speculation invokes that of stockbrokers on computers generating financial market fluctuations. The giddiness of the stock market is reproduced in Tammas' gambling, and it is of great importance that Kelman only gives the reader insight into Tammas' emotions and thoughts during the gambling passages. For example, when Tammas is at the greyhound racetrack known as Shawfield:

Dog 5 at 10/1. It was a great bet. Tammas shook his head. All it had to do was trap properly and it would lead from there to the line. 10/1 was a great bet. (Kelman, 1985: 106).

This demonstrates one of the novel's rare instances of free indirect discourse mediating Tammas' thoughts. The measure of speculation revealed in the words 'All it had to do was trap properly...' proves that the novel lets slip the voice of its protagonist on occasion.

Moreover, this is the voice of the gambling expert, Tammas, speculating upon the probable outcome of the race - it is not the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator declaring the predetermined fate of the race. By this point in the novel, the reader knows that Tammas is spiritually transported by gambling, after having seen that (on page 79) he had felt euphoric during one evening playing for (and winning) a significant sum of money in a game of cards (chemmy, or chemin de fer) - 'I've never felt anything like it man, No kidding ye it was fucking- Christ!' (Kelman, 1985: 79). Echoing that expression, the excerpt above portrays a similar spark of fascinated excitement, specifically by the repetition of the 10/1 being a 'great bet'. Such hints of the subjective experiences of Tammas gesture towards the import of these moments for the novel.

Indeed, the excerpt above forms the beginning of an extended passage depicting one greyhound race at Shawfield which is worth looking at in full:

Dog 5 at 10/1. It was a great bet. Tammas shook his head. All it had to do was trap properly and it would lead from there to the line. 10/1 was a great bet. And suddenly some muttering began and one of the bookies had scrubbed the 6/4 away altogether and was glancing about and now marking in 5/4, 5/4 from 6/4. And another bookie was scrubbing out the 6/4. And now the rush was on, the punters crushing forward onto those bookmakers still offering 6/4. Tammas was carried along to one who had wiped out the 6/4 but without marking in anything else and he was frantically accepting the bets of those directly beneath his stool. Then he stopped and shook his head. No more! He cried. The 6/4's away, it's away! Tammas flung himself forwards, almost over the shoulders of a wee man standing in front of him, and he thrust the thirty pounds into the bookie's face. To thirty quid: he shouted (ibid).

The excitement of the gambling moment on the page is almost palpable to the reader because races by nature are tense and exciting, but greyhound races are so short that the betting, live at the track, becomes especially frenetic, so intensifying the experience. In addition, the novel has seldom permitted us to engage with Tammas' feelings, so that when we are presented with depictions of his adrenaline-fuelled and heightened emotions, their intensity in combination with their rarity stimulates an intensity of concentration in the reader. Aesthetically speaking, analogous sensations are provoked in the reader by the passage's short, punchy sentences that

lead into much longer ones whose urgency and intensity are amplified by repetitions of ‘and’ connecting one fast-paced action with another.

The intensity of the gambling moment for Tammas is manifest in his actions - ‘flung’, ‘thrust’ and ‘shouted’. By contrast, in the majority of the novel he is a quiet man. But when he gambles, he is presented as invigorated, vitalised and full of action. The dog race above ends with the sentence: ‘Tammas had cupped his hand to his mouth and was roaring EEEEESSSSAAAAYYYYY!’ (ibid). Speculating and winning gives Tammas an experience of ecstasy not available elsewhere in his life.

Indeed, the stark contrast between the limbo like experience of daily life for Tammas (seen in his continual smoking and avoidance of personal commitments) and the ecstasies of gambling imbues those latter moments with such intensity that they seem almost to intoxicate Tammas. For example, he quits his new job at the copper works at the end of his first day because the dangers of the work are outweighed by the potential in gambling to create more than a week’s entire wage in the space of a few minutes.

This magical money-spinning is the intoxicating allure of gambling. He places a bet during his first day at the copper works via the teaboy who does the running to the bookmakers. After having almost set his foot on fire on the job through not being provided with safety boots (Kelman, 1985: 252), he then learns from the teaboy that those of his racing choices which have finished by early afternoon have generated more than a day’s wages, and there could be more money if his remaining choices also win (ibid). There follows an extended description of Tammas’ journey to the betting shop during which time his thoughts are depicted in an appropriately racing idiom:

Collecting his jerkin from the locker-area he raced on to the exit and right out and up the road to the betting shop. The boardman was marking up the results of the race his third runner was in, its name being marked up, into the first position, 9 to 1. His third runner had won at 9 to 1. Nine to one. Tammas closed his eye lids. 20’s 16s and 9’s; 50 to 20 was 10 plus the 50 is 10.50 at 16’s; 10.50 at 16’s. ... As far

as he reckoned he had £178 alone for the treble, £178 going on to his fourth and final runner, £178. That was a lot of money, it was fine, good money, plus the doubles, even if it lost, the fourth runner. Tammas nodded. It was good money-plus the three doubles, the 20's and 16's and the other two. ... Two hundred quid minimum (Kelman, 1985: 253).

The passage continues on to describe his borrowing of a cigarette lighter from the woman working at the betting shop and an olfactory sensation which the smoking enhances: 'A sweetish taste in his mouth. He examined the betting slip once again and dragged on the cigarette. The taste had been there all day, to do with the heat probably, and the copper bars' (ibid). Not only are the emotions of Tammas heightened, but so too are his other senses. His mind is focused on his ensuing winnings and the forthcoming race, so much so that it is making him appear drugged. In this betting shop scene, tension is built up in similar ways to the Shawfield passage above, through use of short sentences, repeated words and phrases, or by extended sentences given momentum by their positioning between shorter, blunt statements.

Compare the intoxicating effects of gambling upon Tammas with Edouard Gourdon's description of the gambler which was inspired by the people who go to the Parisian arcades to play games of chance:

I submit that the passion for gambling is the noblest of all passions, because it comprehends all others. A series of lucky rolls gives me more pleasure than a man who does not gamble can have over a period of several years. ... I have spiritual pleasures, and I want no others (qtd. in Benjamin, 1999: 495).

Edouard Gourdon maintains that gambling is a spiritual pleasure beyond all other pleasures in depth and intensity. Indeed, Tammas does appear to experience ecstasy and such depth of feeling from gambling that it could be considered his spiritual pleasure. Of course, the idea that gambling might provide spiritual pleasure is inappropriate. Gourdon's statement seems scandalous for comparing the sacred with the profane.

This is close to what Engledow implies when identifying Tammas' gambling as a political act of subversion (Engledow, 2001: 78). It seems to be profane in contrast to the 'sacred'

(morally righteous) ways of life chosen by his brother-in-law, sister and other peers. The comments made by Benjamin in a letter to Adorno in 1938 about the gambler's empathy with exchange-value help to illustrate the profanity of such an idea:

... [E]mpathy with the commodity is probably empathy with exchange-value itself. And in fact, one can hardly imagine the "consumption" of exchange-value as anything else but an empathy with it. You [Adorno] write: "The consumer really worships the money which he has spent on a Toscanini concert". Empathy with exchange-value can turn guns into articles of consumption more attractive than butter. ... A gambler directly empathizes with the sums which he bets against the bank or an opponent. (Adorno & Benjamin: 295).

That Tammas empathises with exchange-value in itself is scandalous, but not because of any admiration of capitalism's market forces on his part, of course, but because he plays the capitalist market at its own game rather than submit to its exploitative structures of employment. Echoing Benjamin's comment, speculation like Tammas' is very much like that of the stockbrokers, only his speculation is symbolic sabotage of the Stock Exchange. In Engledow's words, 'the notion that in distributing rewards on the basis of chance rather than effort and merit, gambling makes a mockery of the legitimate economy' (Engledow, 2001: 77). She elaborates this point:

The unsolicited and unsecured loan, such a significant motif of the novel, which shrinks to loss or burgeons into profit and is redistributed variably - sometimes paid back, sometimes refused, with an uncertain proportion of winnings going to the person who provided the stake - is the emblem of individual resistance to external systems (Engledow, 2001: 78).

Tammas' resistance to the external systems represented by his brother-in-law, his friends, and even in his gambling acquaintance Joe Erskine, is offensive to all of these people because at root his resistance is improper in the Rancièrean sense, an obscenity, because it dares to gesture out against normalized oppression. In Rancièrè's phrase, when 'those not "destined" to think' do think, they are considered a dissident. Gambling in *A Chancer* is a way for Tammas to repudiate the class solidarity binding the other male characters to forms of work that are not economically liberating. Gambling also provides Tammas with his own work ethic, since it

functions using an alternative etiquette managing the exchange of money. These two aspects of gambling therefore suggest that Tammas subverts the laws of capitalism. Thus it can be seen that the novel contests the ideological ‘worker’ role model that abides by and inadvertently submits itself to exploitation by capitalism’s strictures.

2.4 Aesthetics in *A Chancer*

Two aesthetic characteristics underpin the form of *A Chancer*. The narrative principle, concentrating on the description of external events, attempts to present without explanations only the facts of Tammas’ life. Creating tension with this are the gambling passages which present the interiority of the protagonist, revealed as intellectually exciting and emotionally charged. The relevance of this conflict of aesthetics shall be analysed after consideration of each approach.

A Chancer was completed when Kelman was 38 years old, an age quite distant from when he had first conceived the idea for it (McLean, 1985: 73), and although its publication in 1985 makes it his second novel, in consideration of its early and long gestation it should more properly be thought of as his first. This is important insofar as amongst his works, it is the only novel in which he stringently limits portrayals of the protagonist’s subjective experience. By contrast, his later novels explore almost exclusively the interiority of their protagonists’ experiences (*Busconductor Hines* (1984); *A Disaffection* (1989); *How Late it Was, How Late* (1994)). *A Chancer* is, therefore amongst other things, an example of Kelman’s earliest exercise in the politics of form within the genre of the novel treating working class subjects. As he did not attempt the same form thereafter, the question arises as to the particular effect of this narrative style in the context of his oeuvre.

Kelman describes one of his motivations for taking this approach: ‘the problems then in writing the *Chancer* [sic] were how to be absolutely concrete, you know, to do nothing that was abstract, nothing that was internal...’ (McLean, 1985: 74) because ‘[i]t’s only through the

concrete that you actually get the terror' (ibid: 79). The terror is that born of recognizing 'the humiliating absurdity of having to go out begging, day after day, for this labor [sic] in which one's life was lost' (Rancière, 1989: vii), and the terror of potentially meeting death or serious injury in the workplace (in dangerous industrial occupations). For example, Kelman discusses his later novel, *Busconductor Hines* (1984) and his short story *Acid*, both of which depict domestic routines or work routines fraught with serious risks to health (scalding, corrosion, death):

Obviously, there's no evaluation being made, it's just trying to set out a thing very basic. In setting out the fact, you have set out the danger, because the danger is inherent within the fact, you know. I mean the fact really itself is hair-raising; if you can put forward that fact, then you can put forward the hair-raising-ness of the experience, you know, which is why I go after all those wee effects, such as no abstractions – everything's concrete (McLean, 1985: 74).

In *A Chancer*, Kelman attempts to present 'the hair-raising-ness of the experience'. Indeed, since, for the majority of the novel, the domains of Tammás' imagination and intellect can only be surmised by examining his behaviour and conversations with others, the narrative principle forces events to speak for themselves – to use Kelman's phrase, it presents the danger inherent in facts. By providing access to Tammás' interiority only during when he is gambling, Kelman exaggerates the effect of concreteness in the rest of the narrative.

This principle was also chosen as a method to prevent Kelman's and the reader's value judgments encroaching upon the text, 'there's only facts being stated, there's no such thing as a value judgment' (McLean, 1985: 79). This is seen in the way that the information provided by the narrator is conspicuously lacking in metanarrative, consisting only of unmodified descriptions of the protagonist's activity and of dialogue. There is no 'omniscient' perspective to assist (or influence) the reader as to the meaning of any events, and the absence of a guide makes the reader realize how much they depend upon the authorial voice to foreground the political and moral hue of the novel's subjects: 'there's no evaluation being made' (ibid).

The political ramifications of this principle for the presentation of Tammas are that he is presented as a new kind of working class male literary protagonist compared to those which precede him in earlier working class novels, or novels about working class men, such as Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) or William McIlvanney's *Docherty* (1975), both of which are told in a third-person narrative voice and feature a guiding omniscient narrator who describes the contexts of events in the novels. Tressell's story of a group of carpenters and craftsmen explores an idealistic socialism which is ultimately disappointed, whereas McIlvanney's seminal work gives Scottish miners a heroic voice in literature. Neither of these approaches to writing about working class men is taken up by Kelman in any of his novels. In fact, in seven of Kelman's eight novels, he has pursued a very different track in writing about working class men's experiences. In creating Tammas, Kelman has provided an antithesis to earlier characterizations of working class protagonists that therefore suggests criticism of characterizations of working class men as heroic, law-abiding socialists.

Kelman has written several essays in which he specifies the political agenda of his artistic works, and as Lee Spinks points out, those essays establish Kelman's strongly held view that 'literary style implies a particular ideological attitude' (Spinks, 2001: 89): so, what is Kelman's ideological attitude? Kelman's essays and interviews help to clarify his intentions and thus add to the debate surrounding his use of alienated male working class protagonists.

Kelman's criticisms of a previous tradition of realism help illuminate his position. For example, in a 2001 interview with Michael Clark for *Variant* magazine Kelman criticizes the political agenda of the public institutions that form the Scottish arts world which he sees as driven by outworn principles:

You had a lot of pseudo stuff then, as you still get, like Scottish movies it's full of pseudo left-wing stuff. It's "working class"—it gets sold as that anyway, so called working class—and that gets equated with left-wing. But is it? *A lot of it's just old fashioned naturalism, and naturalism is only a sort of weird fantasy. In literature*

that kind of stuff was out of date in the early 1950s ... (Clark, 2001: 6 – emphasis mine).

In more brutal terms Kelman says: ‘All they want is working-class sentimental shite, a kitchen-sink fantasy land, fucking hopeless’ (Clark, 2001: 5). Here, he implies that a watered-down, sweetened version of working class life is promoted. Clearly, Kelman does not trust those representations of working class people in projects that are approved for funding by cultural authorities in Scotland. His statements echoes Fredric Jameson’s comment concerning the naturalization of subversion in culture to the point where its potency is neutralized:

[T]he repeated stereotypical use of otherwise disturbing and alien phenomena in our present social conjuncture - political militancy, student revolt, drugs, resistance to and hatred of authority - has an effect of containment for the system as a whole. To name something is to domesticate it, to refer to it repeatedly is to persuade a fearful and beleaguered middle-class public that all of that is part of a known and catalogued world and thus somehow in order. Such a process would then be the equivalent, in the realm of everyday social life, of that cooptation by the media, that exhaustion of novel raw material, which is one of our principal techniques for defusing threatening and subversive ideas (Jameson, 1977: 847).

On examination, Kelman’s comments on working class representations in art lend strength to my view that his subversive working class protagonist in *A Chancer* is a figurative gesture towards thwarting the naturalization of which Jameson speaks.

A Chancer inaugurates a debate on the form(s) of working class identity in Anglophone novels. In this debate, I read the novel’s ideological identity of a male working class ‘worker’ as having been subsumed by hegemonic culture and as having little meaning today. Certainly, other critics such as Kővesi mentioned above have likewise commented on Kelman’s suspicion of working class stereotypes. For instance, Kővesi’s comment on Kelman’s intention to write from within the working class experience emphasizes the importance of the position of the narrator’s voice in the construction or deconstruction of working class identity (Kővesi, 2007: 11). The lack of a guiding narrator in *A Chancer* is symptomatic of that intention, and it is certainly part of Kelman’s cynicism regarding the role of the author (which

Lukàcs privileges). For example, Kelman is suspicious of the prejudice which an author might bring to the text: 'To obliterate the narrator, get rid of the artist, so all that's left is the story' (McLean, 1985: 80). As much as is possible, in *A Chancer* Kelman filters out authorial subjective and qualitative meanings concerning the characters and the area of the city in which they live.

As a result of the narrative mode adopted in *A Chancer*, Tammás is ambiguously portrayed as alienated from his peers and family. The corollary of this is that Robert (and other male characters) appears as a typical working class man in the Lukàcsian sense. Through this staging of Tammás versus Robert, Kelman manages to expose the stereotypes of working class men that earlier literary treatments have not resolved. I read this effect as being part of Kelman's 'realism fucking realism' (Freeman, 1997 – in Böhnke, 1999: 62) - the critical form of realism which Freeman sees in Kelman's work. Freeman explains his interpretation:

His [Kelman's] writing is offensive not just in its impoliteness, but because it attacks the very assumptions which underlie the linguistic and cultural order on which social realism is founded. Grimly authentic, Kelman's portrayals are fucking real; but they also dissect the conventions of realism: realism fucks realism (Freeman, 1997, quoted in Böhnke, 1999 – emphasis mine).

Freeman's 'realism fucks realism' phrase refers to the critique on realism which Kelman's writing attempts to perform. The 'impoliteness' of which Freeman speaks sounds a Rancièrian note in its evocation of Rancièrè's usage of the term impropriety. Indeed, Kelman's writing is impolite and improper. I agree with Freeman's view for the reason that Kelman's realism does not conform to the social realism privileged by Lukàcs (i.e. critical realism), who considered immediacy and the surface of reality to be unimportant:

Literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of critical importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is and not merely confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface (Lukàcs, in Adorno et al, 2007: 33)

By contrast, Kelman considers ‘whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface’ to be of supreme significance to the goal in his literature of grasping reality as it truly is.

Maley has pointed out that Kelman risks othering the protagonist and the peripheral characters as a result of privileging the protagonist’s individualistic exploration of self-determination in his texts:

This process of self-fashioning also entails acts of othering which defeats its allegedly enlightened form. As a writer, Kelman wants to maintain close links with his roots, his origins, his culture, his working-class background, yet the characters he creates in his fiction find themselves out on a limb, isolated from the communities from which they arise (Maley, 2000: 66).

Tammas in *A Chancer* does not ‘find himself’ out on a limb and isolated from the community in which he arose – the reader adduces from Tammas’ behaviour that he holds different views on life to his peers and family, and *decidedly* pursues life in the way that might be his own. As well as reflecting his agency, Tammas’ gambling provides a critical subtext that by imitating the logic of capitalism (speculation) enacts a parody of same, thereby defending rather than abandoning the working class community from which he distances himself.

Further, the isolation chosen by the protagonist in *A Chancer* demonstrates the text’s complex response to the historical materialist emphasis on the effect of circumstance upon individual characterization (cf Raymond Williams, 1983: 145). Tammas’s biography conveys the text’s anxiety concerning the fact that economic circumstances are substantive in the formation of individual subjectivization. *A Chancer* demonstrates the strength of influence borne by general circumstances upon individuals, as seen in passages dealing with Robert and Vi in particular, but the text refuses to let environment and socio-economic conditions triumph over individual will. Instead of acquiescing to the status quo, Tammas appeals to his reason and sense of what I call Rancièrean equality, refusing to let his straitened circumstances direct his destiny. Importantly, Kelman’s text treats Tammas’ peers with a quiet respect. These elements create a sense of balance in the text, so that while Kelman risks accusations of

‘othering’ his protagonists, he succeeds in avoiding that trap. Aaron Kelly’s views on Kelman’s politics articulates the particular effect in *A Chancer* producing a modest ‘radically political authenticity’ for individual subjectivities:

Any attempt to offer some given working-class authenticity is already to secure the positions of all classes in capitalist society, to use a version of working-class life as the ideological glue that binds all classes to their places of privilege or subordination. Instead a more radical working-class culture would only ever find its authenticity in the paradox of its own inauthenticity, in the antinomy of being required to find its own reality in the illusion of someone else's. An as yet unrealised authenticity would wait beyond the rupture of bourgeois society and its arrogation of reality. A radically political authenticity congregates around the pledge of the future genuine article that is the equality of all human beings (Kelly, 2012: 39).

Tammas recognizes ‘the paradox of [his] own inauthenticity, in the antinomy of being required to find [his] own reality in the illusion of someone else’s’ (ibid); Robert also recognizes this, but has chosen to accept its terms and conditions for want of an alternative. Tammas creates an alternative and acts in accordance with the ‘equality of all human beings’.

Maley quotes one of Kelman’s essays in *Some Recent Attacks* (1992) that hints at the intention driving his writing about individual protagonists from a working class background:

What actually is the proletariat? Or for that matter the bourgeoisie? ... When we perceive a member of a class we are not perceiving an individual human being, we are perceiving an idea, an abstract entity, a generality... (qtd. in Maley, 2000: 66).

Kelman’s comment carries strong echoes of Rancière’s challenge to ‘Althusser’s insistence on the purity of the category of the proletariat’ (Chambers, 2010: 195). In the vein of Rancière, Kelman challenges the Althusserian distinction of the ‘pure’ proletariat from the petty bourgeois (and all other classes) by creating Tammas, a working class protagonist who, for his strategy of resistance and for his gambling practices, defies stereotyped proletariat characterizations of working class male protagonists in literature. Tammas did not do down tools and pursue an education, nor did he enter into the criminal classes; instead, out of other

options, he chose gambling, at which he was adept and which gave him a sense of control over his own destiny and identity despite the protestations of Robert and his other peers. Through Tammas, Kelman criticizes ideologies shaping working class identity. Indeed, as Kelman and Rancière might agree: there is no proletariat; there is no bourgeoisie.

However, the under-employed community in *A Chancer* is epitomized by “masculinist workerism” (Maley, 2000: 60). Kövesi offers a pertinent reading of the meaning of community in *A Chancer* that is worth quoting in full (Kövesi cites Kelman’s essay in *And the Judges Said* p. 222-5):

It is possible that the security and community of that collective workers’ impulse is also something he [Kelman] keeps away from deliberately, and is redolent of an ideology from which Tammas wishes to flee entirely. Unions are always problematic in Kelman’s opinion, because while he is committed to collective activity and the improvement of workers’ rights, his experience tells him their management compromises unions’ independence and their ability to fully represent the memberships’ interests (Kövesi, 2007: 79-80).

Certainly, Kelman’s text shows interest in what happens to a person (i.e., Tammas) when people with shared interests group together, and socially coalesce to become similar to each other in their decisions, political viewpoints and moral values. Corroborating Kövesi’s observation is Kelman’s comment in an essay from *Some Recent Attacks* (1992):

Entities like ‘Scotsman’, ‘German’, ‘Indian’ or ‘American’; ‘Scottish culture’, ‘Jamaican culture’, ... are material absurdities. They aren’t particular things in the world. ... We use these terms for the general purpose of making sense of the world, and for communicating sensibly with other individuals. Especially those individuals within our own groups and cultures. When we meet with people from different groups and cultures we try to tighten up on these loose, unparticularised definitions and descriptions (Kelman, 1992: 72).

This concern is evident in *A Chancer*’s protagonist who is cynical of the values espoused by his peers and family, and this is linked to the culture of work and working class masculine identity of that community. One interpretation of Kelman’s choice to create an alienated

protagonist is that it troubles the tacitly perceived benefit of the mutuality between members of that working class community. Through the narrative of Tammás the reader is witness to the disadvantages of his community's values.

From another angle, Cairns Craig interprets Kelman's focus on the individual and not the community as being a sign of the atomization of the working class caused by the fragmentation of the industries that used to provide the working class workers with a shared sense of purpose and thus solidarity. Therefore, rather than seeing Kelman's undivided attention to lone protagonists as indicative of a bourgeois discourse, Craig reads it as being indirect commentary on the changed socio-economic circumstance of the class of which they are part (Craig, 1993).

Although Craig's reading seems sympathetic towards both Kelman and the working class characters portrayed in his works, on the other hand it yet remains stuck on the problems other critics have voiced with understanding the meaning of the centrality of the individual in Kelman's oeuvre (Maley & Jackson, 2001). The obstacle appears to be that other critics seem unwilling to consider the idea that Kelman's texts indicate their uneasiness with the assumption (e.g. Craig) that people from the working class do not have an identity above and beyond that derived from a shared economic history and status. This is illustrated clearly in *A Chancer* where there is no actual work in the factory to do, and other than the dangerous work in the copper factory, there is no other employment available: but why should Tammás identify with poverty and unemployment? The novel patently pursues an alternative destiny for him.

The crux of the debate around Kelman could well be that the working class character in literature has not yet been able to escape either the proletariat or the bourgeois categories. Just

as the *individuum*¹⁸ of workers' movements was once feared, so is the new individual seen in Tammas. *A Chancer* is readily interpreted as attempting to create a new space (and place) for the working class individual.

¹⁸ Nietzsche stated in the fragment entitled The Flatterers of Work – ‘... the whole world is swarming with "dangerous individuals," and behind them follows the danger of dangers -- the individuum!’ (Nietzsche, 1997: 105).

2.6 Conclusion

To summarize, *A Chancer* is a novel of important contradictions. Its foremost contradiction, which is fundamental to all others, is the conflict of identity operating between the conceptualization of the ‘worker’ espoused by labour movement discourses, traces of which are seen in Tammas’ male society, and Tammas’ sense of his own, contrasting, identity. This conflict is most conspicuous when analyzing the relationship between Robert and Tammas. Through Robert, the values associated with the idealized model of the ‘worker’ are presented as crucial to the functionality of the social order in which the characters live. While through Tammas, the reader can see that his apparently self-serving behaviours, which attenuate his relationships with his family and friends, are part of his process of maturing and developing his own identity against the odds. His resistance to the imposed identities of his community and society can be interpreted as a practice of Rancièrian politics which together with Kelman’s particular presentation of working class characters insists upon the ‘radical equality’ of them with those who would dismiss or even keep their story inaudible.

A Chancer draws on the potential power of an active resistance as a form of political practice engendering agency through which the ‘worker’ can cast off such a category of identity to create his own individual destiny. However, it is also inherently contradictory, for in the consistently resistant behavior – the indifference - of its protagonist to the *status quo* (the domination of his local community by a police order dominating society at large which identifies each man in the community with the male ‘worker’ model), the conclusion the reader arrives at by the end of the novel takes the form of this question: ‘how can one make a difference in the community with this indifference?’ (Ranciè, 2004: 163). For although the protagonist is a vector of political change, ‘an intercessor’ (ibid) who opposes ‘the old law of the fathers with the great anarchy of Being’, his example does not insist upon its being made into a principle by which a fairer world might be actualized. Instead, the indifference that Kelman’s protagonist represents is one of the strongest elements of that novel – its aporia. The

novel has arranged its own aporia, the point at which it can no longer progress (ibid: 164). This is the dispiriting effect of Kelman's narrative principle in *A Chancer*.

Freeman's comment that Kelman's writing is impolite is of great significance to this chapter because of Rancière's archival work and subsequent doctoral thesis, *Nights of Labour* (1981)¹⁹. There, Rancière describes the impropriety of obscure yet important labour movement figures during the nineteenth century in France who dared to write poetry and literature. Rancière later writes about impropriety originating in Plato's *Republic*, in which Plato imagined poets to be banished from his hypothetical utopian city state to defend it from the political dangers inherent in art. Significantly, one of Rancière's points regarding the impropriety of the workers is that they are transgressing class boundaries by being working class persons who participate in bourgeois activity (writing literature). Of course, it seems self-evident to suggest that the widespread hostility received by Kelman from the literary establishment originates in the establishment's Platonic sense that Kelman is improper.

Since Tammas recognizes that his friends and family are unwittingly complicit with the Rancièrian police order, and wishes to avoid accepting it in any shape or form, he is forced to live in a quasi-alienated state, but it is there that he is afforded agency and powers of self-determination. When the gambling passages reveal repeatedly Tammas' agile intellect and ecstasy in the abstract activity of speculation, the novel exposes its alternative politics. Tammas is the analog of the stockbroker speculating on financial transactions, and through his gambling the novel parodies the legitimate capitalist market economy. However, the serious realism of the narrative principle does not marry with the satire of the gambling passages. This is another of the novel's significant contradictions.

One possible interpretation of that contradiction is that it is intentionally irresolvable. It refuses ultimately to signpost a way out of the political impasse because to do so would be to

¹⁹ As previously mentioned, Rancière's thesis was originally published in French in 1976 as *La Parole Ouvrière*.

replicate the Platonic order. Although the novel highlights the problems attending culturally normalized conceptions of male working class identity, it refuses to offer criteria for a replacement. It is the case that in Tammas Kelman has created political breathing space for working class identity in literature, but that is not to say that he has identified a specific, substitute characterization. Indeed, Tammas' speculation-as-satire is not practicable in the actual world as a politics of emancipation; the prospect is absurd, which may be its point. The following comment on Rancière's interpretation of emancipatory politics illuminates my point:

There is no ultimate, essential grounding of a politics of emancipation. Every time emancipatory political action attempts to ground itself in some essential property, it falls into contradictions and paradoxes that make it miss its self-given target. ... Neither the ethical value of work, nor the demand for full employment... nor some specific proletarian identity. ... Can by themselves stabilise the struggle against domination and make it a univocal, unambiguous project (Déranty, 2010: 21).

Indeed, it is easy to see why Kelman's novel is uneasy about 'univocal, unambiguous project[s]' when one considers that male working class identity has been excessively bonded to ideological projects in the past. Tammas's activities of smoking, gambling and resistance are what Rancière describes as 'byways that lead nowhere', and in pursuing these resisting activities Tammas exists in a 'tension of maintaining a basic "no" to the way things are amid all the constraints of proletarian existence':

What exactly is at stake in this strange effort to reconstruct the world around a center [sic] that its inhabitants dream only of fleeing? And isn't it a "different thing" that is gained on these byways that lead nowhere, in this tension of maintaining a basic "no" to the way things are amid all the constraints of proletarian existence? ... Leaving the field open, for once, to the thinking of those not "destined" to think, we may come to see that the relationship between the order of things and the desires of those subjugated to it is a bit more complicated than scholarly treatises realize (Rancière, 1989: xi-xii).

This long quotation describes uncannily what Kelman creates in *A Chancer* in the figure of its protagonist, Tammás, who helps us to see that politics need not be violent, criminal or crusading in order to effectively draw back the veil of normalized oppression.

3. The Trouble with Industry is Character: Magnus Mills' *The Scheme for Full Employment* (2002)

3.1 Introduction

The board, it turned out, preferred to listen to those imaginary tales of ideal workers, those good workers, whose lives could be heard as heroic yet above all as a bit of a weepy, or to read those good historians who knew how to recount such lives without too much self reflection but with fidelity to a certain dream of solidarity. They did not have much patience for the workers who stole from working time rather than suffer it, who took pleasure in the life of the city, or wrote poems, rather than organising their class (Adrian Rifkin, 2009: 1-2).

Above, Adrian Rifkin interprets the *History Workshop Journal*'s rejection of Jacques Rancière's work in 1979, (which Rifkin translated), 'the most important of the "new Left" reviews' in Britain (ibid: 2). The board rejected it on the grounds that it insulted the working class (ibid), but evidently Rancière's controversial characterisation of workers challenged the editorial board's ideas of what the working class was. What is most important in the quotation above for this chapter is how Rifkin informs us that Rancière's signification of the working class is radical and contests established conceptualizations of it. Similarly, I propose that Magnus Mills's fourth novel, *The Scheme for Full Employment*²⁰ (2003) articulates controversial working class male characters who contest those idealizations scorned by Rifkin – of working class people as heroic and/or loyal to 'a certain dream of solidarity'²¹ – that correlate to the worker identities defined in the thesis Introduction. Moreover, the workers in *The Scheme* are conceivably the kinds of working class men whom Rancière articulates in his doctoral thesis (published as *Nights of Labor*), and which Rifkin speaks of, the workers who

²⁰ Hereafter abbreviated to *The Scheme*, although the non-italicized variant *The Scheme* indicates the novel's eponymous fictional employment programme.

²¹ The definite article of 'the idealization' refers to both any tendency in culture to idealize workers as well as the specific traditions in working class and labour movement cultures that have idealized 'the worker' type (these phenomena were discussed earlier in the thesis Introduction).

steal ‘from working time rather than suffer it’ - because Mills’ workers also steal from working time.

Nevertheless, Mills’ novel challenges the equally problematic romanticization of workers that is couched in descriptions such as ‘the workers who... took pleasure in the life of the city, or wrote poems’ (Rifkin, 2009: 1-2). The romanticization which Rifkin invokes draws from Rancière’s archival research of the literary activity of factory workers, and gives substance to the claim made by some critics that Rancière at times limits his articulation of ‘politics’ to the terrain of culture - the worker who ‘steals from time’ to write in the evening when they should be sleeping is the foremost example (Iles & Roberts, 2012). Others have claimed that Rancière’s definition of politics/the police²² ‘is all too easily assimilated to the leftist scheme that in earlier times opposed the plebs and the state’ (Bosteels, 2009: 167). Todd May, for example, risks theorizing a Manichean order in his anarchist appropriation of politics/the police, where ‘the police takes on more prominence as it serves the role of an enemy to be defeated by politics’ (Chambers, 2012: 67). These entanglements of politics/the police are exactly what Rancière’s work attempts to understand. Foreseeing his staging of ‘the people’ against those with power as engendering a binary opposition of ‘plebs’ against ‘state’, Rancière states that ‘[T]here is never any pure discourse of proletarian power nor any pure discourse of its nonpower’ (Rancière, 2003: 322). In this chapter, I shall attempt to show how *The Scheme* manipulates these entanglements of police and politics, demonstrating their intertwining forces which drive the text’s critique of idealizations – pure discourses – of worker identity.

If not romanticized or idealized as heroes, what portrayals of workers do feature in *The Scheme*? As this chapter title indicates, there are two ideas in *The Scheme* which encapsulate the question of worker identity. The characters in the novel are distinguishable by their individual uniqueness (by their character) in ways that depart from the stereotype of ‘the

²² Explicated in *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy* (1999).

worker’. Thus, I argue that despite the efforts of The Scheme (the ‘industry’ of the chapter title) to impose uniformity upon its workers, the individual uniqueness – character- of the workers is irrepressible and is therefore the site of *potential* politics. In other words, character constitutes the ‘trouble’ in the industry of The Scheme because it is *capable* of challenging the police order of The Scheme. Secondly, by defining character as ‘trouble’ and identifying character as politics, I intend to problematize the moral dimension of Rancièrian politics, which can be too easily be taken for granted as being that which righteously fights the enemy. Indeed, as shall be discussed later, the imbrications of police and politics in *The Scheme* demonstrate their moral ambiguities.

Importantly then, while I have so far suggested a Manichean structural and moral relation defining character as the agent of ‘good’ politics and The Scheme as a ‘bad’ police order, my analysis shall later show that The Scheme is not a uniformly bad police order and the workers are not uniformly good embodiments of politics. Clearly, this analysis will be important for understanding the novel’s resistance to pure categories of identity, both for the police order and agents of politics. The most important quality of *The Scheme for Full Employment* is its portrayal of different workers as complex practitioners of Rancièrian politics challenging the stereotype of ‘the worker’.

3.2 Historical context

Among other British ideologies of work, Mills’ novel bears the influence of a real world workfare programme known as the New Deal, established in Britain by the Labour Party (‘New Labour’), whose first term²³ in power (1997-2001) was a period of wealth attributed to the party’s successes in significantly increasing employment (Toynbee & Walker, 2003: 122) partly as a result of the New Deal. Set up to fund the training and placement of the long-term unemployed, the New Deal was an implementation of the government’s new welfare-to-work

²³ New Labour governed for three terms as a result of their election victories in 1997, 2001 and 2005.

principle, (replacing welfare with workfare), reflecting ‘the functional imperative of integrating the welfare and labour market systems’ (Hall, 2003: 86; Shaw, 2007: 46). Through the welfare-to-work approach, the government could demonstrate that ‘active social and labour market programmes were vital to economic success and social spending could be relegitimated’ (ibid). Thus, the New Deal was ‘underpinned by a philosophy of public intervention’ (Kenny & Smith, 2003: 72) albeit under cover of the government’s new ‘making work pay’ attitude (Sunley, Martin & Nativel, 2001: 485), a hybrid approach that appealed to both the political left and right. This is important insofar as it presents the state as uniformly ‘good’ in its role as a moral figure of authority offering an equitable new solution to individuals struggling with the problem of unemployment. Although its title recalls Roosevelt’s efforts to rescue the American economy from the Great Depression of the 1930s (Purdy, 2000: 185), ‘new deal’ is, however, also a euphemism for the budgetary reform element of its plan stipulating that welfare payments would no longer be paid to any individuals refusing to participate (ibid: 187). Accordingly, the name New Deal refers to the new workfare principle (its means) and also to the new offer it promised to the unemployed (its ends).

By the beginning of 1999, over 100,000 under 25s had completed the New Deal and subsequently entered some form of work or training (Moran & Alexander, 2000: 120). Although the New Deal achieved partial success, the hyperbole and celebratory spirit of official proclamations painted an idealized picture. One government spokesperson considered the programme as ‘one of Labour’s greatest achievements’, and Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, suggested that it had helped ‘to restore the work ethic’, while the Secretary of State for Employment claimed that the New Deal had ‘virtually eliminated’ long-term youth unemployment (Sunley, Martin & Nativel, 2001: 485). These comments imply that the state’s new workfare principle was a resounding success, having improved not only the economic position of participants but also their emotional quality of life (by restoring the work ethic).

In its exploration of an idealized workfare programme, Magnus Mills' *The Scheme for Full Employment* reflects the ambiguous aspects of the New Deal. The Scheme is eventually disbanded by the state ostensibly as a result of strike actions gone awry. However, complicating this plot outline, Mills embroils the state as well as the workers in the demise of The Scheme and in doing so challenges the idea, emergent in public discourse of state intervention in unemployment exemplified by the New Deal, of the state being uniformly good and the workers uniformly bad (or uniformly victims). Here, I shall elaborate on these resemblances between the New Deal and Mills' Scheme so as to introduce Rancière's theoretical positioning of the police order and of politics as *impure* categories.

Both the New Deal and The Scheme are examples of idealized work policy whose objectives are thwarted by the unexpected behaviour of various stakeholders. At variance with the optimistic reflections referred to above, the more disparaging reviews of the New Deal highlight its failings. For instance, New Labour's success in reducing long-term youth unemployment by 7% by the year 2007 was actually 'explained by the growing proportion of youths in higher education or economically inactive'²⁴ rather than by persons securing long-term work, and New Labour's 'misfire expensive' New Deal was, perversely, responsible for 'long-term jobless figures rocketing'²⁵. Even Frank Field, Labour's former welfare minister, called the New Deal a 'woeful failure'²⁶. Furthermore, in discussing the storm surrounding the government's hiring of private firms to place unemployed individuals in work, Camilla Cavendish reports that since 2006 there have been 125 fraud investigations of 'welfare to work'

²⁴ Warner, Jeremy. "The Daily Telegraph: A scandal the PM will struggle to shake off." *Daily Telegraph, The (London, England)* 13 May, 2011: *NewsBank*. Web. 17 Jul. 2014.

²⁵ A reporter. "The Express On Sunday: Save the jobless generation." *Express on Sunday, The (London, England)* 9 Sep. 2012: *NewsBank*. Web. 17 Jul. 2014

²⁶ Field, Frank & Patrick White. 'Welfare isn't working: The New Deal for young people'. Report written for the independent, non-party think tank *Reform* in May 2007. <Available at: http://www.reform.co.uk/client_files/www.reform.co.uk/files/new_deal_for_young_people.pdf> [Accessed: 17 July 2014].

practices of big companies²⁷. Her case study is Ae4, run by Emma Harrison, who controversially paid herself an £8.4million dividend – a profit generated through government fees for Ae4’s services. After investigating the company’s premises and staff, Cavendish’s initial cynicism appears to have been attenuated, as she closes her article with the following ambivalent comment describing the people in power at Ae4: ‘But even people who are the salt of the earth, trying to do the right thing, can still be on a gravy train. Ae4’s manager found the homeless man a sandwich, a bed, a job. Emma Harrison’s £8m dividend was rash. But she’d taken all the risk’²⁷ (the putative risk was financial; Harrison remortgaged her house twice to support the company). Cavendish’s comment casts an interesting light on *The Scheme*, whose participants stand for her ‘salt of the earth’ description of Emma Harrison. In the real world case of the New Deal, the owner of the agency Ae4 chose to jump on the proverbial gravy train that was offered by the welfare-to-work scenario by paying herself a phenomenal bonus, whereas in *The Scheme* the participants profit privately from the employment policy, by taking advantage of its terms, and often in comic ways. Mills thus reverses the situation played out by the New Deal which involved private agencies vying for lucrative government contracts that could be exploited to generate huge margins, and through the use of comedy undermines the idealized figure of ‘the worker’.

An alternative and obvious link with the past is not so much with New Labour but with the Labour Party of the 1970s, whose problems with the trade unions are brought to mind by the strike action forming the major plot development in the novel. A further left wing and British historical reference is the similarity between the disyllabic names of the characters in *The Scheme* with the names of actual union leaders. Compare the novel’s Bill Harper, John Jones, Ron Curtain, Derek Moss, and the man responsible for the keys to the UniVans, known only as ‘Arthur’, with the names of the general secretaries of the Transport and General Workers’ Union: Arthur Deakin (1945–1955), Jack Jones, (1969–1978), Moss Evans (1978–1984), Ron

²⁷ Cavendish, Camilla. "I've seen Ae4 in action. It's not the problem - There is nothing wrong with profiting from getting people back to work, but let's be much tougher about results." *Times, The (London, England)* 8 Mar. 2012, 01, Editorial; Opinion, Columns: 25. *NewsBank*. Web. 17 Jul. 2014.

Todd (1985–1992) and Bill Morris (1992–2003). A suggestive trade union reference is given by the name of one of the major characters, Len Walker, who becomes the leader of the strikers after organizing workers into political groups; he could be Lenin, Leon Trotsky or Len McLuskey.

As well as Labour and the left, the novel alludes to the Conservative Party and the political right. An obvious example will be seen in the sole female character, (with an active role), Joyce whose political principles recall the milk policy of Margaret Thatcher. Others include the strict domination of the workers by time schedules, and the numerous descriptions of the black uniforms of managers, hinting at totalitarian regimes. However, while *The Scheme* contains invocations of different political ideologies it shows allegiance to none, so that the text's critical comments maintain the novel's distance from Party politics.

As well as referencing philosophies of work symbolized by political parties, *The Scheme* links to different periods of twentieth century labour history and/or ideology in other ways. Certain characters appear to be cultural references, for example John Ford (Mills, 2011: 218) and Ron Curta in summon Ford Motors²⁸ and the Cold War. Moreover, the name Ford also conjures the image of the American actor and director John Ford, whose idealized masculine, heroic roles in Westerns resembles the heroic hyper-masculine 'worker' figure represented in a mural celebrating The Scheme at the Long Reach depot²⁹. The ethnic make-up of the workforce (whose names, excepting Joyce of course, highly suggest they are male and white) indicates late 1950s industrial Britain. This is reinforced by the obvious similarity between the

²⁸ Magnus Mills lists *Working for Ford* (1975) by Huw Benyon as one of his favourite books in a list published in 1999. <Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/top10s/top10/0.6109.99334.00.html> > [Accessed: 11 Aug 2014]. In a 1995 *Times Higher Education* article, professor of sociology Huw Benyon describes his intentions for the book: "What I was looking at was the relation between shop stewards and workers and the whole idea of representation and representativeness and how it was that different workplaces produced different kinds of understandings and different kinds of organisations as a consequence" A reporter, 'Worth more than my job, mate'. *Times Higher Education*, 21 August 1995 <Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/worth-more-than-my-job-mate/95023.article> > [Accessed: 11 Aug 2014].

²⁹ More discussion of the figure in the Long Reach mural shall feature later in this chapter.

narrator-protagonist and another fictitious ‘worker’ protagonist, Stanley Windrush of Alan Hackney’s *Private Life* (1958)³⁰ who works in a warehouse where the workers ensure that they do not work too hard so that they do not damage their shared bonus (Hackney, 2011: 66). The anachronistic appearance in the text of some of these historical and cultural references creates an odd effect. For example, the novel’s strong correlation with the New Deal of 1998 is at odds with the late appearance in the narrative of the Margaret Thatcher reference. Taken in the round, *The Scheme for Full Employment* reads like a medley of allusions to the most striking periods concerning ideologies of work in Britain since the mid-twentieth century.

³⁰ Made famous by Peter Sellers’ portrayal in the film adaptation, *I’m All Right Jack* (1959).

3.3 An ideal scheme for ideal men

Once you're on The Scheme they look after you right down the line. Just think about it. You've got your full uniform provided, winter and summer, so that saves on clothes; you've got your subsidized catering, your welfare fund, your sports association and your on-site amenities, and all you've got to do is turn up for work every day! It's like being in a great big feather bed! (Mills, 2011: 123-4).

The protagonist-narrator, quoted above, guides the reader through the idealized eponymous employment programme set up by the state. *The Scheme* presents a strange, simplified society recognizably Millsian to those familiar with his other novels, wherein a faux-naïf male narrator-protagonist becomes embroiled in other people's systems of constraint (rules, regulations, and bureaucracy). Mills' fabulism and fascination with rules have elicited comparisons with Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast novels³¹ and the works of Beckett and Kafka. In common with the latter two writers, Mills shares an interest in absurdity, which in *The Scheme* is manifest in its melodrama of production, for the *raison d'être* of the eponymous programme is to keep the country's unemployed fully employed. Wholly funded by the taxpayer, The Scheme's objective is achieved by placing workers in a felicitous simulation of an automotive company that solves the problem of unemployment by avoiding the need to sell anything for an income, instead receiving its income from the state. By not depending on profit for survival, the non-competitive Scheme will never need to rationalize, and the employees thus can safely remain employed for life, as long as they 'turn up for work every day'. The Scheme is pitched to the workers as ideal work, and Mills develops numerous ironies relating to the idealization of both work and workers.

The Scheme is presented idealistically in a number of ways. Its principal aim is explained at the beginning of the novel where the reader is informed that The Scheme was introduced in order to counter the two blights of 'idleness and uncertainty':

³¹ Ian Samson in *The Guardian* reviewing Magnus Mills' *A Cruel Bird Came to the Nest and Looked In* (2011) on Friday 23 September 2011 <Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/sep/23/cruel-bird-nest-magnus-mills-review>> [Accessed: 18 July 2014]

Participants had only to put the wheels in motion, and they could look forward to a bright, sunlit upland where idleness and uncertainty would be banished forever. (Mills, 2011: 1)

Echoes of the ‘broad, sunlit uplands’ in Winston Churchill’s Battle of Britain speech³² contribute to the broadly utopian register of this message, which vaguely implies that the state is promising future happiness for those people who sign up for The Scheme. Note how the work ethic is woven into this message since the twinned anxieties of idleness and uncertainty are promised to be precluded by their implied antithetical opposites, activity and certainty, which are the qualities of work. While hinting at the self-mythologizing nature of the employment programme, the promise also contains a sinister bent for the implication it carries of an authoritarian state.

Instead of being referred to as employees, the workers are euphemistically considered as ‘participants’, since, despite being enrolled on the ‘employment’ programme, they are still unemployed by any *real* employer. Baudrillard’s description in *Simulations* (1983) of the changing nature of work helps to highlight the superficiality of The Scheme where ‘the spark of production, the violence of its stake, no longer exists’ (Baudrillard, 1983: 47). The work performed by the participants of The Scheme is not *needed*. What is required of the participants, by the culture of the world as it is in Mills’ novel, is simply that they work; as Baudrillard puts it, work of this sort is ‘the object of a social demand’ (ibid). The Scheme is a simulation of a real automotive industry – a ‘scenario of work’ - and its *ideological* appeals to the ‘participants’ are semblances of real world labour movement discourses designed to fulfill the purpose of making the manual unskilled labour feel authentic.

Like a new kind of theme park then, The Scheme provides participants with the appurtenances of a real industrial job but without any of its usual anxieties (injury, or fears of low productivity leading to redundancy, for examples). The Scheme’s optimistic metaphor

³² Winston S. Churchill. 1949. *Their Finest Hour: The Second World War. Volume II*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986:198.

‘Participants had only to put the wheels in motion’ is later understood to be literal when the reader discovers that the job of the ‘participants’ is to keep a fleet of wheeled vehicles (UniVans) in working order, i.e. in motion. (Mills literalizes other metaphors, as we shall see later in the section, ‘Cakes and Corruption’.) This specific kind of irony forms part of Mills’ oblique style, which, like the participants in their UniVans, drives around in circles, never arriving at a final point. The comedy inherent in that circular situation undermines the authority of The Scheme (*qua* state, in the small world of this novel) whose pompous claim to save the participants from a state of ‘idleness and uncertainty’ is risible in light of the nature of the jobs it sets the participants.

Other appurtenances to authentic work which contribute to the idealization of The Scheme are the comprehensive financial incentives offered to participants, as listed in the extract above. Ironically, given that The Scheme is not profit-driven, these include a productivity bonus – ‘Equivalent to what we might earn in a comparative industry’ (Mills, 2004: 131). The narrator’s delight in these absurd and generous accommodations signals his faux-naïf voice. The affectless innocence of that voice brings both comedy as well as ambiguity to many of his comments. Indeed, this dual aspect of the faux-naïf voice is the premier vehicle for the text’s critique of the idealization of work and ‘the worker’. On one hand, the narrator-protagonist is evidently impressed by The Scheme’s financial benefits, but on the other there is a degree of infantilism in the narrator’s exclamation ‘It’s like being in a great big feather bed!’ (Mills, 2011: 123-4). The childlike narrator takes things at face value, but the reader is able to pick up the stylistic cues to read paternalism in between the lines. The Scheme resembles an instrument of a nanny state in its provision of *everything*; even the ‘cost of living allowance’ connotes ‘pocket money’ – something given to a child. In such ways, the narrator’s reflections on The Scheme demonstrate the absurdity in idealizations of work and ‘the worker’.

Another example of the idealized appeal of The Scheme is seen in the easiness of the work; the workers are tasked with what is essentially a sinecure maintaining a fleet of vans which they must use to deliver the vans’ spare parts to different outposts of The Scheme: ‘We

move the parts from one depot to the next, and it keeps us all in work' (Mills, 2011: 125). Although the work is simple, The Scheme ensures that the participants take their jobs seriously by demanding moral investment from the UniVan drivers who are meant to practice 'a code of conduct on The Scheme that included courtesy to other road-users' (Mills, 2011: 84). Such rules are bound up in ideology; a fact pointed out to the reader by the narrator who describes the propagandist promotion of the UniVans: 'This [the code of conduct] was wrapped up with the image of the UniVan as a sort of model, skilfully-driven vehicle, sharing the highways with everyone else' (Mills, 2011: 84). Furthermore, the workers are led to believe The Scheme is 'the centrepin' of their nation's economic existence (Mills, 2011: 191). Each of these aspects of ideal work is commented on by various characters making evident to the reader the absurdity of The Scheme's efforts to idealize itself.

The narrator demonstrates an increasing awareness of the manipulative elements of The Scheme as the novel progresses. His recognition of the promotion of the UniVan as mere fabrication and manipulation, as described above, is one example. By being aware of the machinations acting on his behavior whilst simultaneously participating in the system, he is in a state of cognizant participation. This state of cognizant participation is described by Mark Fisher as 'subjective disinvestment' 'which enables [workers] to continue to perform labor [sic] that is pointless and demoralizing' by their maintaining a separation between their subjective (authentic) response to their work and their objective (pretended) response. (Fisher, 2009: 55). A complex example of such subjective disinvestment is conveyed sardonically by the faux-naïf voice of the narrator which appears to be by turns sincere, deluded, then cognizant of The Scheme's propaganda of the UniVan:

[W]hat could be nicer than an excursion in a UniVan on a bright spring morning? Oh I admit they were underpowered and rattly, and that the novelty of driving them wore off once you'd done a few years behind the wheel. But every so often, when I caught sight of my vehicle reflected in some huge glass-fronted office building, it seemed there could be no better way to earn a living (Mills, 2011: 41).

Prima facie, the narrator initially confides in the reader in the pleasure he takes in his work, adopting a confessional style of voice. His pleasure derives from his appreciation of nature (witnessing a ‘bright spring morning’), and of the reflection of his vehicle; he is describing a moment that could be considered a moment of aesthetic judgment. But, the voice signals some sarcasm and ulterior meaning, which is highlighted by what happens next - the narrator’s interior monologue segues into a rhapsodic extolment of the UniVan’s appeal, claimed to be ‘loved by all’:

For without a doubt the UniVan was a glorious creation! With its distinctive gunmetal paintwork and silver livery, its bull-nosed profile, running boards and chrome front grill, it had become a celebrated national icon, recognized and loved by all! Moreover, it represented a great idea that not only worked, but was seen to work! (Mills, 2011: 42)

Now the text shifts from a confessional and humble form into impassioned rhetoric – ‘a celebrated national icon, recognized and loved by all!’. The phrase ‘was seen to work’ applies not only to the general public who can witness the principle of The Scheme in practice, but also to that moment he previously reflects on where he caught sight of his UniVan in the reflection of a large window-fronted office building: his rhetoric appears to be persuading himself that he enjoys the spectacle of his part in ‘a great idea’ ‘seen to work’. The ridiculous and exuberant climax of this passage undermines the plausibility suggested at the start – ‘What could be better...?’ that Mills might be being serious about the narrator’s job on The Scheme. Other cues tip the reader off to the ulterior meaning, which dispels the promise contained by the suggestion of aesthetic judgment: the UniVans ‘were underpowered and rattly’ (not pleasant to drive), and the novelty of driving them wore off after ‘a few years behind the wheel’ (a few years of driving around an identical route performing identical tasks everyday holds no appeal). Even the hyperbole of the narrator’s glee signals the author’s sardonic critique of the idealization of work.

The subjective disinvestment becomes apparent in the third stage of this passage concerning the narrator’s view of the UniVans, but the narrator admits that:

The reality, of course, was different. Due to their size and sluggishness, UniVans were in fact the primary cause of traffic congestion in most towns and cities, and this often brought out the worst in fellow drivers. ... The result was that we all tended to defend our road space quite robustly, as if we were in command of assault tanks rather than humble utility vehicles (Mills, 2011: 84-85).

The narrator-protagonist's displays of cynicism about The Scheme make self-evident the novel's critique of the idealization of work, which is otherwise masked by his affectedly innocent voice.

Additionally, the less than ideal nature of The Scheme is revealed in other developments. Unbeknownst to the workers, their three week strike and absence from the national road network permits the general public to see how much easier life is without the UniVans on the roads, and the strike is deemed ridiculous by 'hostile voices... saying that employees on The Scheme had had it far too easy for far too long' (Mills, 2011: 242). The diminishing public support for the programme (ibid: 241) pressurizes the anonymous managers, the 'slick-looking individuals' (ibid: 238), to find a reason to stop the project. On return to work after the strike, the narrator and his assistant are asked to participate in a random weight test of their UniVan, which they fail because they are wrongfully carrying somebody else's pallet trolley in the store of the van. This failed weight test provides the management with enough reason to call an end to the entire scheme - 'General consensus was that the people at the top had simply been looking for an excuse to close us down, and the weight test had done the trick perfectly' (Mills, 2011:241). Joyce comments that The Scheme is a 'relic from some bygone age when people didn't know any better, dreamt up by do-gooders in their ivory towers!' (Mills, 2011: 191) and 'a complete sham' of a failed social experiment (ibid). The Scheme is indeed the 'centrepin' of the nation's economic existence but only in a negative (ironic) sense, since it is funded entirely by the taxpayer and must therefore constitute a substantial portion of the national welfare budget. By incremental plot developments, the novel reveals the weakness of the ideology dressing up The Scheme.

Indeed, the superficiality of The Scheme is highlighted during the protagonist's conversation with his trainee whom he misadvises about the reputation of a depot:

'Very important place, Merry Park,' I said, as we pulled out of the front gates. 'It's the central hub for this region. Any amount of UniVans pass through there, from all over the place.'

'So how come we've got nothing to deliver except the trolley?' asked Jonathan.

...

As a matter of fact, Jonathan's observation wasn't as far off the mark as I'd made out ... Not that it mattered, of course. Like I said before, it was appearances that counted, and by all appearances this depot was a model of efficiency.

(Mills: 2003, p.60)

Merry Park is meant to be the busiest depot but in reality it has been the quietest on the narrators' route for some time. It is not clear whether the narrator has imagined Merry Park to be the most important depot because it is the central point on his route, or because another worker has told him this perhaps during his own apprenticeship, or for some other reason. At any rate, this scene exposes his facile belief in the mythology of Merry Park; myth fulfils the desire for meeting expectations in this circumstance – 'it was appearances that counted'. Again, this reflects Mills' schematic style which practices dissemblance through irony, just as the mythology of The Scheme promulgates its 'truths' in order to conceal the emptiness at root. Appearances matter to the protagonist who wants to be seen to be doing his job effectively: he wants to be seen as obedient to the police order. In this way he participates in maintaining the hierarchy of rule and the authority of regulations decreed by The Scheme.

A further contrast to the idealization of The Scheme is seen in the text's references to totalitarian states of dystopian fictions. The people who control The Scheme do not appear in the novel except in the anonymous description 'slick-looking individuals' (Mills, 2011: 238), so that the highest authority is present in the text only by name 'The Scheme'. This elicits

comparisons to the absent ultimate authorities of Big Brother in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and the Benefactor in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), but unlike those dystopian fictions *The Scheme* does not feature instruments of state who mete out gruesome punishments to transgressors. The superintendents are the novel's only visible agents of authority; they are itinerant, appearing spontaneously, and thus they make the workers anxious, but there are no rats gnawing the faces of traitors, nor monstrous robots liquidating brainwashed rebels. The distance between traditional dystopian treatments of the state and Mills' ironic treatment creates comedy, but it also makes a point about the potency of mythologized authority, supporting the Althusserian concept of 'good subjects' (Althusser, 1984: 55) who are good because they maintain the hegemonic order under the influence of an invisible authority that is manifest only in discourses, or logos.

The Scheme fulfils Althusser's description of subjects living in ideology, since the participants-as-subjects recognize the 'absolute guarantee' (Althusser, 1984: 55) that life on The Scheme is exactly how the state has said it will be (idleness and uncertainty will be banished forever). In particular, the flat dayers – those participants who believe in being seen to adhere to the strict regulations of The Scheme – act and behave accordingly to that guarantee, because if they do, they know that 'everything will be all right' (Althusser, 1984: 55). The flat dayers accept that, quoting Althusser, 'As St. Paul admirably put it, it is in the "Logos", meaning in ideology, that we "live, move and have our being"' (Althusser, 1984: 45). However, although the flat dayers realize the value of consensus in their workplace and strive to appear to live, move and have their being in the ideology of The Scheme, they also surreptitiously exploit their positions at work. So while they are Althusserian 'good' subjects, their exploitation of their positions at work marks them out to be aware of their playing the part of the 'good' subject. In this way, the flat dayers are practicing subjective disinvestment, just as the narrator-protagonist does. The importance of appearances for *The Scheme* is touched on again in this way, for again the idealization of work is exposed as superficial and lacking the depth which its loudest bombast proclaims to the participants. And just as The

Scheme is not what it conveys itself to be, the participants are not how they present themselves to be either.

The participants appear to be ‘good’ subjects: they appear to subject to the ‘Subject’ (Althusser, 1984: 55) who is the idealized ‘worker’ depicted in a mural within one of The Scheme’s transport depots. The mural helps to illustrate how *The Scheme* references the idealized figure of the working class male worker depicted in labour movement discourses:

Painted in bright colours, this [the mural] depicted scenes from daily life on The Scheme. In one section, UniVans were shown being loaded and unloaded by industrious men in smart blue uniforms. In another, they were seen motoring along a great uncluttered highway where the traffic consisted entirely of UniVans. Further images showed dignified superintendents, smiling ancillary staff and resolute gatekeepers, all working together in the spirit of cooperation. The centerpiece was an eight-hour clock beneath a golden scroll. This bore the words: labor omnibus (Mills, 2011: 93).

The protagonist looks upon the mural and contemplates its difference to the reality which he has experienced over five years: the mural ‘made these vehicles appear much more angular than the ones I was familiar with. The result was that they seemed as if they were from another age. Also, the men’s arms were much thicker than would be natural (ibid.: 78). Here, the protagonist notices the mural’s nostalgia (‘from another age’) and idealism (‘much thicker than would be natural’). Nostalgia and idealism are two powerful elements of the labour movement discourses of the ‘worker’, but Mills uses a deadpan, equable protagonist to subvert the glorification of the ‘worker’ which his narrator observes in the mural.

The latin motto translates as all men work, or, everyone works, and since the image of an eight hour clock is positioned directly beneath the scroll, the message actually reads ‘We all work for eight hours’. The lack of euphemistic modifiers and the absence of reference to a purpose for such work render the motto witty because it relates to the pun of the novel’s title, *The Scheme for Full Employment* – which is the state’s plan to keep men fully occupied for eight hours a day, but it is also the official name of the employment programme, and

furthermore it refers to the concept of full employment which the pun suggests may only be achieved through some scheming plan. The state will ensure that everyone is fully employed, for eight hours a day and being fully occupied by work ought to be every man's ambition. This is the 'absolute guarantee' of the employment programme.

The idealized 'worker' figure evoking the heroic 'worker' of labour discourses is naturalized in the mural; it is thereby situated not as a figurehead for organized labour's class struggle, but rather as an instrumental constituent of the novel's Rancièrian police order seeking to idealize work and the worker to ensure there are no unemployed people. However, the workers on *The Scheme* stand in comic contrast to that idealized figure, which acts as a satire exposing the weakness inherent in any idealization of 'the worker'.

3.4 The eight hour day

The method by which authority manages the participants in *The Scheme* is direct control of the participants' time. Emulating real world industrial factory conditions, *The Scheme* enforces a rigid eight hour day, which is glorified in the Long Reach mural, and specifies each worker's daily schedule to the minute; these two particular concerns with time are historical references to studies from the seventeenth century onwards of the effects of time on the health of workers and on the productivity of output. The eight-hour day celebrated in the mural is a reference to the eight-hour day political movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and other countries (Dembe, 2009: 196). The painstaking control of each minute of the mens' working days alludes to Fredrick Winslow Taylor's time and motion experiments measuring discrete processes of industrial labour with a stopwatch. Taylor's studies formed the basis of his theory of 'scientific management', which revolutionized industry in the early twentieth century (Taylor, 1998: 25-26). In addition, *The Scheme's* references to industrial time also allude to the Ford Motor Company, which impacted upon labour management through its pioneering use of the assembly line (Janoski & Lepadatu, 2014: 6). Both Taylor and Ford's practices attempt to totally control, respectively, the

horizontal processes of production and the vertical relations of power in operation between discretely hierarchical levels of workers and managers.

Mills' treatment of time in *The Scheme* appears to glorify the eight-hour day and fetishize the daily schedule (an example of which is given in the preliminary matter of the novel, more of which below), but arguably it ironically questions the meticulous control of time in the workplace by exaggerating the characters' emotional reactions – as seen in their strike action against each other resulting from disagreement over their differing interpretations of the eight-hour day rule - to the scientific management practice governing their roles in The Scheme. A biographer of Taylor, Robert Kanigel, describes scientific management in an ideological mode of discourse, clearly aiming to parody the industrialist's idealism:

In the great drama of Taylor's life ... he had overcome angry resistance and, through fairness and goodwill, triumphed, not for himself but for the sake of all. At Midvale, by about 1884, most of the essential elements of what would one day be scientific management were in place. *Ahead lay a harmonious new industrial future*. Or anyway, that was the idea (Kanigel, 1997: 214; emphasis added).

Kanigel writes of Taylor's comment in *Principles* regarding man and the system: 'Once men and women placed themselves in the system's benign hands, the industrial evils of the past would fade away' (ibid: 513). Mills' narrator employs similarly ideological language to describe The Scheme, considered to be 'a national treasure ... envy of the world' (Mills, 2011: 1), which 'solved at a stroke the problem that had beset humankind for generations' (ibid): 'idleness and uncertainty' (referred to earlier). Uncertainty could refer ambivalently to that of the state or the workers, and recalls the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), who remarks that the state's eugenics scheme, Bokanovsky's Process, 'is one of the major instruments of social stability!' (Huxley, 2007: 5). The text satirizes The Scheme's industrial idealism, which is strengthened through association with Huxley's novel.

Additionally, the hyperbole of the discourses of work exemplified above indicates a criticism of any potential purity of the police order: such extreme systems of control are frightening, but Mills undermines the possibilities with comedy. The importance of appearances in *The Scheme* serves as a reminder of the role of the worker in shaping the police order.

Ford left a greater mark on Anglo-American history than Taylor, for reasons that David Harvey explains:

What was special about [Henry] Ford (and what ultimately separates Fordism from Taylorism), was his vision, his explicit recognition that mass production meant mass consumption, a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politics of labour control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalised, modernist, and populist democratic society (Harvey, 1999 [1990]: 125).

In Mills' novel, Fordism's inculcation of a 'new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society', clearly modeled on the time control practices of Taylor, is shown to be implausible by *reductio ad absurdum*. Mills briefly puns on Ford:

‘You’re right, though.’ I conceded. ‘Some of them do tend to take the early swerve thing a bit far’.

‘That’s exactly what this other bloke told them. John, his name was, I think. He suddenly came marching up to the table and said they were going to ruin everything if they carried on the way they were.’

‘That’ll be John Ford.’ I said. ‘He’s a great believer in The Scheme, but also highly opinionated’ (Mills, 2011: 88).

Taylor's management method makes a more palpable appearance. In *The Scheme* the individual has been identified as a predictable variable in the labour process, as seen in the 'Sample Duty' timetable for a typical day's work for one of the general workers in the lowest positions of power. Ordering the workers to be at certain sites at set times of the day and to be

doing certain jobs at set times of their schedule might seem like a realistic organising principle for any real company. However, the 'Sample Duty' parodies this mechanism of 'direct control':

SAMPLE DUTY (for training purposes only)

Start/finish Long Reach depot.

8.00 Collect keys.

8.02 Attend vehicle during loading/unloading.

8.15 Depart Long Reach depot and proceed east along Ring Road.

10.15 Arrive Cotton Town depot. Attend vehicle during loading/unloading.

11.00 Depart Cotton Town depot and proceed north (Note: observe 20mph speed limit along Butler's Causeway)

12.45 Arrive Bell Tower depot. Attend vehicle during loading/unloading.

13.00 Dinner break.

13.30 Attend vehicle during loading/unloading.

13.45 Depart Bell Tower depot and proceed west. (Note: during diversions, drivers should be aware of low bridge at New Borough Sidings. Normal cautions apply.)

15.00 Arrive Rudgeway depot. (Enter via Rudgeway Approach, not rear gate.) Attend vehicle during loading/unloading.

15.45 Depart Rudgeway depot.

16.20 Arrive Long Reach depot. Secure vehicle and return keys.

16.30 End of duty.

(Mills, 2011: preliminary matter)

The sample duty rota details the tasks of a van driver to the exact minute, so that even the ‘task’ of collecting the van’s keys is accounted for as a two-minute job. The workers in *The Scheme* have been told what to do every minute of the working day.

Moreover, it is not merely the job which has been calibrated finely by management, but also everything else that could possibly be related to the job such that there is nothing any worker can do for himself, except ‘turn up for work every day!’ (Mills, 2011: 124). This echoes the words of Tecumseh Swift (a writer and critic of Taylor's scientific management approach): ‘No workman knows anything or, in this scheme, is to be expected or permitted to know anything. Every operation is to be directed by a boss’ (Kanigel, 1997: 356). Despite the attempts of Taylorist business practices and ideology to completely control production and to sculpt the workforce psychologically and sociologically into new model workers, the idiosyncracies of the individual workers are not taken into account, and it is in that overlooked locus – character - where potential power accumulates.

3.5 Mysterious authority

As in Taylor’s ideal workplace, each worker’s role is specialized, and each is kept under surveillance by a hierarchy of supervisors. Numerous superintendents exist - stratified into depot manager, silver badge and gold badge. Mills makes several puns about the fact that the superintendents have no practical purpose and is particularly good when portraying the gold badge superintendent, Nesbitt, ‘a figure in a black coat, and wearing a black peaked cap’ (Mills, 2004: 60) whom the other workers perceive to be shrouded in mystery, as one such man called Osgood reveals:

No one knows how his mind works. Sometimes we don’t see him for months on end, then suddenly he decides to pay a visit. Apparently he turned up at the Bell Tower the other day without warning. Sat in the super’s room for eight hours. Never uttered a word (Mills, 2011: 82).

But the enigmatic veil enshrouding Nesbitt is dispelled as mere superstitious myth-making during a scene in which Nesbitt chooses to supervise the narrator's van duty one day. Nesbitt demands to see what is inside a mysterious box that the narrator has illicitly permitted George, his assistant, to carry on board his van. When the narrator opens it, Nesbitt observes a children's birthday cake. "Rather pretty", remarked Nesbitt. "Has it got marzipan in it?" (Mills, 2011: 86). He is duly offered a slice of the birthday cake after which point the protagonist reminisces:

For a few moments I remembered my own distant childhood, and the weeks I used to spend waiting for my birthday to come round. I realised that on those far-gone occasions the candlelit cake had always been central to my boyish hopes and dreams, the guarantee that there would be many happy returns of the day. (Mills, 2011: 87)

The absurdity of this scenario portraying Nesbitt as a cold-blooded children's birthday spoiler is humorous and serves to add strength to the earlier impression received of Mills' parody of management staff, who, in *The Scheme*, have nothing to do except have their cake and eat it.

3.6 Cakes and corruption

The cake plays an amusing role³³ acting as a satire of corruption near the end of the novel, when the narrator and George are asked to participate in a weighing test of their van before a team of management staff as part of a general auditing process. The narrator converses with George about the matter after having received their redundancy letters:

On the way home a thought occurred to me.

³³ The novel's humorous treatment of cakes, bakeries, sandwiches and tea recalls the kind of humour characteristic of the English novelist, Barbara Pym, in particular her late novel *Quartet in Autumn* (1977), which depicts with great comedy the mundane experiences, such as making pots of tea and sharing biscuits, of an office of four clerks approaching retirement. Similarly, Mills' material on cakes is comparable with B.S. Johnson's satirical puns on confectionery in the factory featured in his penultimate novel, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973).

‘You know that trolley we’ve been carrying around for weeks?’

‘Yeah?’ replied George.

‘Do you think it could have made any difference to the weight test?’

‘Shouldn’t think so’, he said. ‘One of Trace’s cakes maybe, but not that trolley’ (Mills, 2011: 240).

Perhaps the cake might have been a sufficiently ‘heavy’ bribe to save The Scheme. Earlier, John Jones had informed the narrator of the whereabouts of the troublesome duty card which instigated the early swerve scandal, only to request a bribe in return: ‘Perhaps you could get our friend George to drop off one of his cakes sometime’ (ibid: 176). Mills’ literalization of the idiom ‘you cannot have your cake and eat it’ critically alludes to the corruption of officials.

Indeed, cakes are emblems of power in this novel, where they are the stuff of childhood dreams, of sweet memories (like Proust’s madeleines, but at the same time so very unlike them) but in adulthood they are methods by which to demonstrate authority over others. For instance, it is his girlfriend’s cake business that holds power over George, not The Scheme. In fact, the disregard that George the cake-dealer has for his Assistant Van Driver job mocks the possibility that ‘the worker’ possesses a work ethic and intrinsically values his work. For there is no spiritual communion between George and his experience of work in the van as he sits in the passenger seat, staring out the window at the same landscape day after day, thinking not of his own job but of his girlfriend’s cake business. In its absurdity, the literalisation of the cake metaphor and its symbolism of power reflect a similar absurdity found in the painted figuration of ‘the worker’ stereotype in the Long Reach mural.

3.7 Althusser's good and bad subjects; or, a worse and a better police

A different manifestation of the intertwining of politics and police is seen in George, who exploits his position as an assistant driver to carry out business for his girlfriend, distributing birthday cakes to various customers located close to his driving route. When challenged, he comments: 'When you've got a job like ours you have to make the most of it, don't you?' (Mills, 2011: 8). George is certainly not interested in any intrinsic value of his own job, or of abiding correctly to the regulations it enforces. His nonchalant response to the question of his unsanctioned moonlighting suggests that George is unperturbed by The Scheme's sententious rhetoric. Far from being a 'bad' police then, The Scheme is seen as merely an apparatus for earning a living. Indeed, his girlfriend's cake business elicits greater emotional responses from him than his job for The Scheme. When George returns from a week off, he races up to his driver (the narrator) to impart the news that Trace 'is going to skin you alive' (Mills, 2011: 137) for not having delivered a number of cakes in his absence. We find out that he spent his break 'running around like a headless chicken, trying to get those cakes sorted out' (ibid). George is a hard worker of his own volition, not as a result of the man in the mural affecting his sense of identity or work ethic.

George's moonlighting raises the question of who is exploiting whom in The Scheme. In order to look at this more closely, the structural relation between workers and The Scheme can be considered in Althusserian terms of the subject, which was briefly introduced earlier. The Scheme's chosen appellation of 'participants' for its workers conveys the two Althusserian senses of the meaning of 'subject'. Althusser's discussion of 'the subject' focuses on the ambiguity of the meaning of 'subject' – where there is either 'the "free subjectivity" of an individual' (Althusser, 1984:55) or 'a subjected individual who *submits* to a higher authority' (ibid). Mills' workers are subjects who are *both* free and subjected. They are Althusserian 'good' subjects who 'work all by themselves' (they submit themselves to The Scheme's ideology); but they are not entirely acquiescent to the rules. They search out means by which

they can live as ‘free’ subjectivities whilst acting to appear obedient to the law of their workplace. Thereby they enjoy a supplementary form of freedom as a result of their having submitted to the law of The Scheme. Their clandestine practices, carried out in the workplace but hidden from the view of supervisors, represent canny forms of subjective disinvestment. Understood by Fisher as a cynical disavowal offering ‘the only way to stay healthy amidst capitalism’s perpetual instability’ (Fisher, 2009: 54), for the transgressive participants in The Scheme, subjective disinvestment is simply seen to be - as George put it – ‘making the most of it’ (Mills, 2011: 8).

In this novel, there are examples of participants practicing this dual subjectivation. An example of a ‘dual’ Althusserian subject is Len, who operates a darts league in an unused room during an afternoon period, which he has managed to make available by finishing his duties earlier than the job description demands. When Len suggests that some workers are threatening The Scheme, what he really means is that some workers are noticeably disobeying the regulations governing working hours and that they will arouse unwanted attention to the routines of all workers, thereby threatening Len’s private *état* within The Scheme.

'The point I'm making is that Len always does his full eight hours even though he spends half of them upstairs. He never clocks off early because he doesn't want to jeopardize his darts, and his cards, and his snooker, and all the other leagues he's running. He's been on The Scheme a long time, don't forget. He wants it all to stay exactly as it is...' (Mills, 2011: 5)

In response to the perceived threat posed by the different practice of the early swervers, Len assumes the self-appointed role of political ideologue:

Len Walker...talked in high moral tones about “just deserts” coming to the early swervers and their benefactors. It was Len, of course, who’d been first to voice concern about the way standards were slipping on The Scheme, and he now seemed to be regarded as a kind of sage, especially by the flat-dayers. George told me how ... Len had sat on his forklift truck holding forth about the sanctity of the eight-hour day, while a small group of drivers and their assistants listened closely (Mills, 2011: 152).

Len's motivation for strike action is political in the Rancièrian sense. Chambers quotes Rancière: '[A strike] is political when it reconfigures the relationships that determine the workplace in its relation to the community' (Rancière qtd in Chambers, 2012: 85). Given that Len seeks to reconfigure the relationships between the early swervers and flat dayers in order to maintain The Scheme's relation to the community, the strike is an act of Rancièrian politics. But his motivation for maintaining The Scheme stems from his desire to maintain his easy life including his part in the darts and snooker leagues. His politics works in favour of some workers but not all, and works in favour of The Scheme 'because [the flat dayers] adhered to the eight hours on which The Scheme was based' (Mills, 2011: 197). In that way then he represents both the police order and politics, thus contaminating both categories.

Gosling is a superintendent who also signals the impurity of the police order. He falls from grace having been identified as the person responsible for signing off the dockets of workers too early in the day on too many occasions. Very early in the novel we learn that a worker called Charlie thinks Gosling is 'good for the clock' (Mills, 2011: 5), a claim reinforced by the narrator who considers Gosling to be someone who 'might sign the card for us' (ibid: 20). Being a superintendent, he represents the authority of the police order that is The Scheme, but as he goes against the law of The Scheme by bending the rules, he represents an impure police.

Watts and Hoskins are other superintendents who also know about this unauthorised practice (ibid), but, at first seen as upholders of the law of The Scheme, they initially represent a pure police. Mills mocks their stringent obedience to the rule of law when he depicts them as behaving as keen authoritarians:

'How long have you been on The Scheme?' Watts asked.

'About five years', I replied.

'Well then,' he said. 'You should know very well you can't go missing out ports of call just because it takes your fancy'.

‘But I thought someone might sign the card for us, as it’s quiet’.

‘Who do you mean by “someone”?’

‘Dunno really’.

‘Mr Gosling, for example?’

‘No, of course not.’

‘Well, who then?’

‘It depends’.

A long silence followed, during which Watts stood slowly shaking his head as if reminded of some unbearable tragedy of long ago. Meanwhile, Hoskins took a half-turn away, for no apparent reason other than to gaze across the yard with a mournful expression on his face (Mills, 2011: 20-21).

The narrator is depicted as a naughty schoolboy, dissembling to his teachers. The reader knows that he had Gosling in mind to sign the card, so his response to Watts appears ironic. The seriousness of the poses made by Watts and Hoskins after their interrogation is made absurd in its contrast with the slightness of the narrator’s transgression. Despite the humour of the passage, it can be read as undermining articulations configuring the police order as uniformly authoritarian. Indeed, this is amplified when, later, Watts shows lenience to the narrator-protagonist who contemplates: ‘[Watts] could have easily have dropped me right in it for not getting that trolley delivered, especially with Nesbitt present, yet he’d actually gone out of his way to change the subject’ (Mills, 2011: 81). The narrator’s comments demonstrate the mutability of the police order as represented by Watts.

Even the narrator is susceptible to corruption, and thus demonstrates an impure ‘politics’. During an official foray to an obscure depot situated some distance from his permanent post, the narrator decides to ‘make certain informal observations’ (Mills, 2011: 115) entailing a

justifiable reconnaissance of the most useful places to eat on his long journey to the new depot, but ends with him selecting something inappropriate:

Halfway home, for example, I took note of a café called Jimmy's, an establishment which looked highly suitable for drivers in search of a late breakfast. Further along were The Cavendish Tea Rooms, which on first impressions seemed less appropriate. On slowing down for closer inspection, however, I saw they had 'parking space at rear for patrons only'. This would provide a good place to disappear for half an hour or so, if such was ever required' (Mills, 2011: 115).

This is a good example of the protagonist's proclivities for an 'easy time', and shows that he is certainly not an ideal 'worker', like the man in the Long Reach mural.

Another example where authoritarianism is lampooned is seen where the narrator formulates the essence of the novel's conceptualization of the police order, in a passage where he explains to his new recruit, Jonathan, why they ought not to worry about carrying one of George's cakes aboard the UniVan: 'The management aren't bothered about that sort of thing. Their only concern is to keep these vans on schedule, so all the collections and deliveries coincide.' (Mills, 2011: 49). In other words, as agents of authority within the police order, 'the management' will protect its logic so as to maintain The Scheme, meaning that minor transgressions will be overlooked, so long as they do not impact upon the schedules.

3.8 Three exceptions

There are three minor yet significant exceptions to the novel's ethnic and gender majority, which for its whiteness and maleness could be considered a police order. The first is Joyce (referred to earlier), a manager on The Scheme whose opinions on free school meals (Mills, 2004: 158) leave no doubt that she is focused on the health of the economy before that of its citizens. The second is Sandro, an immigrant baker, whom the narrator describes as 'the most hard-working man I'd ever met' (Mills, 2011: 73). The third is the unseen girlfriend (Trace) of a UniVan Assistant Driver (George), who uses her boyfriend's position in The Scheme to

carry out deliveries for her cake business. The significance of these exceptions is seen in the dichotomy they produce in the novel's groupings of its characters.

Joyce and Trace are caricatures, in the Thatcherite mould, of working women who 'get things done',³⁴ thanks to their business acumen. Likewise, Sandro's business does so well he takes on an assistant (Mills, 2011: 193) who is cautioned about the severity of the work - 'It'll kill you' (Mills, 2011: 194). As the women and the immigrant work harder for their jobs than the men on The Scheme, they create a binary opposition in terms of labour: those who have to work hard against those who don't. One interpretation of this is to read it metaphorically as reflecting the politically 'Othered' position of both women and immigrants in Britain both of whom must work hard to achieve what white normative men find easier to obtain.

³⁴ A quote from Downing Street's official qualification of Margaret Thatcher's controversial statement 'there is no such thing as society', reported by Atticus in the *Sunday Times* on 10 July 1988.

3.9 Conclusion

Mills' schematic style mirrors the schematic logic of domination in the hierarchical structure of The Scheme's managers, supervisors, drivers, and mechanics. This structure correlates to the implied dichotomy of the opposition of police versus politics, which is a reductive relation, and schematic, implying a purification of the contradiction between the two positions. Rancière recognizes that configuring the police with politics in that way engenders a false dialectic. He reflects, 'Everything would be simple for sure if we could move in this purged contradiction: the revolt of the "wretched of the earth" against a state power represented by social-fascism. But reality is not such' (qtd in Bosteels, 2009: 168)³⁵. In discussing *Dis-Agreement* (1999), where Rancière elaborates his theory of the police, Bruno Bosteels observes that for Rancière the police is not a uniform power - 'the police does not represent a night in which all cows are grey: "There is a worse and a better police"' (ibid). In *The Scheme*, it is Len Walker who is arguably the 'worse police' for it is his actions that bring about doubt, suspicion and paranoia amongst the workers. The possibility of a worker being a worse police than the bureaucratic powers is an important aspect of Mills' novel.

Bosteel interprets Rancière's statements of the 'heterogeneous' logic of politics and police to mean that politics affects the police and shapes its terms as much as the police affects the potential agents of politics. Rancière states: 'Politics acts on the police. It acts in the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status of those words' (ibid: 170). In Bosteel's view, Rancière articulates the intertwining of police with politics, thereby complicating what appears initially to be a purified contradiction.

³⁵ Bosteel quotes Rancière in *Les scènes du peuple: les révoltes logiques 1975/1985*, Paris: Horlieu, 2003. p. 322.

Mills also demonstrates the complicated binding of police with politics in *The Scheme*. Len Walker is the best example of this, where, like the nineteenth century joiner-writer Gabriel Gauny of Rancière's *Nights of Labor*, he 'remains in the world of domination and exploitation ... But ... [h]e is able to locate his ownership in the ownership of master and owner. He actually builds up a new sensible world in the given one' (Rancière, 2009: 282). Louis Gabriel Gauny's new sensible world is one born of sincerity and integrity, but Mills shows Len's world to be otherwise. Rancière explicates the role of time and space in relation to the police and politics:

Disciplinary thinking uses time itself as a principle of spatialization. It makes time a place that encloses and defines those who are in it. It replaces, as a methodological principle, the Platonic assertion that "work does not wait", which amounts to locking up workers in the space of their absence of time. And the experience of emancipation consists in locating another time in that time, another space in that space (ibid).

This explanation of disciplinary thinking, of police, serves as an appropriate description of *The Scheme*. Indeed, as discussed earlier, Mills exaggerates Fredrick Winslow Taylor's time and motion theory, with the effect of making absurd *The Scheme*'s 'disciplinary thinking' manifest in its Duty Rota. Len's 'emancipation' matches Rancière's words, for his self-made world within the world of domination is seen in his tactic of being maximally efficient at work so that he finishes tasks ahead of schedule (he evades the circumscription of the Duty Rota) and during the remaining 'free' time he indulges in his darts and snooker leagues. The comedy of conceiving Len's petty snooker leagues as his practice of emancipation – a liberating principle generally considered to be something much more serious than what is being alluded to by my claim – works to point out the moral contingency of Rancièrian politics.

Indeed, the weakness of Rancière's theory of politics turns on a question of morality that, despite Rancière's claims otherwise, frames agents of politics as victims. Bosteel cannot dispel his concern that Rancière remains too close to the Manichaeism of speculative Leftism (ibid: 170). Rancière's violent metaphors do not assist any attempt to defend his work from that criticism: 'he shattered in advance the pious discourse' (Rancière, 2009: 281); 'It is a war'

(ibid); ‘The warriors may ...’ (ibid: 282). His phrasing frames agents of politics as warriors, accentuating the already implied pure contradiction between police and politics that figures agents of politics as righteous moral crusaders fighting the enemy that is the police. Samuel Chambers alerts us to the fact that police is an underdeveloped concept in Rancière’s theory, which could go some way to explaining the moral contingencies of Rancière’s work on same (Chambers, 2012: 67).

Significantly, in *The Scheme* the lowest status workers have much in common with those who hold authority over them in terms of their working practices and principles: the workers, the supervisors and even the state liberally interpret official regulations each as much as the other. The conclusion to be drawn from this scenario is that *The Scheme* demonstrates the impurity and intertwining of the police order and politics that much commentary has spoken of in the literature on Rancière (Rockhill & Watts, 2009; Chambers, 2012). This conclusion supports the core argument in this chapter, where in I have attempted to argue the following points. Through inversions of ‘worker’ stereotypes, *The Scheme* practices a critique of idealizations of ‘the worker’ and of the normalization of such in culture (the man in the Long Reach mural) through the way workers and managers alike demonstrate a common susceptibility to corruption through their various exploitations of the rules regulating The Scheme. Thus, the characters in *The Scheme* highlight the similarities between individuals of the police order and individuals of the workforce, which concomitantly emphasizes the agency of the workforce individuals. As discussed in the thesis Introduction above, Mills’ text portrays a cast of working class male workers who are not ‘the disoriented victims of some hypostasised individualization’ brought about by neoliberal capitalism, but are agents of some power ‘with their own theories of the social order and of the potentials attached to their own place within it’ (Armstrong, 2011: 2-3). Len’s demarcation of official time and space within The Scheme to create another time and space of his own can be seen as Rancièrian politics but one without a revolutionary telos.

Since the same characters practicing Rancière's formulation of politics also participate in the police order they can be read as representing the impure and complicated admixture of police and politics that Rancière has asserted (Rancière, 2009: 287). This intertwining practices a denial of pure categories of identity. Mills lampoons not only the stereotypes of worker identity, but also those of identities of the state and of industrialists. His egalitarian deployment of criticism against each and every stakeholder in the novel's industry demonstrates his skepticism of the value of stock identities for any class of person – not just workers.

4. Work, morality and masculinity in Monica Ali's *In the Kitchen* (2009)

4.1 Introduction

Gabriel sighed because it was all very well a generation ago, to take your son to work, and show him how to be a man. The values Ted preached at home he practised at work. But the world wasn't like that anymore. Gabriel wasn't proud of the way things were (Ali, 2009: 218).

One of the works Monica Ali consulted during the preparation of her third novel, *In the Kitchen* (2009) was Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998), a philosophical essay which considers the impact of work under two forms of capitalism through the case study of a father and son; Sennett asserts that their different personal values were directly shaped by the work practices that they experienced. Similarly, and as the excerpt above indicates, Ali explores the consequences of changing economic practices upon the private lives of working people, in a British context, explored via the dynamic between a father and son. The father, Ted represents an old world of skilled, long-term factory labour and the son, Gabriel represents a new world of flexible knowledge-based employment. Through the narrative of Gabriel, Ali dramatizes a moral argument against the new flexible economy – critical of 'the way things were'.

Conveyed by a third-person narration told from Gabriel's perspective, *In the Kitchen* privileges and idealizes Ted, whose persona draws comparisons with 'the worker' figure glorified by labour movement discourses. Gabriel's admiration of his father's work, but simultaneous disaffection with his own career, informs the reader that Gabriel values the previous culture of work experienced by his father, and is dissatisfied with his own current world of work – regretful that 'the world wasn't like [Ted's] anymore'. Since that narrative strand is concurrent and intertwined with one which charts Gabriel's personal breakdown, the novel creates a cause and effect relation between work and subjectivization, which is explicitly

signaled by the text within instances such as Ted's comment "We used to build ships in this country, Gabe. That was part of who we were" (ibid: 188), and the narrator's information in the quotation above – 'The values Ted preached at home he practised at work'. Indeed, the workplace is where Ted taught Gabriel 'how to be a man'. The text constantly emphasizes the significance of Ted's masculinity for Gabriel's sense of self; Ted's masculinity is presented as possessing a moral quality because the kind of work he does is honest and visible. Throughout the novel, being 'a real man' (as symbolised by Ted) is important to Gabriel, but he fails to achieve that identification. Therefore, considering such links between work, morality, masculinity and subjectivization, the most important relation affecting Gabriel's subjectivization is that between masculinity and work.

Consequently, the idealized masculine man, Ted (competent, wise, reliable, protective and faithful) is presented as a better type of masculinity than that represented by Gabriel who describes himself in interior monologue as 'weak-willed, unfocused and spineless' and 'Unable to commit' (Ali, 2009: 271). These contrasting aspects of character correspond to Ted and Gabriel's differing work practices. Through its process of privileging a certain set of work practices over others, drawn from the experiences of both Ted and Gabriel, the novel suggests criteria for a new kind of masculinity.

In the recognition of his 'self' reflected in the principles structuring his work practices and his subsequent rejection of that identity – being at the same time a rejection of the economic philosophy influencing his work - Gabriel can be read as practicing what Rancière describes as political subjectivization. The novel presents Gabriel's sense of identity as being shaped by the principles of his work. His work stands, a synecdoche, for the hegemonic economic order recognizable as contemporary flexible neoliberalism. The hegemonic economic order is Rancière's 'the ruling order of policy', or, 'police'. Thus, Gabriel practices a denial of an identity given to him by the police order:

[T]he logic of political subjectivization ... is never the simple assertion of an identity; it is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by another, given by the ruling order of policy (Rancière, 1995: 68).

Indeed, Ali's text shows Gabriel in denial of being like his father, of being like the investors of his first restaurant, of being like his male colleagues in the Imperial Hotel, and provides increasing occurrences of Gabriel behaving inappropriately to the point of mental breakdown. Ted represents a police order entirely different to that symbolized by the managers, male colleagues and male investors of Gabriel's world. However, Gabriel complains about each kind of police order, thus resisting their impositions; and an emancipatory quality of Gabriel's political subjectivization is seen in his attempt to locate and then enact a new (masculine) identity based on two principles which are not prioritised by the 'police' order: creativity and commitment.

Considering this, we can see that the third-person narrative form of *In the Kitchen* reflects Gabriel's attempt to traverse the gaps and differences between the identities which he disapproves of as he attempts to extract their appealing qualities that he identifies with. Rancière describes his view of narrative relating it to the process of political subjectivization, and claims that they follow different sequences:

[T]he concept of narrative, like the concept of culture, is highly questionable. It entails the identification of an argumentative plot with a voice, and of a voice with a body. But the life of political subjectivization is made out of the difference between the voice and the body, the interval between identities (Rancière, 1995: 68).

Ali's narrative method can be seen as mirroring Gabriel's experience of political subjectivization. Drawing from Rancière's explication above, the third-person narrator of Gabriel's story is a questionable expression of Gabriel's voice; its enunciator's distance from Gabriel represents the distance that Gabriel experiences between his 'true' (but unrealized) voice and his body that performs the identity given to him by the police order. The narrative attempts to identify its argumentative plot (Gabriel's biography) with Gabriel's voice, but by

the narrative's signposts of Gabriel's unstable sense of self a rift is maintained between the plot and Gabriel's voice, enhanced by Ali's third-person narration. That is to say, Gabriel's growing psychological instability throughout the plot is part of his political subjectivization, which, like the plot, reaches closure upon Gabriel's abandonment of his career and subsequent decision to return to live in his late father's house.

Two major problems arise from the factors outlined above: the text's implication that personal identity is created (and eroded) by work alone, and the repeated message in the novel that Gabriel must be a man before he is anything else - that masculinity precedes personal subjectivity.

In this chapter, I shall first explain how *In the Kitchen* asserts the primacy of an idealized form of masculinity and of work, paying particular attention to the text's focus on delineating the moral, creative, intellectual and manual dimensions of work. Subsequently, I shall discuss the text's negative presentations of the neoliberal financialized economy. Lastly, I shall look at the protagonist's Rancièrian political subjectivization and the ways in which Ali's text suggests criteria for a new kind of masculinity.

4.2 Masculinity and work

Ali's novel demonstrates in several passages how work affects Gabriel's feelings of self-worth, self-respect and masculinity. These feelings are rooted in his relationship with his father, and so his subjective experience of work is also closely related to how he feels about his father. The novel gradually layers sequences in which Gabriel remembers his father's imposing figure and masculinity. For example, here Gabriel remembers looking at his father during a visit to the mill: 'He had a fresh oil-spot on the leg of his boilersuit [sic], screwdrivers in his top pocket, an infinite manliness to the steely cut of his nose ...' (Ali, 2009: 104). Further impressions of masculinity are drawn from Gabriel's perception of the physically dangerous tasks Ted did: 'Watch out. There's fingers been lost before now. Man's been scalped on this machine' (ibid: 149), and the stoic, capable attitude Ted displays towards dealing with crises: 'threads break all the time. A decent weaver won't wait on a tackler. They'll fix it and get on' (ibid: 283). Gabriel's conception of masculinity is also drawn from Ted's expression of an unsentimental loyalty and sincere love for his work, 'Ted operated it with a loving precision' (ibid: 198). Therefore, Ali creates an interesting relation between honesty, masculinity and work together purveying a secure sense of selfhood and agency, and this is further developed throughout the novel.

4.2.1 Moral dimensions

Gabriel is the prodigal son, who leaves his father's home in an act of protest against all that he perceives his father to represent, and sets out to establish an independent career in a metropolitan, cosmopolitan world, but he experiences failure followed by disillusion, and finally returns to his father's home where he reckons with his mistakes and forms hope for a new way of life. Theological resonances are seen elsewhere too, as Gabriel, like his namesake, is a symbol of annunciation and redemption. His message cautions that the neoliberal metropolitan world of work is full of temptations (Gabriel's relationship with Lena, his previous drug abuse, and his misplaced hostility towards his father), and that answers can be

sought by returning to the local, industrial world of work, which replaces religion as a source of moral teaching:

Gabriel had looked up in fear and reverence at the cast-iron columns, the rolled steel beams, which had seemed to him more beautiful than the pillars of any church (Ali, 2009: 103).

Such resonances make plausible an allegorical reading of *In the Kitchen*, offering a critique of the neoliberal regime which privileges the individual and ‘having a career’, and that seeks refuge in the arms of a former culture of work that privileged the work itself (process and product) rather than the individual.

Significantly, the novel associates the old world of manual work with honesty, whereas the new neoliberal world of work (business and finance) is identified as disreputable: for its unwillingness to protect vulnerable people from economic exploitation as well as its culture of disinterest in being honest (more of which later). As the narrator comments, ‘Gabriel wasn’t proud of the way things were’ (Ali, 2009: 218). The theme of redemption in the novel’s major narrative influences the reader to sympathize with the protagonist, Gabriel, which problematizes the novel. For despite Ali’s exploration of the entanglements of Ted and Gabriel with their respective worlds of work, the theological and allegorical suggestions amplify the positive qualities of an industrial world of work and idealize the skilled manual masculine worker.

In a passage near the end of the novel when Gabriel is recovering from his nervous breakdown, he meanders into a bonded labour scheme, forced to pick spring onions on a farm in Norfolk alongside European migrants who have forfeited their passports unwittingly to their ‘employers’. He experiences a pseudo-spiritual sensation while working in the dirt of the soil, an experience he has sought from his career as a chef but not hitherto found:

He worked, and while he was absorbed he was surprised to find a new self growing in the space that he had cleared, and it had no voice or thought, and he

sensed it rather than knew it, and it didn't ring in his ears, and it did not divide him but made him, for the first time, whole. And for the first time in his life he felt that he was connected to the earth, to the trees and the sky, and that there was a prayer in him, not words to be offered up, but a life to be led (Ali, 2009: 403).

The emphasis in this passage is on Gabriel: his selfhood; it hints at a past fractured state or confusing experience of selfhood, which the physical toil has helped dispel. Affirming Ted's point about 'doing' being preferable to 'feeling' – 'it's not what you feel, it's what you do' (Ali, 2009: 197), the passage reinforces the idea that work creates character – that doing creates feeling. The moral directive of 'a life to be led' derives its confidence from a sense of identified selfhood and agency, recalling the qualities of self-possession, dignity and moral righteousness epitomized by the 'worker' figure.

Clearly, however, the naïve Arcadian allusion³⁶ of the agricultural passage is problematic. Moreover, Gabriel's experience of realization is at odds with the specific situation of his working alongside numerous immigrants who are effectively slaves and are presumably unlikely to share in Gabriel's self-affirming moment. In this way, the text exposes a reverence for manual work that weakens its argument against the financialized world.

4.2.2 Creative and intellectual dimensions

From another angle, Gabriel's awe of the mill's machines and instruments reflects the novel's emphasis on the value of an inquiring mind. The intellectual side of work is often

³⁶ Gabriel's experience recalls the passage in Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* when Konstantin Levin experiences a sense of spiritual unity with 'nature' whilst working with a scythe in a field, but other, more critically engaged treatments of the pastoral expose the absurdity in romanticizing man's relationship with nature. For example, Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, in which the protagonist visits shepherds to seek a simple and innocent way of life only to find the shepherds moaning about their situation wanting to emigrate to the city instead. A more contemporary version in the Johnsonian mode can be found in Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* (2008) in which a young farmer, the protagonist, is bemused by the misplaced cynical attitude of the new upper middle class inhabitants of his village towards the modernization of the local pub which to them symbolizes the loss of the spiritual hub of the rural community, a pub which in the farmer's view is merely a rundown drinking den devoid of cultural value undergoing much needed modernization.

highlighted throughout the novel. For example, the fascination Gabriel recalls here suggests his sensitivity to sensuous modes of experiencing and learning about the world of work:

Wide-eyed still ... they had been in the warp room and it blew his little mind... He walked slowly up and down the length of the creel, drinking in the rainbow colours of the multitude of spinning cones as though he were visiting the crown jewels (ibid: 148).

This new, abstract world – especially its creative component - excites Gabriel, while the particular features of textile mill work become associated in his mind with manliness, integrity and effort. In this way, the novel begins to suggest its vision of a new kind of masculinity.

Ted's appreciation of the harmony in textile processes and Gabe's appreciation of the creativity of cooking present alternative worlds of work to the neoliberal financialized world presented in the text. Gabriel loves doing what he does –cooking – “I like the process, the science of it. And then there's the seduction of course” (Ali, 2009: 142), and his comment refers to the power of food to seduce the olfactory senses, which is pointed out elsewhere: ‘Gabe added tomato purée to the pan and leaned in to catch the rich sweet smell’ (ibid: 267). The novel describes his inventiveness: ‘He'd use the jus for a chardonnay and leek sauce, and he had an idea to try a little fresh fennel instead of the usual mustard seeds’ (ibid). Gabriel values autonomy in his work - ‘At twenty-four he was there in a two-star in the middle of Paris and kept his head’ (ibid: 270). When reminding him of the early days, his sister, Jen highlights his passion: ‘you were so full of excitement, about the things you'd seen and what you'd tasted and the way they did things and you'd sleep on the laundry pile because you were on your feet sixteen hours a day’ (ibid: 177). On giving advice to his sous-chef, Suleiman, about getting ahead as a chef, Gabriel's artistic intellectual leanings are pointed out:

“I was serious like you and I was reading when I was your age. You get ideas, you see, inspiration, though mostly it's plain hard work. I read Hemingway on the subject of fried fish on the Seine” (ibid: 267).

He continues:

“Have you read Elizabeth David? She makes it all come alive. Read Brillat-Savarin, I recommend him. ... Zola wrote about Les Halles and I read it when I was working in Paris ... What about Balzac on gastronomy ...” (ibid).

The examples above of the creative, intellectual and scientific elements of industrial and gastronomical work demonstrate the values that Gabriel’s work and that of his father inspires in him and show how work affects his sense of self.

By focusing on the differences between himself and his father, Gabriel misses what they have in common. Gabriel considers himself to be worldly, knowing ‘more than his father’ who was ‘stuck as fast to Riley’s as a shuttle caught in the loom’ (ibid: 72), and open-minded (for embracing the multicultural elements of London), and even representing a new masculine identity: ‘Now you’ve got to know yourself, what you really are’ (ibid: 188). Gabriel’s maxim stems from the neoliberal financialized culture that the novel works hard at undermining, and it suggests that Gabriel is an embodiment of the national condition portrayed in the text. Sarah Brouillette, a literature scholar, has connected Gabriel as an embodiment of financialized culture to the economic policy of New Labour, in an article where she discusses the ‘pathology of flexibility’ in Ali’s novel, and points out that Gabriel’s maxim is based on ‘a model of the self in which ceaseless contemplation of one’s life and values is regarded as a sign of social evolution’ (Brouillette, 2012: 532). However, the irony is that Gabriel does not know himself and this contributes to his nervous breakdown.

The new masculinity found within *In the Kitchen* draws from both Ted and Gabriel’s worlds of work, favouring the principle of commitment (from Ted) and the quality of creativity (from Gabriel). In the textile mill’s community where people ‘knit together slowly’ (Ali, 2009: 100), work practices inform personal philosophy, because ‘weaving is a bit like life’ (ibid: 283): ‘You’ve got the warp going one way, and it brings the pattern and the colour. And you’ve got to have the weft, the constant, which runs through everything’ (ibid: 283). In contrast, Gabriel’s work as an executive chef in the Imperial Hotel in London is directed by the principles of business, where: ‘Trust, loyalty, [and] commitment [are] only bits of management speak’ (ibid: 218). Ted’s job as a textile mill tackler is a ‘job for life’; a contract

of long-term employment; but it also comprises a skillful manual aspect which is seen in detailed descriptions of the mill's machinery and processes. Similarly, passages containing vivid descriptions of cookery techniques, culinary events, and literary gastronomic influences reveal its creative aspects, thus the text establishes a commonality of creativity between father and son. Although the textile work is only creative insofar as the collective labour of all its workers produces complex fabrics and Gabriel's work is presented as creativity in its individualistic and artistic sense, both Ted's and Gabriel's work receive considerable descriptive attention in the text which establishes a connection between the two kinds of creativity. In the creative elements of their work, both men find the truest expression of life. For both of them it can be said that creativity is the weft of life – their constant (Ali, 2009: 283). Consequently, the new masculinity developed by *In the Kitchen* becomes defined by creativity (skilled manual processes, intellectual capability) and commitment (long-term employment, 'the constant' 'weft' of life, and the idea of people 'slowly knitting together').

4.2.3 A worker's hands

In a critique of the neoliberal socio-economic climate, Ted states: “‘The whole country's living on tick ... it's a house of cards ... There's nothing solid’” (Ali, 2009: 202), recalling the sentence in the *Communist Manifesto*, ‘Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft’ memorably translated by Samuel Moore in 1888 as ‘All that is solid melts into air’³⁷. Repeated references in the text to hands and or holding onto something emphasize the worth in tactile work, which relates to the importance of hands and tactile work to Ted and Gabriel. To elaborate, here, the novel provides one of its clearest expressions of Gabriel's values regarding work:

³⁷ Jonathan Sperber offers a new (albeit less catchy) translation: ‘Everything that firmly exists and all the elements of the society of orders evaporate’; in a review of Sperber's recent biography of Marx, Richard J Evans avers in the *London Review of Books*: ‘What Marx had in mind was not some mystical process of transformation, but the dissolution of hierarchical Prussian society by the steam-power of industry’. For Ted, the steam-power of industry is being dissolved by neoliberal economics (Evans, RJ. ‘Marx vs. the Rest’. Rev. of: *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life*, by Jonathan Sperber. *London Review of Books*. 35(10). 23 May 2013. 17-20).

When he was a kid he used to look at his father's hands. Ted's hands held an entire world, of work, of manliness, and now Gabriel wanted to hold his own aloft for inspection because Dad had never realised that his son has worker's hands (Ali, 2009: 168).

The repetition of 'hands' emphasises their significance for Gabriel while the logic of the clauses reflects the priority of the qualities. Firstly, 'Ted's hands' signifies knowledge and wisdom, as gained through experience, which is seen in the occupational marks across his hands. Secondly, they represent an alternative reality, an 'entire world' which excites Gabriel. That he 'wanted to hold his own aloft for inspection' shows how he seeks approval for his work from his father, meaning the world of work is one to aspire to experience and master, and occupational scars are marks of honour attesting to one's efforts. Finally, the third clause - 'of manliness' ascribes a masculinised dimension to the nature of the kind of manual work carried out by Ted. Through the symbol of the hand this passage touches upon the fundamental issues concerning the role of work in shaping masculinity.

Certainly, the metonymy of the hand to mean work recalls the idiomatic expressions 'hired hands' and 'all hands on deck'; the hand has long been a symbol of work. It also reminds us of the common 'worker' motif of the hand or fist raised up, seen in the illustrations of unionist or labour movement posters and pamphlets. The illustrated fist signifies that profit for the employer is created by the hands of others who have the right to cease working (to close their hands into fists) should they not be rewarded or treated with due respect. Evidently, in this way the fist is a symbol of agency. The naked human hand or fist also proclaims honesty and righteousness. The hand therefore is a potent pluralistic symbol in the arsenal of labour movement rhetoric. However, for Gabriel, Ted's hands do not represent protest; they are seen as positive symbols of rewarding work and of a preferred kind of masculinity.

4.3 Gabriel's political subjectivization

Ted's distrust of 'invisibles' reflects his awareness of their insubstantial existence ('a house of cards'); he is the novel's principle voice of criticism of the financialization of our

lives under neoliberal capitalism. One of the central concerns of *In the Kitchen* is the human rights issue of people trafficking into Britain. Through the stories of Eastern European characters such as Lena and the murdered kitchen porter, Yuri, Ali discloses the traumatic experiences suffered by economic migrants tricked into sexual slavery or bonded labour by ruthless profiteers in Britain, implying that this occurs in the umbra of financialization. Financialization can be defined as thus:

Financialization remains a disputed and somewhat elusive concept. In one of the core texts on financialization, Gerald Epstein opts for an ecumenical approach: “financialization means the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors, and financial institutions in the operation of domestic and international economies.” Such a broad definition feels appropriate given the breadth of the impact of finance across economic and social life, from intimate to global scales (Davies, 2012: 319).

The import of financialization in this novel is seen in its destructive effects upon social relations amongst the characters and in its part in the unravelling of Gabe’s sense of identity. Thus, the novel connects neoliberalism’s culture of financialization with harmful social relations and a problematic sense of masculine identity. When Gabe seeks sex from Lena while he offers her refuge in his apartment, he becomes her new captor in place of the pimp who enslaved her, thus highlighting the vulnerability of economic migrants, and Gabriel’s confused sense of masculine identity (he seeks to protect Lena, but then proceeds to control her). Later, Gabriel’s promise to give her a large sum of money to help her establish her life in safety further highlights the role of money in contemporary neoliberal Britain. In this way the relationship between Gabriel and Lena alludes to the heavy impact of finance across economic and social life on an intimate (financial exchange for a personal relationship) and global (international economic migrant) scale.

The impact of financialization on our social relations means that our subjectivities are shaped by ‘everyday financialization’ (ibid), which in broad terms refers to property ownership, credit, and participation on the stock market, to take but the most obvious examples. Davies comments that ‘as actors orient their activities around securing access to

finance, finance plays the principal role in identity formation or subject formation' (Davies, 2007: 320). The novel constantly underscores the primary role of finance in private and public life; Fairweather's speech about the relationship between 'turbo-capitalists' (Ali, 2009: 250) and government describes why the text considers that 'We're all entranced by money (Ali, 2009: 250):

I'll tell you what's so difficult about being in office. You're right there with them, these turbo-capitalists, these Genghis Khans of the money markets, and you think, I'm supposed to be the one with the power. And what am I earning? Ninety thousand a year (ibid).

In accordance with the views of Davies, *In the Kitchen* points out that finance culture encourages greed and competitiveness at the personal level. Fairweather alludes to a famous advertising catchphrase 'We want to live like celebrities because we're worth it' (ibid: 245), driving home the point that financialization has ample power to shape personal identity and thus behaviour. Additionally, Gabe's assertion to his father that 'we're a nation of consumers' (Ali, 2009: 201) reflects the power of discourses of work to shape national identity as much as personal identity: formerly, Britain was commonly (and somewhat pejoratively) described as a nation of shopkeepers, while Manchester was once termed the workshop of the world.

Through conversations with his father and Fairweather, Gabriel begins to reckon with his incipient distrust of the world of finance and business. Those discussions concern discourses of wealth creation and the economy. Fairweather points out to Gabriel that understanding the wealth creation aspect of the economy is 'a matter of interpretation. ... I could say that the financial sector is thriving or I could say there's a million white-collar drones inputting data and answering phones' (Ali, 2009: 253). The politician's view indicates that the government selects those discourses which can explain increased employment figures in an advantageous light, with the implication being that if certain social problems are intertwined with employment issues, then the employment statistics will be manipulated to give the electorate a satisfactory impression of the state of the economy:

“There are more people in employment now than when we were elected ... Of course the Opposition would bang on about how many more foreigners we've got filling jobs in construction and agriculture and catering and how there's a pool of unemployed and virtually unemployable Brits” (Ali, 2009: 253).

This excerpt tells us that quantity not quality of employment takes precedence for the political machine. Additionally, its references to foreigners working in agriculture and catering highlights which industries are ‘booming’. In the context of the novel's subplot – Gabriel's investigation of the bonded labour organised through the Imperial Hotel – those references also suggest the exploitation bound up with wealth creation in Britain.

Agriculture and catering are tactile manual industries, but unlike Ted's skilled manual work they are not idealized. Unlike Ted's work as it is presented in the novel, they are vulnerable to abusive practices; this forms part of the novel's argument. Certainly, factory work is subject to exploitative practices in the actual world, and knowing this, the reader perceives the text's idealization of Ted's work all the more. The role of abusive practices in supporting the service industry in the plot suggests that the novel views the service industry as the premier example of financialized culture. Examples of the service industry in the novel include: ‘the financial sector’ (described by Fairweather), a call centre (where Jen works), a shopping centre (on the site of Rileys), nightclubs and bars (where Gabriel's girlfriend, Charlie works), catering and hotels (the Imperial Hotel). Jen's daughter works in the ‘Shopping Village’ which used to be Riley's textile mill where Ted once worked; still called ‘Riley's’, it is claimed to be ‘A Legendary Experience’ (Ali, 2009: 197). The hyperbole regarding the consumerist experience on offer is comical, but it might equally refer to Ted and Gabriel's experiences of the working mill, which combines with the hyperbole to create irony, but also signals that the old world of work is being mourned.

Charlie's narrative is a diluted version of Gabriel's; her ongoing anxiety is caused by worrying about ‘the terrible poverty, terrorism, climate change ... it's really huge’ (ibid: 147) which she feels bombarded by via ‘The way the media is today. We get it all the time’ (ibid). Unable to name specific sources for her anxiety, she avers to Gabriel she would have preferred

to have lived under the threat of the World Wars or the Cold War: ‘In a funny way I think I’d have preferred it. It was more *collective*, but our things just make us turn in on ourselves’ (ibid). She concludes that ‘we don’t know who the enemy is, not with any clarity – and we can’t be sure it’s not us’ (ibid), meaning that Charlie, like Gabriel, connects a general cultural malaise with her personal state of anxiety and contemplates her part in sustaining that cultural malaise. Like Gabriel, she too abandons her career in favour of a different job (ibid: 145), thus strengthening the text’s position vis-à-vis the neoliberal financialized economy.

In sum, the financialization of culture is portrayed as predominantly a malevolent force, unchallenged by government and the richest elites, encouraging citizens to become individualistic, shallow and exploitative. Gabriel’s growing understanding of how his privilege relates to others’ suffering motivates his self-reflection but contributes to his mental breakdown. However, his breakdown is a necessary stage in the process of denying the identity given to him by the ruling order; or, the Rancièrian ‘police’. Therefore, Gabriel’s critical judgment of his assumed identity is at the same time his critical judgment of the ‘police’. Despite having realized the extent of the moral and cultural malaise through which he has drifted during his adulthood, he continues to be unable to clearly see who he is or what he shall do with his life:

It was as if he was divided into three selves. The first self wanted to go back in time and set a few things right, the second laughed at the absurdity of this idea, and the third's only and ardent wish was for the other two selves to go away (Ali, 2009: 300).

Gabriel’s interior monologue reveals that he is aware of the hopelessness in looking back in time for solutions to the problems of the present, and yet it also discloses his capacity for hope. His process of political subjectivization – a negative and dispiriting experience - has not erased his hope of creating a better life, which rests on the foundation of practicing his authentic identity, but this remains undefined by the close of the novel.

4.4 Conclusion

One of the issues at stake in this novel is its implication that identity is shaped predominantly by work. Both Ali and Rancière appear to support Sennett's view that personal identity is profoundly affected by work practices, but Rancière denies 'a necessary link between the idea of emancipation and the narrative of a universal wrong and a universal victim' (Rancière, 1995: 64), which is precisely the kind of link that *In the Kitchen* draws. The gradual development of the dichotomy between the industrial world of work and the neoliberal financialized world engenders a gradual polarization of 'politics' (Gabriel and Ted) and 'police' (neoliberal economy), and suggests a pure discourse of nonpower (victims) and of power (committing a universal wrong). This in turn suggests a Manichean order where the neoliberal economy is morally bad, and the industrial economy signified by Ted 'the worker' is morally good.

The text's disclosure of Ted's quasi-imperialist politics attenuates the Manichean order that problematically predominates the moral terrain of *In the Kitchen*, and shows that the text does not wholly indulge in glorifying Ted as 'the worker'. Ted declares to Gabriel in a conversation about the state of the nation, "'We've lost the 'Great'. Know what else we've lost? Britishness. People keep talking about it. That's how you know it's gone'" (Ali, 2009: 187). Ted's words evoke an imperialist discourse of power. His allusion to the emotive understanding of the place name Great Britain suggests ideas of magnitude, stature, certitude, and power. These are not too dissimilar to the ideas evoked by the heroic worker imaginary. Christoph Houswitschka explains Ted's views on identity and character: 'What Ted calls "character" means stability and homogeneity of identity' (Houswitschka, 2013: 83). In agreement with Houswitschka, I have argued here that Ted's sense of identity is shaped by his working life - which was an experience of constancy and homogeneity; as Gabriel points out, Ted "'[w]orked in the same place all his life'" (Ali, 2009: 248). By problematizing the character of Ted in this way, the text also problematizes the category of identity which he represents so clearly - the white, working class British man. Ali presents Ted as a conservative, not a radical, working

class man, but the text envelopes him in the language and imagery belonging to the radical discourses of the labour movements described in the thesis Introduction. While Ted ostensibly symbolizes a homogenous identity, and constitutes the righteous pole of the text's Manichean order, he yet consists of contradictory political elements.

Gabriel's contrasting response to his father in their conversation about the condition of the country further spotlights the homogeneous identity that Ted demonstrably represents: "There's no point trying to keep everything the same. And just because things are different doesn't mean they're worse" (Ali, 2009: 187). Indeed, Houswitschka observes that Gabriel vouches for the cultural heterogeneity of contemporary metropolitan life: 'In [Gabriel's] experience, citizenship is defined differently because society has changed' (Houswitschka, 2013: 87). The pluralized identity that Gabe developed while working in Paris and London is attributed in part to working alongside people from around the globe (ibid). Therefore, Gabriel's defence of multiculturalism is evidence of there being at least one appealing quality, in the novel's view, of neoliberal socio-political life. Consequently, Ali's novel does not wholly lambast the ideology of neoliberal socio-economics, thus attenuating the novel's otherwise predominant tendency to simplistically moralize against neoliberalism.

These problems are irreconcilable within Ali's novel, but they also invite consideration of the text's suggested new masculinity as a tonic to the toxic neoliberal work practices explored in Ali's novel. Where Sennett examined the top-down effect of work practices upon personal subjectivity, Ali conceivably suggests an optimistic role for bottom-up effects of personal subjectivity upon work practices at the level of the 'ruling order of policy'.

While Rancière's theory of political subjectivization specifies the occurrence of politics among the interstices between identities, he does not detail his opinion on what happens at the end of political subjectivization. In the context of *In the Kitchen* one question to ask would be, is it not inevitable that the police order will co-opt the criteria of creativity and commitment that define the new masculinity suggested by Ali's text? Is the struggle for a new rewarding identity of working class masculinity worthwhile, or should any idealization of identity

relating to work practices be avoided? Certainly, these questions hang tantalizingly over the end of the novel.

5. Summary and Conclusion

In 1983 Raymond Williams argued for a new working-class (or ‘regional’) novel form ‘rooted in region or in class’ that could grasp the political, social, economic and aesthetic relations and relationships which:

in their pressures and interventions at once challenge, threaten, change and yet, in the intricacies of history, contribute to the formation of that class or region in self-realization and in struggle, including especially new forms of self-realization and struggle (Williams, 1983: 238).

This appeal stemmed from his earlier comment in *Marxism and Literature* that ‘what is now in question, theoretically, is the hypothesis of a mode of social formation’ (Williams, 1977: 135). Arguably, Ali’s novel alone (of the three texts studied) provides strong suggestions of a new ‘social formation’ relating to working class masculine identity. *In the Kitchen* modifies the proletariat mission - of class consciousness to be fulfilled by unitary Party struggle - for the twenty-first century, by outlining the figure for a new ‘worker’ characterized by creativity, inventiveness, commitment and submission to the telos of work. Ali’s novel suggests that with Ted’s insight and ‘craftsman ideal’ work ethic, and Gabriel’s creative talent and flair for invention, a new ‘worker’ figure can be developed and emulated. While the relationship between son and father takes precedence in the text, Ali’s approach is generalized and relies too heavily on thinly veiled stereotype characters in its portrayal of contemporary Britain. The text’s critique of Britain’s financial and socio-political culture through Gabriel’s narrative of personal breakdown suggests a top-down relation between hegemony and worker identity. Ali’s text strongly suggests that the lack of challenging and rewarding work for working class people is partly responsible for social disorder and personal anxiety, while the text targets the neoliberal prioritizing of the economy (or the concept thereof) as the cause of the worst forms of exploitation. Thus, to borrow Williams’ statement above, the new ‘worker’ emerges out of *In the Kitchen* in response to the pressures and interventions of political, social, economic and aesthetic relations and relationships arising as a result of the condition of the nation.

Williams' appeal echoes Georg Lukàcs who asked for literature to disclose the social foundations of existence through the vehicle of character ('individual destinies') who distil in their 'individual uniqueness' the typical, representative features of the connections between politics, economics and social relations. However, Williams specifically seeks a new form of working class novel. Most of Kelman's novels could be argued as such creations, although they do not all easily fit Williams' description. Certainly, *A Chancer* ambivalently engages with the concept of working class identity; whether it was written intentionally to capture new forms of working class existence is another question entirely. Tammas' realistic and naturalistic portrait in *A Chancer* obstructs interpretations of his gambling as subversion; although Maley and Jackson, as previously discussed, have critiqued the novel for presenting a protagonist who rejects his peers and community, stating, for example, that Kelman cannot maintain 'close links with his roots, his origins, his culture, his working-class background' (Maley, 2000: 66) while at the same time writing protagonists who isolate themselves. But *A Chancer* demonstrates that those 'roots' are enmeshed with the bourgeois idea of what a working class culture is. Hence Kelman makes use of what can be understood as concrete realism; he attempts at the level of form to shake off the value judgments inherent in specific aesthetic styles used by earlier bourgeois novelists, while at the level of content the text tries to rethink working class identity by critiquing the working class cultures in which Tammas lives. That attempt to excise a man from history in order to restate the conditions of humankind – that we are all born equal - is a Rancièrian politics of radical equality: '[T]he critical upshot of the radical equality thesis is the explanation of the fact of existing inequality as a result of hierarchically organized social structures' (Déranty, 2010: 7). Thus, we can see that Kelman's novel grapples with existing inequality at the level of the aesthetic (within the literary tradition) as well as at the level of the social.

Additionally, I claim that the primary texts each demonstrate that the hierarchy is informed by hegemonic manipulation of discourses of worker identity: each text resists the identity of 'the worker' which is imposed upon them. Gabriel resists the neoliberal self-serving philosophy represented by the male characters with whom he works, while Tammas resists

‘the worker’ figure seen in his brother-in-law, Robert. Meanwhile, Magnus Mills’ narrator-protagonist in *The Scheme for Full Employment* resists ‘the worker’ figure most clearly typified in the Long Reach mural, but also that of the proletariat which emerges in the oratory of key characters during the strikes. Mills’ novel focuses on playfully, sometimes satirically, critiquing the proletariat, the worker figure, industrialists, neoliberal economics and especially the concept of the work ethic.

While all three of the novels show concern with unpacking the unalloyed, pure identity – the Absolute Subject – of ‘the worker’, thereby suggesting their critique of hegemonic discourses of working class people and communities, Mills’ novel is the text containing the greatest challenge to the abstract idea of the work ethic (arguably, in smaller measure, so does *A Chancer*’s subversive gambling). Additionally, while not disputing the real injustices of the past, *The Scheme* undermines the idea of the righteous mission of the proletariat. The narrator-protagonist is content in his role within The Scheme, but is not motivated by any sense of purpose, or by a work ethic. He is instead motivated by maintaining an easy life: ‘I wouldn’t say I was particularly conscientious. I like an easy time, same as the next person’ (Mills, 2011: 3). This is, in essence, what Mills’ text suggests is the truly radical reality behind the pomp of worker discourses: that we all have the right to an easy life. The narrator is one of Armstrong’s industrial sociologists, with his ‘own theories of the social order and of the potentials attached to [his] own place within it’ not a hypostasized victim of the hegemony (Armstrong, 2011: 2). Moreover, *The Scheme* depicts an impure hegemony – not all the people with power are exploitative, and an impure workforce – not all the workers are radical and/or righteous. In fact, the workers and the people with power behave similarly, and there are more characters occupying the grey moral ground than not. I have argued above that Mills’ novel practices an intertwining of police with politics. Rancière states: ‘Politics acts on the police. It acts in the places and with the words that are common to both, even if it means reshaping those places and changing the status of those words’ (ibid: 170). Thus, Mills denies the pure categories of police and politics which tend to polarize society into two moral camps where the police is a hegemony of domination and oppression, and where politics is found in the domain of the

exploited and disenfranchised, who because they are wronged by injustice are therefore righteous in morality and mission.

The aesthetic of *The Scheme* is allegorical, in the tradition of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* albeit less biting and far less pessimistic. That is not to deny the substantive politics of *The Scheme*. However, *The Scheme* does not fulfill Williams' conceptualization of a new working class novel. Williams' appeal treads on the toes of the very problem traced throughout this thesis, that the category of working class identity is inherently problematic. The category of genre in literature ought not to be held to account for the relative merits or failures in speaking on behalf of an entire class or 'region'.

In *Lanark* (1981), Alasdair Gray famously wrote about representation of the kind that Williams means, when the character Thaw avers that Glasgow does not exist in the literary imagination other than as 'a music-hall song and a few bad novels' and he concludes that 'That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves' (Gray, 1981: 243). The three novels which I have discussed in the course of this thesis contribute to the history of working class literature, but demonstrate a critique of previous conceptualizations of the working class community and citizen that can be found in the tradition. Kelman specifically targeted bourgeois aesthetics (naturalism) and discourses of the working class, even those that come from the voice of working class writers. Taken together, especially considering the history that they span from 1985 to 2009, that they resist dominant articulations of 'the worker' and the working class suggests that, in literature, heroic narratives of working class missions and victories are in transition. Neither do the three texts present a negative hero, the rebel. In *A Chancer*, Tammas' private thoughts are made obscure by being blocked from the reader. At the level of content, he lurks obscurely in passageways, lanes, dark streets and the back rooms and covered shops of betting offices and illegal private clubs. Tammas becomes an obscure subject in order to elude the trapped destiny awaiting the working class men in his community. Magnus Mills' narrator-protagonist in *The Scheme for Full Employment* speaks with a faux-naïf voice which treads the fine line between innocence

and affectless irony. In combination with the novel's schematic aesthetic, which permeates it entirely, this ambiguous narrative voice belonging to the masculine working class protagonist fashions him into an obscure subject. Gabriel Lightfoot in Ali's novel *In the Kitchen* is an obscure subject for being morally and psychologically ambiguous; he does not know himself. He oscillates between the two poles staked out by his father's example (the ideal workingman) and the illegal, immoral business of people trafficking occurring within the Imperial Hotel. Gabe exists in the interstices of certain kinds of masculine identity - as sexual exploiter of Lena, as paternal figurehead of the Imperial Hotel's kitchen, as poster boy of the executive Michelin starred restaurant scene. At the end of the novel he remains an obscure subject. The quiet, fallible, flawed and atypically masculine protagonists are obscure subjects occupying the interstices between hegemonic discourses of social categories.

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