

Constructing Churchill

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I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

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Signed Jon Hartless

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PhD Abstract

Constructing Churchill is presented as a work of metafiction, in which the novel and critical commentary are combined into one volume. The narrative explores the way in which the Establishment preserves itself by maintaining control of nationalistic mythology, thus presenting a hegemonic, binary view of right and wrong, valid and invalid etc, through which society can be ideologically maintained and controlled. The specific focus will be on just one modern day variation of this; Churchillian hagiography, in which Churchill the man has been rendered into Churchill the Myth, beyond all criticism.

The novel makes use of theorists such as Chandler and Althusser, to explore how society and language is made, as well as Hroch, and Taylor, to examine how nationalism itself operates. as well as the Great Man Theory initiated by Carlyle, which still proves a powerful point of appeal for the establishment. In a similar vein, books such as John Tosh's *Historians on History* and E.H. Carr's *What is History* have also been of central importance.

The novel uses postmodern, metafictional commentary to deconstruct the concept of the novel, thus allowing the book to similarly deconstruct Establishment norms and assumptions behind concepts including the biography, history, and society. This is done via satirical footnotes which almost act as a metacommentary on the main action of the book, asking questions of the Establishment narrative and assumptions in a way that hopefully rings back to earlier satirists and their intentions.

The novel follows Yvonne Jones, a young, black woman from a nouveau (comparatively) riche family who finds her dreams of success in the world of publishing are curtailed by the fact she doesn't belong to the social elite, and as such she will never be given the same chances handed out by the elite on behalf of the elite.

The elite is represented within the novel in the figures of Michael Vansittart, the owner of Clavier and Coldwell publishing, his Etonian friend, Sebastian Featherstonehaugh, (Deputy Minister of Culture (Regions)), Terrance Rogerson, a right-wing journalist (and ex-Etonian) born into privilege and Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn, who like Yvonne is an unpaid volunteer at Clavier and Coldwell, but unlike Yvonne, has a trust fund, social contacts, and a public school (Eton) background, and as such, he just has to wait for opportunities to be given to him by his social group.

Supervisors: Dr Duncan Dicks
Dr Martin Randall

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Reader's Abstract

Constructing Churchill is an investigation into how the English Establishment perpetuates itself via the codification its own fictitious national mythology, as seen via the populist rendering of Winston Churchill the man into Winston Churchill the Myth. The book achieves its aims through metafictional commentary which allows the author to deconstruct cultural assumptions concerning biography, history, and society.

In practical terms, this means the Establishment story is laid out like holy writ in the traditional form of numerical chapters, while any alternative history or point of view is mostly relegated to the undigestible footnotes at the bottom of the page, where they will probably be ignored by everyone.

If the reader therefore wonders at the abundance of ridiculously overlong footnotes, please bear in mind the annotations are intended emphasise the artificial construction of books, biographies, histories etc which purport to be natural and unfeigned when in truth they are fictive reconstructions designed (deliberately or otherwise) to sell an officially approved narrative.

As such, the footnotes do go on a bit.

However, this idea of splitting the text between the official Establishment narrative on the page and the alternative viewpoint in the footnotes is an idea that can only go so far, containing as it does certain inherent limitations with regard to making the book function as a piece of readable literature.

As such, a smidgeon of mockery does occasionally intrude (in the spirit of conventional unconventionality) upon the main pages, but only in the Author's Note, the Forward, and the Prologue. After this, the derision is mostly contained in the chapter headings, muzzled away from the official story.

Although Chapter Two does give the plebian author a chance to make a few observations on the main page, while Chapters Eight and Nine are almost entirely made up of snark.

And the character of Helen does also ask awkward questions and detail inconvenient facts on the main page. And then Yvonne starts thinking for herself under the cynicism of Helen's guidance, despite the best efforts of the Establishment to suppress free thought.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves too much...

Finally, it should be noted that the novel was written for my PhD in Creative Writing, and the intended readership therefore consists entirely of university lecturers.

Which, I'll admit, may limit the appeal of the book a teensy-weensy bit if it ever reaches the open market...

Warning: this book may contain socio-economic commentary. If afflicted by feelings of rage at the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda within, please follow the recommended cure; open the nearest right-wing newspaper or TV channel and smother the contents thickly over the cerebrum. Side effects of this may include impaired social skills, diminished empathy, and significantly reduced intelligence.

Author's Note

It is the convention at the start of a “serious” novel for the author to beg the forgiveness of the reader for the sin of creating false locations, be they countries, counties, neighbourhoods, streets, or even specific buildings. Often, the writer will admit to having “lifted” or “borrowed” some elements of real geography, in which case an apology is usually tended toward those who live in, or know, the area.

Quite why authors should continue to do this is anyone's guess... Except this sort of false modesty, and the asking of forgiveness for something carefully planned, written, revised, submitted, and edited, is now an established publishing tradition – especially if the book in question is a populist piece which therefore stands outside the acceptable literary canon. PD James as an especially good example of this sort of thing, as shown in her author's note for *The Black Tower*. And *A Taste for Death*. And *The Lighthouse*. And *The Private Patient*. And *The Murder Room*. And *Gaudy Night*. Although that last one was by Dorothy L Sayers. But the point still stands. And hence the carefully constructed (and somewhat meaningless) apologia.

With that in mind, I have nicked the exterior of Virginia Woolf's old house, 34 Paradise Road, Richmond, to use as the outer shell of Clavier and Coldwell Publishing, though I have rejiggled the inner layout for artistic effect while also translocating the entire building into the fictitious adjunct of Kensington Manor. I've also taken the liberty of slapping down a railway line in Hauz Khas, Delhi, again purely for artistic effect, and thus I must now adhere to the ritual and appeal to the reader's kind indulgence in taking such presumptive steps with their beloved communities etc etc etc.

And while I'm on the topic, some of you may recognise the offices of the *Daily Crier Magazine* as well...

But having got that out of the way; welcome to my literary novel! Or at least, I *think* it may be literary. Unfortunately, defining 'literary' is not a simple as you might assume:

Although the designation of “literary” fiction is

complex and difficult to define, one trait associated with literary texts is a tendency to feature complex characters whose changing behavior (sic) challenges readers to understand and empathize. (Black, et al., 2017).

Or, to give an opposing view:

There are certainly high brow literary readers who believe that genre fiction does not deserve any merit. Then there are the types who exclusively read one or two subtypes of genre fiction and automatically classify any “serious” works of literature as pretentious or boring. (Petite, 2014).

It’s almost as though the supposed ‘rules’ to literature are little more than areas of (dis)agreement now labelled as tradition, in which merit is assigned by the dominant status quo to its favoured authors and practices. Which, incidentally, is pretty much what the rest of the book is about, albeit on a wider social scale. And so this digression – and pointing out the point of the digression – does serve as quite a neat and apposite introduction to the narrative.

And do please be assured that this book will strive to be literary. By which I mean it will be both pretentious *and* boring.

And will employ many a sesquipedalian word.

Forward, and a caveat.

This novel is concerned with Winston Churchill, but it isn't about Winston Churchill. It examines the construction of history and biography, but it is neither historical nor biographical. It is set during the shambolic premiership of Boris Johnson, (24th July 2019 – 6th September 2022), but it is not about Boris Johnson himself.

Instead, the novel is concerned with how English society works; how it maintains itself, how it repeatedly offers prime opportunities to the aristocratic and capitalist elite who are already at the top of the pile, and how it denies any real prospects to those at the bottom. The book is, in short, about the people who make up the Establishment, though it features only a few fictionalised examples of them.

I will acknowledge here that I, the ill-bred author of this book, have no personal experience of this level of society; I wasn't born in the gutter, but I can *see* the gutter from my rung of the socio-economic ladder. This has both positive and negative issues. Being an outsider can give you a wider perspective on things, but it also means you may misunderstand or miss entirely the significance of certain deeds or behaviours. Footnote #17, for example, has a quote from Boris Johnson in which he refers to Churchill's mother using her charms on certain men to advance her son's career, which I *think* means she was shagging the aforementioned men, but I'm not one hundred percent certain on this.

Either way, shagging is certainly something the aristocracy enthusiastically indulges in whenever there's an 'R' in the month. Or any other letter:

"Aristocrats have always bonked like crazy simply because it is fun," says society designer Nicky Haslam.
"...it's about a show-off quality among the upper classes who go to shooting parties and talk about who they have got their leg over with. It's to do with position and a power play. 'We do it because we can.' *This attitude is bred into upper class thinking.*" (Pasternak, 2021).
Emphasis mine. Because it pretty much sums up the entire issue this novel goes onto explore...

But what if anyone outside the elite acts in this way? Are they treated in the same manner by society's moral watchdogs? Of course not:

The British press loves to hate women, but it particularly loves to hate... working-class women who are singled out as symbols of moral degradation...

...

Life at the other end of the scale of what the media deems acceptable femininity can hardly be stress-free... [but] Their basic dignity, however, is deemed worthy of respect. The Sun even refused to publish topless photos of the Duchess of Cambridge, acquired by French *Closer* magazine – and not just out of pique that the French got there first. (Penny, 2014).

If you're wondering what all this has to do with Churchill, bear in mind Churchill's story is the story of class, and hence the examination of the man is an examination of the nepotistic system that created him while excluding everyone else. After all, if I turned up at a bank/business/political party/media firm expecting to be given jobs and opportunities while in possession of nothing more than a proletariat name, an obscure background, and a respectable mother, (thus conspicuously lacking a title in the family, social connections, and a mother enthusiastically screwing scores of influential men), I'd be told to piss off.

And that is pretty much the whole point of this novel; nepotism rules. And the class system wouldn't work without the support of the quisling English media coupled with society's deference to posh power.

Finally, it should be noted that while *Constructing Churchill* is critical of Churchill the man, the novel acknowledges that it is possible to admire the art but not the artist, or the science but not the scientist, or the achievements but not the achiever. As such, I can admire Churchill's part in defending Britain while also being aware of and criticising his motives in doing so, for he was defending *his* world, the one run by an aristocratic elite intent on keeping their system of socio-economic serfdom intact across the Empire. And this is no exaggeration, as a quick glance at the Ruling Elite's relationship to education demonstrates:

Since 1900, 44 men and nine women have had charge of English education. They included one duke, two marquesses, two earls, two viscounts and three hereditary baronets. Eight were old Etonians; four were old Harrovians; 10 went to state schools but only two... to comprehensives.

...

... Another Tory education minister, Edward Wood (later the 3rd Viscount Halifax), was... dismissive of education: state schools, he said, should train children up "to be servants and butlers". (Wilby, 2020).

Had anything changed by the time of Boris Johnson's rule?
No.

Members of Boris Johnson's new cabinet are nine times more likely to have gone to an independent school than the general population, according to analysis by the Sutton Trust published today. 65% were educated at fee-paying schools, while 27% went to a comprehensive and 8% attended a grammar school. (Sutton Trust, 2020).

Should the reader feel outraged at this lack of deference toward Churchill and his kind, then take comfort that he won and his values are maintained to this very day; we still live in an oligarchical society with virtually no opportunities for those born outside the upper and wealthy classes. And you are playing your part in upholding the status quo by raging about the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda etc from your kneeling position of deference down on the cold, hard ground. Congratulations.

Prologue

“... you may have noticed literary agents voicing their dislike of prologues... This is largely due to the poorly-executed prologues littering query boxes and submission piles. You’d be surprised how many writers commit the deadly sins of prologues.” (LaTorre-Snyder, 2017)

While it may be the case that a prologue is a construct much despised by certain professionals, given the work you now hold in your hands is a self-reflexive novel bedevilled by the very notion of the construct, we can surely extend our indulgence in beginning our story with the literary cliché of the humble prelude – especially as this sort of preamble is useful when introducing characters who are vital to the back-story while remaining little more than supporting players throughout the work.

So, let us be kind to this prologue which has, after all, served the purpose of establishing the place, plot, and themes of the novel.

Except, of course, the prologue has done no such thing. This is because writers are liars. *All of them*. Trust no one. Instead, it will be down to the humble footnotes to explain how we are all constructs of wealth, family, class, education, and socialisation.

Churchill is an excellent focus for this as he was/is a construct; he had the means (via his Establishment background/contacts) to push a fictionalised version of himself into the public consciousness, and this image was then taken at its own value by the hordes of establishment sycophants who came thereafter – see footnote #138 for further particulars.

But how does the Churchillian (and other Establishment myths) keep going? What keeps them alive? Why does the public seemingly fail to understand they are looking upon a careful selection, presentation, and even distortion of facts whenever they open a biography or watch a documentary? Why do they accept and then regurgitate supposed “facts” even when they have no reason to do so? Why do they not question that which they are told to believe?

The short answer lies in the stranglehold of power held by the UK Establishment (political, media, and cultural) over the rest of the country,

while deference, stupidity, and English exceptionalism provides the necessary support for this situation to continue.

History, after all, is moulded by those who hold the means of cultural production. Those born to wealth, leisure, and opportunity have the necessary access (via family, friends, and peers) to top positions within business, politics, publishing, the media etc, while everyone else must slave all day just to pay bills.

Which is a depressing way to end the chapter. But it does sum up the book reasonably well.

Chapter One¹

In which we meet one of our secondary (though important) characters, Michael Vansittart, owner of Clavier and Coldwell Publishing, who through inherited wealth is a powerful man in the publishing industry. Or at least, he is important within Clavier and Coldwell. We also meet Sebastian Featherstonehaugh, a government minister also born into a wealthy and well-connected family – yet he (like Vansittart) honestly believes his success is down to his own talent and sheer hard work...²

Michael Vansittart's eye glanced from corner to corner of his computer monitor, taking in the nervous, self-conscious faces of the unknown people sharing the Zoom meeting, as well as the untidy clothing of his fellow guests; although the men were wearing shirts and ties, there was a sense this was not their usual apparel. Probably he was looking at people who more commonly wore hoodies and T-shirts in their daily lives. Slovenly.³

¹ Chapter One – and the commencement of the Establishment narrative! Which is appropriate, as the entire concept of a “Chapter One” is a facile tradition in literature which suggests that everything starts at this one point, whereas in truth everything is in motion long before we enter the world. The Lovecraftian tentacles of social stasis reach out from the past to entwine around the present while also stretching toward the future, ensuring that nothing will ever change. As this novel will now attempt to demonstrate. Also: Chapter One – and the commencement of the counter-culture footnotes! Please be aware the number of plebeian footnotes will increase exponentially from this point forward, deconstructing everything from education to convention to fondly held beliefs, thus demonstrating how the Establishment narrative is just that – a narrative. Have fun wading through them all.

² The Dunning-Kruger effect: This is when people who [sic] believe that they are smarter and more capable than they really are. (Cherry, 2020).

Compare the above with Churchill's “...belief in his own uniqueness and destiny” (Ponting, 1994), and consider also Churchill's:

...management of the war, which... was much more hit and miss than conventional history usually has it. (Heffer, 2015).

3

Every day I go to class [at Eton] in a morning suit, identical to the clothing of a bridegroom. By the time my teens are over, I will have worn one of the smartest outfits in anyone's wardrobe hundreds of times. The effect of this is that, when I put on a business suit for work

Vansittart checked his own camera feed, the image reassuring him with its carefully knotted silk tie, well-pressed shirt, and lightly laundered ironic smile. He wouldn't have dreamed of dressing in any other manner on a workday, but especially not when meeting his old friend, the Right Honourable Sebastian Featherstonehaugh MP, Deputy Minister of Culture (Regions) and self-proclaimed rising star of the government, for they both knew the code; they had, after all, been at Eton together. The minister, however, was conspicuous by his absence, though his empty chair and desk somehow managed to dominate the group meeting.

With time to kill, Vansittart lazily studied the backgrounds behind his fellow Zoomers. Like him, all seemed to be working from home. Unlike him, all seemed to have set up their laptop in their living rooms, (Vansittart refused to call such poky squalor sitting rooms), though one woman's feed seemed to hint at the edge of a bed in the very corner of the shot.

Vansittart's lips twitched disdainfully; he alone seemed to have a proper office to work from, for he had long ago converted the fourth bedroom into his own private space. That no one else at the meeting had a spare bedroom, and thus had to work from whichever room was free of other household members, was not a thought likely to encroach upon his assumptions.⁴ 'Hello, er, have we started yet?' asked a nervous voice afflicted with a Birmingham accent as another camera feed appeared on the screen, this time showing a middle-aged woman in a cheap blazer and blouse.

or any formal occasion, I look as relaxed as if I am wearing a pair of pyjamas. (Okwonga, 2021).

⁴ Vansittart's lack of self-awareness is an issue shared by practically all his contemporaries born into wealth and ease; they live in a world made for them, meaning their lives (and thoughts) all run on pre-laid tracks, stopping at every station of opportunity while speeding by the sidings of deprivation. They never question their assumptions or good fortune, in much the same way that a fish doesn't think to question water:

Each day the children [at exclusive public schools] are told that the reason they are here is because they are the brightest and most important children in the world. (Verkaik, 2019)

Or, as Musa Okwonga succinctly puts it:

No one here ever tells us out loud that we Etonians are natural leaders: that is what the architecture is for... (Okwonga, 2021).

‘Not as yet, no,’ replied Vansittart, his upmarket accent intimidating the woman still further. ‘Although the feed is on for the Minister, Sebastian himself is not yet here.’

‘Oh, er, you know him, then?’ asked the woman in a flustered manner.

‘We’ve met at a few social functions,’ smiled Vansittart, glossing over their shared schooling and social advantages. ‘The occasional soiree.’ He paused, wondering if anyone else on the screen knew what a soiree was; they all looked like the sort to eat chips in a pub rather than attend an exclusive Garden Party. They also seemed to be somewhat uneasy, but talking to the great and the good was probably not their *métier*. Vansittart supposed there wouldn’t be much opportunity for such things out in the provinces. No wonder they all gave the appearance of a group of schoolchildren in their Sunday best. Not that he would ever say such a thing out loud, of course.⁵

‘All right, Kerry, how you doing?’ boomed a Black Country accent as another figure appeared on the shared screen.

‘All right, Jason?’ responded the newly identified Kerry.

‘All right, everyone?’ continued Jason Allen, beaming at everyone on the screen. A chorus of greetings echoed back, ranging from the enthusiastic to the polite to the pained, at least on the part of Vansittart, who was wondering how a human voice could produce such an unmelodic noise so painful upon the ears. ‘Ah, you’re Mr Vansi-tart, of Coldwell books?’ asked Jason. ‘I saw your interview in the paper, not long back.’

‘Van-sittart,’ replied Vansittart, wincing at the mutilation of his name while hastily issuing the correction. ‘Which paper was that?’

‘The Times Literary Supplement.’

‘Really?’ coughed Vansittart in surprise.

5

Strikingly aware that others may perceive them as ‘snobbish’ and ‘elitist’, [middle-class] interviewees go to lengths to downplay difference in social encounters. Such reflexive monitoring of self-presentation, we argue, constitutes a distinct Bourdieusian ‘strategy of condescension’, allowing the privileged to both benefit publically [sic] from adherence to culturally dominant norms of openness, while continuing to privately harbour private feelings of snobbery. (Jarness & Friedman, 2017).

‘Good morning, Michael, how are you?’ tally-hoed another figure as she materialised on the screen. This was Cassandra Harrison, of the Chelsea Musicology Academy.

‘Good morning, Cassandra, how are you?’ beamed Vansittart at the beautifully enunciated words of his eldest son’s ancillary headmistress, so unlike the uncouth, inarticulate hollering from “Jason”.⁶

Vansittart looked with approval at Cassandra’s glossy hair held back with a broad Alice band, cream blouse, light yellow scarf, tweed jacket and discreet make-up before his eyes slipped disapprovingly to the rest of the women visible on the screen, all of whom probably bought their clothing from supermarkets and who wore rather vivid shades of lipstick and foundation. *Less is more*, thought Vansittart, recalling his mother’s oft-repeated mantra on feminine appearance, as well as differentiating between a lady and a mere woman.

‘How are you finding all these Zoom meetings?’ hooted Cassandra, causing those who didn’t know her to adjust their volume controls in the mistaken belief the sound levels were too high. Vansittart, however, was long acclimatised to the tones of the Cheltenham Ladies’ College; almost all his mother’s friends had attended there, as had virtually all his own female friends.

‘It’s not too bad, once you get used to it,’ smiled Vansittart.⁷

⁶ Vansittart would enjoy sharing his impersonations of the man for several weeks thereafter with friends and family around various Chelsea supper tables, eliciting guffles of laughter followed by hasty assurances that no, they weren’t snobs, for that was an alien concept and quite old hat, and no one thought that way anymore, and anyway, what even is snobbery, it’s all simply rather amusing, yah?

... a considerable swathe of the nation's opinion-formers seemed to be animated... by the vexed question of snobbery... We are a nation of snobs, one or two of the stiffer commentators have deposed, and ought to be ashamed of ourselves. (Taylor, 2014).

The reader may notice how the above quote is decrying the sin of *criticising* snobbery, rather than taking issue with the snobbery itself.

⁷ Vansittart was unable to even find Zoom on his computer, never mind open it, without the aid of his wife, Heather. And when working from the Kensington Manor office, Vansittart simply relied upon the latest unpaid assistant to ready the computer for his arrival. Incidentally, should Vansittart ever have a biography written about him by a fellow member of the Orthodoxy, his marriage to Heather would be rendered as: “The union was duly solemnised in a full church wedding attended by many famous and influential names

‘I say, it’s terribly exciting, isn’t it?’ continued Cassandra as she adjusted the small but expensive earrings inherited from her grandmother, noting in distaste the huge hoops of false gold dangling from the ears of a woman in a cheap jacket and blowsy lipstick. ‘The chance to ask Seb for an extra bit of funding, yah?’

Vansittart was spared the need to reply to this sightly indiscreet revelation of their close friendship with “Seb” by the arrival of the Deputy Minister of Culture (Regions) himself on the screen, sliding into his seat and clicking his mouse before glancing at the screen. ‘Ah, are we already on?’ he asked, relieved to find his PA had already set the link up for him.

Featherstonehaugh smiled urbanely into the camera. ‘I do apologise for being a little late; just a few last details needing to be dealt with on another matter. Now, are we all here?’ He peered at his screen, giving the impression of a fish staring out of a wide tank, noting the presence of Cassandra and Vansittart before counting the other camera feeds. ‘Yes, we seem to be. Excellent.

‘Now, as is common knowledge, the government recently decided to award extra funds to certain organisations within the arts industry, as we recognise the arts are a vital part of modern Britain.’⁸

from the publishing world, a satisfactory end to a brief yet genuine courtship.” Nowhere in the Establishment pages would we discover that Heather had been Vansittart’s PA before their affair was discovered, after which the original Vansittart marriage was discreetly dissolved, the new nuptials arranged, and the painful and distressing business was thus conventionally laid to rest.

And no one ever had the ill-breeding to mention the matter out loud.

At least in Vansittart’s presence.

Unless it was done quietly.

Behind his back.

⁸ In truth, the government had only grudgingly agreed the extra funding after an article in a popular newspaper had decried the lack of support for the arts outside London, but by glancing at his notes Featherstonehaugh was able to reassure himself of the truth of his words, for the words were written down on an official document and thus they held equal – if not greater – authority than Holy Writ.

The paper in question, edited by old Etonian Finley Anthony Wolfson, had printed the opinion piece only to remind the government of the paper’s power, not because Wolfson cared in any way about the arts outside London – or indeed anywhere.

Featherstonehaugh and Wolfson had enjoyed a gentlemanly laugh about the article in the Chummo Club the following day, though Featherstonehaugh had gently pointed out the government had dropped a point in a popularity poll after the article, leading him to tactfully remind Wolfson who was actually in charge of the country (though each man knew the answer to that).

‘A sizeable allocation of funding, amounting to some three million pounds, has been earmarked for those artistic groups or organisations who, in our opinion, are doing the most for modern Britain,’ continued Featherstonehaugh, his upper lip curling into a slight sneer at the paltry sum of three million, though he reminded himself this was more money than most of the applicants in the North would see in as many as fifty lifetimes. ‘To this end, you have all submitted applications on the grounds that your own individual organisations best represent modern Britain through their artistic endeavours.’⁹

After this, Featherstonehaugh and Wolfson approved the paperwork which would ultimately divert public money into repairs for the club’s roof (both men sat on the Chummo Building’s Committee), while Featherstonehaugh later voted against funding the Acton Soup Kitchen on the grounds that feeding the poor and homeless would only encourage dependency – and in any case, the Urban Development Company had some exciting plans to use the charity site for office blocks, and as Featherstonehaugh just happened to sit on the board of the aforementioned company, the decision was a no-brainer.*

Boris Johnson was said to have been astonished that Bill Crothers, a former senior civil servant, had simultaneously worked for two months for the government and the collapsed finance company Greensill Capital. But with “double hatting” in Whitehall under intense scrutiny, awkward questions are now being directed at one of the prime minister’s closest and longest-serving allies. (Pickard & Hammond, 2021).

The “awkward questions” mentioned in the above quote don’t seem to have led anywhere in particular, by the way, such an independent enquiry or reform of governmental practices to eliminate corruption.

⁹ Featherstonehaugh privately wondered how a dance school in Nottingham could ever justify its submission, but he had to listen to the personal appeals from each applicant, as dictated by the rules, for then everything would be open, transparent, and democratic – and then he could get on with allocating the funds to Vansittart’s publishing house and Cassandra’s Musicology Academy, at which the minister’s own daughter was studying the flute every Tuesday evening and Saturday morning. And this sort of cronyism is quintessential to the upper echelons, with jobs, favours, and opportunities flowing between them:

Private health care firms with Tory links have been awarded NHS contracts worth nearly £1.5billion. Circle Health landed £1.36billion worth of health service work after several of its investors gifted about £1.5million to the Conservatives... And Care UK has contracts worth another £102.6million. Its chairman John Nash was made a peer after boosting Tory coffers by £247,250. (Lyons, 2014).

‘We have now read your written applications,’ continued

Featherstonehaugh, moistening his lips as he recalled some of the awful presentations he had encountered so far,¹⁰ ‘and now you must make a short verbal pitch for your organisations, as explained in section four, subsection three, paragraphs five to twenty-six inclusive.’

Vansittart and Cassandra nodded along, very much at their ease, in contrast to the rest of the lobbyists who all gave the appearance of being intimidated or even, astonishingly, bored by the minister’s restating of the known facts. Vansittart continued to smile and nod, showing he was participating fully in the ritual of belonging.

‘This, then, is the summation of our role and purpose here today,’ continued Featherstonehaugh, triumphantly winding up his brief (sixteen-minute) introduction. His attention had barely wandered as the oiled words rolled

And the above is, if anything, small beer compared to the staggering levels of corruption on display during the Covid19 emergency:

Of 1,200 central government contracts – worth £16bn in total – handed out by the government during the pandemic, around £8bn ultimately went to companies run by friends and associates of Tory politicians, or to those with a history of controversy or no previous experience, a recent analysis by The New York Times found. (Stone, 2020).

And in case the PhD supervisors or external assessors are wondering why I didn’t quote the above data from the direct source, i.e. the New York Times, it’s simply because I can’t afford the paywall. And unlike our political masters, I don’t have access to £16 billion cash handouts.

¹⁰ Featherstonehaugh, being an orthodox and rather dim member of the Establishment, is unable to see the connection between poor writing skills and his government’s destruction of the state education sector:

Children’s education is being eroded by financial pressures triggering staff cuts and scaled-back curriculums, with local authority-run secondary schools among the worst hit, according to parliament’s spending watchdog.

...

One in four secondary schools maintained by local authorities were in deficit in 2019/20, forcing them to cut staff, narrow the curriculum and reduce support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, it said.

In contrast, the report highlights the relative wealth of some academy trusts that have built up large reserves with a cumulative surplus of £3.1bn – money which is therefore not being spent on current pupils’ education, the report points out. (Weale, 2022).

smoothly along, though thoughts of his discreet mistress did intrude once or twice. ‘As well as justifying your organisation, and your organisation’s role in the community, you must also show how the funding will be used to the benefit of all of Britain. As such, I now call upon you all to make your pitches, starting with Kerry Turner.’ He peered suspiciously at the poor people on his screen, wondering if they were articulate enough to give any form of understandable answer.

‘Oh, er, right, thanks, Mr, er, Mr Feather-Stone-Huff,’ stuttered Kerry. ‘We at the Turner Dance School in Nottingham have worked for years in helping local kids get into dance, as it’s a great way for them to learn new things and, er.’ Kerry’s confidence fled under the supercilious gaze of the wealthy elite, causing her to falter over the notes hidden on her lap. ‘And, er, meet new things, I mean new people, and learn things, like dance, er, and meet new dancers.’

‘Yes,’ drawled Featherstonehaugh, the faintest hint of a well-bred sneer appearing around his full lips at the mispronunciation of his name, the uneducated voice, and the idea there were any dance institutions worth watching outside London. The minister had his family ticket for the English National Ballet, (always claimed back on expenses – and rightly, too, in his opinion – as he attended not as a private individual but as the face of the whole Government), and as such, he knew what good dancing was. ‘And how does this benefit the country as a whole?’

‘Er, well, I suppose giving local lads and girls a way off the streets is good for everyone, isn’t it?’ wavered Kerry. ‘It helps the community, doesn’t it? Getting kids off streets, getting them meeting new people, making friends and that?’

‘Thank you,’ murmured Featherstonehaugh before glancing at the man in the top left of the screen. ‘You are next, Mr Jason Allen; you represent the Black Country Poetry Press, yes?’

‘Ar, that’s right,’ said Jason, his colloquial response and broad accent provoking a fleeting wince on Featherstonehaugh’s face. ‘The press was founded back in 1987, to give a voice to Black Country poets who was being discouraged from trying poetry by schools and polytechnics who all pushed the line that writing and creativity wasn’t for the likes of us.’

‘Indeed,’ said Featherstonehaugh, making a small cross on his paperwork; he could not comprehend how anyone with that sort of uneducated persona could ever appreciate true poetry, the beautiful form of Shakespeare and Shelley and Spenser. *It would be a positive boon to literature*, he thought, *if the Black Country Poetry Press collapsed forthwith*. ‘Thank you, Mr Allen,’ he smiled, tuning back into the meeting as he saw the low-born lips finish moving. ‘And now you, Mrs Sheena Griffith, of Newcastle Amateur Theatricals.’

Featherstonehaugh glanced down at his notes, giving an excellent impression of deep concentration, though he had no need to focus here, at least; Newcastle was a marginal seat and a byelection was looming, so the promise of funding would be publicly pushed forward.

Hopefully, that would be enough to swing support their way. The minister certainly didn’t want to have to visit the place. No doubt it was full of people living in squalid flats and small terraced houses, and who spent each evening drinking brown ale in some awful local pub. He really couldn’t understand why anyone chose to live that way.

Featherstonehaugh nodded and smiled and grimaced on automatic pilot as each applicant made their case for the funding until finally, just as his secret doodle of his mistress’ breasts was nearing completion, there were just two applications left. ‘Thank you. And now over to you, Mr Vansittart, of Clavier and Coldwell Publishing.’

‘Thank you, Mr Fanshaw,’ purred Vansittart, correctly pronouncing Featherstonehaugh’s name and thus eliciting a nod of approval from the minister, as well as a series of uneasy blushes from the other participants.

‘Now, as you know, Clavier and Coldwell was founded in 1931 on the back of the Bloomsbury movement, with a commitment to finding the best artistic voices who understood the essential need for truth and decency in society.’¹¹

¹¹ Here, Vansittart is ignoring how this commitment to high art owed more to cultural snobbery than anything else, for Clavier and Coldwell were both very conscious of their own social status. And that of everyone else. And this refusal to believe that anyone beneath the upper-middle-class was worth reading had seen the business fail to make a profit for years, eventually resulting in the original owners selling up in alarm as their family wealth gurgled down the drain of socio-literary snobbery. Note that Vansittart is

‘With this in mind, and in order to qualify for the most generous allocation of funding from the government, I have determined the best way we can serve the community is by *inspiring* the community. As such, we plan to launch an initiative aimed at all writers for a brand new, innovative retelling of the greatest hero this land has ever produced; we are seeking a new biography of Winston Churchill!’ Vansittart smiled as he laid down his trump card, for he had no fears on Seb being in any way displeased with the truly original proposal.¹²

‘What an excellent idea!’ enthused Featherstonehaugh. ‘Churchill was as much an inspiration and unifying figure then as he is now, no doubt about that!’¹³ Oh, and do you both have a commitment to equality in all areas of your business?’ he asked of Cassandra and Vansittart, poised to tick off another box and completely forgetting the existence of the other applicants

glossing over this inconvenient fact even in his own mind, for it does not fit easily the Establishment narrative of posh people always being open-minded and successful.

12

One bibliographer cataloged [sic] twenty-six biographies published in Churchill’s lifetime; another, thirty-six between Churchill’s death in 1965 and the end of the 20th century... The 21st century has seen no diminution. (Freeman, 2015).

13

A university academic [Professor Richard Toye] has questioned the accepted view that Winston Churchill’s WWII speeches inspired the nation at a time of crisis.

...

He said the earlier speeches were "by no means universally acclaimed".

He also said many people thought the Prime Minister was drunk during his famous "finest hour" broadcast.

...

He said the complexity of the public reaction had been obscured from historical record by the power of a treasured national myth. (BBC, 2013).

And with regards to Churchill being a unifying figure today:

A statue of Winston Churchill was sprayed with graffiti during recent protests in London, with claims that the former prime minister was racist. (BBC, 2020).

for the funding. ‘You do consider NINeW¹⁴ – that is, Non-Indigenous and Non-White persons – in your hiring processes?’

‘Oh, yes!’ hooted Cassandra. ‘Why, we interviewed three people only last week for the post of caretaker, and we are giving serious consideration to giving the job to a Mr Samuels, who is West Indian. His family came over here just after the war, apparently.’

‘And you, Michael – Mr Vansittart?’ murmured Featherstonehaugh. ‘You also employ an NINeW?’

‘We do, for we are a truly diverse and inclusive organisation,’¹⁵ beamed Vansittart in multicultural pride. ‘After all, a publishing house has a duty to be a reflection of society,’ he continued with genuine sincerity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pronounced “Nin-ooH”. Featherstonehaugh was able to smoothly and professionally insert the latest governmental placebo to inclusivity into the proceedings, despite his private contempt for the acronym and the people it covered – though his feelings were, naturally enough, buried deeply under layers of plausible deniability. He knew how to play the game.

¹⁵ Vansittart’s sincerity was coupled with a total lack of self-awareness; his “diverse and inclusive organisation” consisted of just one Black teenager who worked on the voluntary (i.e. unpaid) intern programme. And this was only as a grudging favour to the girl’s mother, an old neighbour and casual acquaintance, who overheard Vansittart talking loudly about the internship programme while queuing in the post office. Vansittart, upon turning and realising Mrs Jones had heard the entire conversation, could not avoid the suggestion that maybe her own daughter could benefit from the scheme. And this is the closest Yvonne, who we will meet properly in the next chapter’s final footnote, will ever get to the Establishment – and its practice of handing out opportunities to its own kind.

¹⁶ The Clavier and Coldwell publishing list was indeed a reflection of Vansittart’s society, for almost all his authors were white, middle-class, and Oxbridge-educated, with only a few token non-white authors included for reasons of public relations rather than genuine commitment to the whole community (see also Chapter Eighteen). Vansittart would have found the idea that creativity is a luxury of privilege to be utterly incomprehensible, and yet:

Writing is a career in which opportunities are currently far greater for those from privileged backgrounds. Pay gaps in relation to social class identity, gender identity, ethnicity and geographic region are greater in a writing career than in employment outside it. (Royal Society of Literature, 2019).

And to put these sorts of figures into a real-world context, working-class author Kit de Waal notes that:

...to survive as a writer, there’s got to be money coming in from somewhere else, not just writing. You need a partner or another job... It puts a limit on the pool of people who can consider writing

‘Excellent,’ smirked Featherstonehaugh as he ticked the relevant boxes on his paperwork, going over the light marks he had placed there that morning for Cassandra’s Musicology Academy, (which would benefit the whole nation as the well-connected students would undoubtedly be heard in the near future on the BBC), Clavier and Coldwell Publishing, (which would soon benefit the nation by the publication of their new biography of the greatest Englishmen ever), and the Newcastle thing. He wasn’t quite sure how this last would benefit the nation, but he’d get one of his assistants to fill in that part of the form before submitting it.

Featherstonehaugh nodded. This was when he enjoyed his work the most; in maintaining tradition and excellence across the land.¹⁷

as a profession.... For many working-class people, that isn’t often an option.” (Flood, 2019).

¹⁷ The power, huge salary, vast expenses, and constant networking opportunities were, Featherstonehaugh reassured himself, mere irrelevances. After all, he had gone into politics to help people. That he helped himself first, his peers second, and no-one third, was a truth never allowed to cross his complacent mind, for he truly believed himself to be a Great Man of History.*

*The ‘Great Man’ theory, and its immense popularity with the Establishment, needs some explanation, and here is as good a place as any, what with Featherstonehaugh believing himself to be one. Thomas Carlyle and his 1840 lectures, later adapted into a single published volume *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, seems to bear much of the responsibility for the modern approach to the Great Man concept as Carlyle demonstrates an inherent need to be deferential to a higher authority, which may go some way to explaining the trope’s popularity with the Establishment:

One comfort is, that Great Men, taken up in any way, are profitable company. We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him. He is the living light-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I say, of native original insight, of manhood and heroic nobleness;—in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them. On any terms whatsoever, you will not grudge to wander in such neighborhood for a while. (Carlyle, 2012).

Thankfully, Villanova University is able to offer a far pithier summation of the Great Man trope, consisting of two basic components:

- Great leaders are born possessing certain traits that enable them to rise and lead.
 - Great leaders can arise when the need for them is great.
- (Villanova University, 2022).

This would appear to describe Churchill perfectly – at least as far as his supporters are concerned, given they believe Churchill and only Churchill could have taken control of the UK and guided us to victory:

No other British leader in the spring of 1940 could have kept Britain in the war. World War I's heroic leader, David Lloyd George, who admired Hitler, was ready to lead a collaborationist government, just as France's hero, Henri Pétain, actually did, when France sued for peace that June. (Forbes, 2014).

The clear narrative being pressed here is that Great Men are Good Things, and thus we see the importance of the Great Man theory to the Establishment; against such narratives presented above, any questions against Great Men become encoded as unpatriotic, socialist, and just plain wrong. And this is most likely the point; if “we” all share a narrative of “our heroes” and “our way of life” that has been inculcated from birth onwards via home, school, books, films, the workplace, the media etc, then any questions against these narratives become difficult to contemplate, and even more difficult to say out loud – especially in a society predicated to culturally mocking and browbeating:

Today's rhetoric that the nation single-handedly defeated Nazism does disservice to the thousands of soldiers from the empire and fuels dangerous ideas of British superiority

...

To challenge these myths is to risk being accused of hating Britain, yet for decades historians have been pushing back, offering critical analysis of the conflict that complicates simplistic narratives, introducing inconvenient facts and often unwelcome nuance. More recently scholars of the war have taken on the myth that explains why the imperial aspects of the war are so poorly remembered. (Olusoga, 2019).

When this mental outlook has been landscaped onto the population, the result is that any alternative voice – be it a historian challenging the narrative, a writer asking questions, a philosopher questioning the very framing of our beliefs, or an outsider with their own separate articles of faith – will be viewed by the indoctrinated population as a discordant element to be rejected. See the entirety of footnote #154 on the power of conformity, and consider this observation from cultural historian, PhD holder and University Challenge victor, Hannah Rose Woods:

Writing a history book that has something new to say about the past used to be a normal thing to do. Now, according to the government and a swathe of the national media, it is apparently a sinister attempt to ‘rewrite history’ and discredit Britain in the present, and we would do better to realign ourselves with the official narrative that Britain's past is a seamless roll call of glittering triumphs and inspirations... and other less glorious episodes that we don't need to think about because it was ‘just how things were’ at the time. Not only this, but they tell us we can only find our way as a nation again if we ‘rediscover... the dynamism of the bearded Victorians’, or summon up the ‘buccaneering’, ‘swashbuckling’ spirit of Elizabethan explorers and nineteenth-century free traders. (Woods, 2022).

And thus the Establishment is protected and perpetuates itself, for those who disagree will be crushed under the cogs of the cultural cavalcade, even if they're merely saying something fairly obvious such as “Why are our Government leaders mostly made up of

the pre-existing elite who are continually given opportunities denied to the rest of us?" or "our media is owned by wealthy capitalists who all seem very friendly with the top levels of government, can we trust them to tell us the truth?"

The persistence of the Great Man theory can therefore be put down to its sociological usefulness. First and foremost, it is an excellent means of cultural control, keeping society quiet and compliant. Louis Althusser notes that "the State (and its existence in its apparatus) has no meaning except as a function of State power" (Althusser, 1970). Or to put it another way; the state is not a means to an end but the end in itself, concerned with its own preservation rather than any other purpose, i.e. promoting genuine equality, opportunities for all etc. Althusser identifies two factors in state oppression: the Ideological State Apparatus and the Repressive State Apparatus (ISA and RSA for short):

What distinguishes the ISAs from the (Repressive) State Apparatus is the following basic difference: the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function 'by ideology'. (Ibid).

The idea of an Ideological State Apparatus maps onto the central point of this thesis – the use of Myth to enforce hegemonized subjugation upon the public. And Althusser notes almost *all* institutions are inherently Ideological State Apparatuses, for they all enforce codes of indoctrinated ideological beliefs concerning acceptable behaviour, beliefs, thoughts etc, via their cultural practices:

"Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family.... The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship, among other things), etc." (Ibid).

The ISA of Churchillian Mythology is clear to behold; Churchill as Hero is the dominant ideological discourse and all other views (concerning Churchill's racism, imperialism, corruption etc) must be attacked and devalued as being false, unacceptable, and even dangerous, for if people suddenly started questioning the Myth, they could then go on to question all of society's assumptions and workings. Hence the hysterical headline; "Why are the Left's woke warriors so desperate to destroy Winston Churchill? Because if the West's greatest hero can be made to fall, they can force anything on us" (Murray, 2022). Murray's view offers an insight into the right-wing hatred of immigrants, lefties, progressives etc, for immigrants, lefties, and progressives are not invested in "our" (i.e. the Establishment's) myths, and thus they may be difficult to control, for they will have their own views on history, society, and the basics of right and wrong. And so the Great Man becomes a prop to keep the Elite in power, for if the masses believe in the Great Man, they will also believe in the other myths perpetuating the status quo, such as the dangers of foreigners, the Greatness of "our" past, the impropriety of asking questions, and the glorious future that awaits us as long as we return to a "golden" past when things were supposedly better. And in this, the current ruling Establishment is no different to its forebears, with Miroslav Hroch noting that a large part in the formation of nationalism:

...in the nineteenth century was the conflict between new university graduates coming from a non-dominant ethnic group, and a closed elite from the ruling nation keeping a hereditary grip on leading positions in state and society. (Hroch, 1996).

Hroch also had this observation to make on the national(istic) state: "Karl Deutch long ago remarked that for national consciousness to arise, there must be something for it to become conscious of." (Hroch, 1996). This fits extraordinarily neatly with England's post-

war creation of its Finest Hour myth when we – and we alone – stood up to the Nazi tyranny and saved the entire world, a myth repackaged down the generations until it has become reality:

Fundamental to the way the war is now remembered is the idea that between 1940 and 1941 Britain “stood alone”. The myth of national isolation is particularly potent because it is one of the central pillars of the broader fantasy of British exceptionalism, a delusion that can only be maintained by wilful historical amnesia. (Olusoga, 2019).

Returning to the Great Man myth and why it continues to grip the Establishment so firmly, we must turn our attention to the egotistical narcissism of the Establishment – for a belief in the general theory of the Great Man seems to entwine neatly with the specific belief of their own Individual Greatness. Certainly, the fictional Vansittart and Featherstonehaugh both feel they have worked hard for, and thoroughly deserve, their success, and neither man has any patience with alternative historical theories such as the ‘grassroots’ or ‘history from below’ approach. But then, as noted by E.J. Hobsbawm:

Most history in the past was written for the glorification of, and perhaps for the practical use of, rulers. Indeed certain kinds of it still have this function... Not only are they about people like themselves, and activities like the one they are engaged in, but they are about eminent practitioners of their own trade... (Hobsbawm, 1988).

This remark is as true now as it was then – at least as far as one Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson is concerned. And yes, it was inevitable we would eventually have to face Johnson, his life, privilege, ambition, and Churchill biography/panegyric, *The Churchill Factor*. This tome, published in 2014 while Johnson was the Mayor of London, was regarded even by the Establishment as being an opening shot of Johnson’s own ambition to one day be (crowned?) the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and thus be lauded as a Great Man:

The element of self-identification in Johnson’s project is too obvious to ignore. Here is a maverick Tory politician, endowed in equal measure with fierce ambition, immense self-confidence and wide-ranging intellectual inquisitiveness; a man endowed with many obvious advantages in the great race of life, not only through innate aptitude but also through social privilege in his upbringing; a public figure with a populist touch that gives him brand-name recognition with the electorate. (Clarke, 2014).

However, the quote above is merely an indulgent observation rather than a real critique, for the rest of the article by Oxbridge alumnus Peter Clarke quickly settles down to offer an easy ride to the Establishment’s not-very-wayward son, noting how Johnson’s writing style is “a jocular sanitisation of anything that now sounds politically incorrect, again clearing Churchill’s reputation, this time in the court of public opinion in the 21st century. (Ibid)

When the critic spends his time gushing over the style of the book, rather than digging into the actual content, then something has gone very wrong – at least academically, though not when judged by the ‘standards’ of the Establishment. But then, Clarke does seem to be an enthusiastic groupie of Johnson, for “Johnson has not only celebrated Churchill in this book: he has emulated him with comparable panache.” (Ibid). Clearly, Johnson feels there is a certain quality needed to be a Great Man, and he uses this to spread (and further) his traditionalist right-wing views, attacking any opposing

viewpoint to Establishment orthodoxy – note the bog-standard invocation of Marxism into the discourse:

[Churchill] is the resounding human rebuttal to all Marxist historians who think history is the story of vast and impersonal economic forces. The point of the Churchill Factor is that one man can make all the difference. (Johnson, 2014).

The idea of nuance or an all-encompassing approach to the known facts, followed by a vigorous sifting and analysis of the material to come to a fair and unbiased conclusion, is almost entirely absent from Johnson's Establishment approach, or indeed Johnsons' Establishment worldview:

...the biographer had better avoid any oversimplified theory of historical development. The individual makes history; so does chance; so do social forces... Each of us makes decisions that influence the lives of others; each is controlled and limited by the world we live in; each is affected by the caprice of fortune. It is the biographer's job to determine the relative importance of each factor throughout his subject's career. (Garraty, 1957).

In short, *The Churchill Factor* is a paean to the Establishment, tradition, and not changing things, with Johnson adopting a jocular, stereotypical, deniably-racist 'chap-of-the-old-school' tone – "The French generals cut pathetic figures – white-haired dodderers in their Clouseau-like kepsis" (ibid) – to impart the 'golly gosh!' nature of Churchill's Greatness, while glossing over any awkwardness with a constant burbling flow of Wodehousian words:

It is unquestionably true that Churchill loved war... without war he knew there could be no glory... He knew how war and its risks had lifted men and painted everyday deeds with fame. That was why, as a young man, he had plunged himself so headlong into battle – while watching the newspaper accounts out of the corner of his eye. (Ibid).

And here we reach the final reason for the Establishment's adherence to the Great Man theory; as justification for their appalling behaviour. Johnson makes use of what could be termed the 'Mythic Fault'; if forced to criticise your hero, do so in a manner which reinforces their Brobdingnagian character, thus bolstering their 'higher' status of being above the mortal herd. Many who criticise Churchill over specific issues do so through this 'prism of greatness', thus emphasising the Mythic nature of the man and excusing his mistakes/flaws as being almost beneath notice:

Churchill was a great man who made enormous mistakes. Churchill's gigantic mistakes include the Bengal Famine in World II and the Gallipoli Campaign in World War I. Conversely, Churchill's greatest peace time mistake; returning the United Kingdom to the gold standard was more destructive than his wartime blunders. To explain, the Gold Standard's damage went on for several years and affected many more people than WSC's wartime mistakes. In contrast, both the Gallipoli Campaign and the Bengal Famine ended after a few months. (Jennings, 2021).

As so the Greatness of the Great Man is emphasised, keeping him in the realm of the Gods and thus beyond all mortal criticism – a useful absolution seen also in the excessive pay of the Establishment's corporate world, for CEOs are working in "a system that rests

on the Great Man theory of history: a school of thought that attributes virtually all important developments through time to heroic individuals.” (Koehn, 2014).

And Johnson, it seems safe to say, clearly thought he was the next Great Man. Indeed, on reading *The Churchill Factor*, it seems that whenever Johnson gazes into Churchill, he sees only himself. Though to be fair, it’s hard not to note the similarities between Churchill and Johnson. Both were born into privilege, both were lazy at school, both ruthlessly used their social and personal contacts to get ahead, (Johnson, shortly after leaving university, was given “a plum job in journalism, assisted by formidable family connections” (Purnell, 2019) while Churchill leaned on his mother, who in turn leaned on (or under) several influential men in order to get her son preferential treatment:

Thanks to some nifty lobbying by his mother (who is said to have used all her resources of feminine charm to bend the generals to her will) he got himself a billet, two years later, with the Malakand Field Force... (Johnson, 2014).

Returning to Johnson; his chance of demonstrating his supposed greatness came when Britain was under attack from the Covid pandemic, in which he had the chance to lead wisely by making hard decisions while maintaining a sense of morality and decency. And his actual response? Summarising Michael Head’s main points in *The Conversation*, (a self-proclaimed – and no doubt doomed – attempt to create genuinely independent journalism), Johnson’s failures included inadequacies in terms of preparation, missing emergency meetings, ignorance of pre-existing simulations and responses which could have proved essential, shoddy deals to source equipment and tracking systems, refusal to listen to experts, failure to keep promises, and breaking his own lockdown rules. (Head, 2022). And that’s before we reach the £16 billion of Covid contracts awarded to Conservative friends and donors, as mentioned in footnote #9.

Johnson could have gone down as the Prime Minister who guided the country through a time of fear and danger – but then, with a majority of eighty seats, he could have reformed Britain into a genuine meritocracy free of politicians who can be bought and controlled by vested interests. But he didn’t. Meaning what came after was exactly what came before in government:

Research from Byline Times suggests that [Conservative Party] donors with a background in banking, property and energy now form a major chunk of the party’s patrons – groups that are currently benefitting from Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s agenda in office. (Bright, 2022).

That overprivileged public school elitists who have everything handed to them should come to believe they are Great and Destined for Further Greatness is hardly a surprise. And neither is it a surprise they have every chance to get to the top, given they again have access to the people, social structures, and opportunities that can get them there, which in essence is the whole point of this novel; that Churchill and his class were/are not that great, but simply had/have the opportunities (denied to others) to acquire the public façade of greatness. Though the Establishment seems to be permanently unaware of this, and instead believe that they are, one and all, Great Men: “There is always someone in the Tory Party who believes that they are the one who can lead everyone to the promised land.” (Kuenssberg, 2022).

But if this is the case, how are we to approach history in general, as well as biography in particular? After all, it was once held that history was, so to speak, a solid block of coal, from which knowledge (dates, people, events etc) could be hewn. Now, however, things are known to be different:

“History” was considered to be a specific mode of existence,
“historical consciousness” a distinctive mode of thought, and

“historical knowledge” an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.

In the twentieth century, however, considerations of these questions have been undertaken in a somewhat less self-confident mood ... Continental European thinkers... have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically “historical” consciousness, stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions, and challenged history’s claims among the Sciences. (White, 2014).

White’s observation on the “fictive character of historical reconstructions” forms the backbone of the myth of Churchillian Myth, which is constructed and sustained through articles and biographies largely controlled by Establishment performers with a vested interest in keeping things as they are, all of whom serve up their version (or illusion) of the truth in an eternal cycle of self-serving reflexivity.

Churchill is thus an excellent micro-example of modern-day cultural mythology, for his image appears to be a deliberate construct that has appeared almost perpetually since the end of World War II, hence ‘Churchill the man’ has been rendered over the years into ‘Churchill the Myth’. And this myth bleeds into England’s national identity and perceptions concerning its (real and fictitious) past which thus forms its (real and fictitious) present:

While Thatcher is recent enough that the battles about her time in office are well remembered, Churchill – equally controversial in his era – has been turned into the guard dog of Anglo-British nationalism, the hero in the mythical national story. (Ramsay, 2020).

And Churchill himself helped create this modern version of England, a smaller, meaner, inward-looking place of grey bigotry:

Churchill is the founding father of modern Anglo-Britain. His radio broadcasts over the course of World War Two shifted from addressing an imperial ‘we’ to an archipelagic ‘we’, reinventing Britishness as located not across millions of square miles of colony, but in these North Atlantic islands.

His personal story is the story of modern British nationalism – the gassing of Kurds, the starving of Bengalis, the Mau Mau concentration camps; and the defeating of European fascism, the post-war rebuilding, the famous qualified defence of democracy. (Ramsay, 2020).

Thus, nationalism and the Great Man dovetail neatly into Churchill the man and Churchill the Myth, and demonstrates how both are essential parts of the Establishment as prime cultural weapons to keep the masses compliant and powerless.

So, does the Great Man theory have any validity as a concept? Academically and historically, the answer appears to be “no”. The theory seemingly rests on a mixture of wish-fulfilment, personal projection, and perhaps one of the greatest flaws of the human race, unthinking deference, while the real benefit of the theory, at least for the Establishment, lies in keeping the population quiet and biddable, for the blanket acceptance of the Great Man Myth helps erase the individual’s ability to think critically, to question, or to even know there are questions to be asked, resulting in a compliant society unable to even see the chains binding them, never mind break those chains. And as such, the Great Man theory acts as an effective means of control to help prevent any genuine change or progress for those outside the elite.

Chapter Two

Having set up the story in the previous chapter, we should perhaps now set the scene also, to give the reader some idea of the world they are now inhabiting:

The realist novel needs, obviously, a genuine community : [sic] a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship—work or friendship or family—but many, interlocking kinds. It is obviously difficult, in the twentieth century, to find a community of this sort.
(Williams, 1988).

And it's even more difficult in the twenty-first century, now we've gone digital, but I shall do my best, and as such we now proceed to:

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In which the narrator of the footnotes temporarily sets up shop on the main page in order to give this lengthy and somewhat ornate description of Clavier and Coldwell House, for while in practical terms it's a simple building in which our main characters lose their basic humanity in serving both mammon and social expectation, it is also a symbol representing the world of Vansittart and his ilk, meaning the house of privilege must serve a dual purpose within the narrative. Or in this chapter, anyway.

Also, the description of the house, in line with its sociological and marketable value, is embedded into the chapter. In contrast, the full introduction of our main character, a young Black woman without social contacts or Establishment levels of wealth, will be relegated to a footnote because she isn't – in society's terms – anyone important.

But to resume:

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Also, before we get going, I should mention this descriptor of a place is one of the very few to be found in this book, (and it exists here only to prove I can write such things), for this is a novel about the people of England, not the places of England. It is about the conceptual spaces we carry around in our heads, not the geographical spaces we live in. And so:

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“It... was an old fashioned house—the sort of house in fact, as Strange expressed it, which a lady in a novel might like to be persecuted in.”

Susanna Clarke, Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell

Actually, I will just briefly defer the next thrilling instalment to point out that using a quote at the beginning of a chapter is a tradition used by writers to show “that an author has done the homework necessary to write with authority.” (Crumm, 2018). It’s the literary equivalent of posing on the beach in your swimming trunks, flexing your muscles in the hope of appealing to busty blondes in bikinis. Ideally, the excerpt should be from the classics (Dickens, Shakespeare, Trollope etc) though an extract presented in the original Greek/Latin/French/Scandinavian Camel Trumpeting is equally desirable – especially if there is no accompanying translation. Back in the old days, it could take hours of scouring *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (or similar) to find a suitable passage. Today, a quick search on the Internet brings up innumerable suggestions within seconds. Such as the one above, from Susanna Clarke. Which also explains why I haven’t referenced it in the usual way, as it isn’t drawn from Clarke’s book itself but is instead second-hand from the Internet.

But anyway:

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Built sometime in the 1750s as two separate dwellings but later joined into one, 34 Paradise Road, Kensington Manor, is a four-level construction of

hope and confidence¹⁸ which appears to have stood firm against the passing armies of time, for the house has changed little – at least externally – within living memory. True, the centrally placed front door is a late addition, as are the accompanying respectable white pillars on either side, but all seem to be in keeping with the original design – including the double-glazed windows peering down at the busy main road which links the town hall, the library, the police station and, in one nod to modernity, the tube station (built 1927, extended 1967, haughtily referred to by the locals as “the pit”).

Those allowed entry through the door find within a wide hallway with two reception rooms on either side, now utilised as the general office and board room respectively, the latter of which remains largely unchanged since 1931 and contains a large dark wood table, eight matching chairs, and twin portraits of the original founders of the business, Reginald Clavier and Tarquin Coldwell. (Clavier and Coldwell, incidentally, sold out to Harrison Humphries, who in turn sold out to Charles Donahue, and finally Donahue sold out to the Vansittart family who were riding high on trade while fervently wishing for respectability, hence four generations later we arrive at Michael. He keeps the portraits for the sake of tradition, as well as for the tone they add to the room and thus the business, a consideration especially useful when meeting important clients).

The opposing office, in contrast, is made up of cheap flatpack furniture, several examples of rickety shelving sagging under the weight of hundreds of box files and thousands of books, and a few second-hand office chairs. Although this office abuts onto the kitchen, the staff are strongly discouraged from entering therein, and indeed Vansittart has gone as far as providing the office with a tiny galley area to keep the main kitchen free from outside contamination.

The kitchenette consists of a miniscule sink, barely large enough to hold the single dripping tap used for filling the office kettle, (possible only if the

¹⁸ In what way is the house a construction of hope and confidence? Hope and confidence on whose part? The town planners? The builder? The first owner? Beware passages such as these, for not only are they built on the strata of social assumptions, but they corral the reader into the enclosure of predetermined conclusions. See also histories, bibliographies, articles etc.

kettle is held at an angle approaching 90 degrees), while a small, mildewed fridge just about allows the storage of one carton of milk, two bottles of juice, and a few modest lunch boxes.

Upstairs is little different in that three of the four bathrooms are strictly out of bounds to the staff, as are the five bedrooms, for Vansittart instinctively knows, as did his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather before him, that strict lines of demarcation are required in any successful endeavour, for that is the way of the world.

(The bathrooms are in any case virtually inaccessible owing to the innumerable boxes of books shoved into each room in defiance of the fire insurance policy relating to the storing of flammable material. The bedrooms are likewise used for storage, and are similarly impenetrable to all except the most agile who can contort themselves through the hundreds of boxes containing an entire library of remaindered books which represent a dusty archive of Vansittart's bad business decisions, poor management, bad timing but also, on more than one occasion, pure bad luck in the publishing world).

And here ends the tour of Clavier and Coldwell Publishing.¹⁹

¹⁹ And here begins the unofficial tour. To Vansittart, the house represents his heritage, his family, and his place in the world. It also represents his security, both ideologically and financially. Alas, the property doesn't sit on weakened foundations or suffer from drastic subsidence, but then, a metaphor can only be carried so far before it falls under the strain of disbelief, meaning there can be no gothic collapse of the building (and all it represents) at the end of the novel. Though the plaque on the front door is, it is true, somewhat stained around the four rusty screws holding it in place, so there at least we can find an artistic display of the moral decay to be found within.

To Yvonne Jones, the young Black woman sitting in the office and whose lot in life is dealing with the mundane aspects of the business such as sorting junk mail and cleaning the bathrooms, the house represents the first step in her desired literary career; Yvonne is the volunteer mentioned in chapter one, working for no pay in order to break into the publishing world. (And see the following chapter for further details on Yvonne's ambitions; for now, we must contextualise her existence via a laborious backstory).

Given the unconscious prejudices and assumptions running through *Clavier and Coldwell*, the reader may be wondering how a young Black teenager is able to take an unpaid post there and survive. The reason is simple; Yvonne has relatively wealthy parents who happen to know Vansittart by virtue of living down the road from him.

Barry and Gloria Jones set up a childcare day centre in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of London in the 1990s, taking advantage of the nursery funding offered by New Labour for four-year-olds, then set up another centre and ultimately followed this up with five more, all still serving the poorest areas until Barry and Gloria were able to divest themselves of the business, as well as their old friends and neighbours, by selling up and moving into a wealthy (white) area.

Barry and Gloria found their new neighbours warmly welcoming as the community publicly embraced the Jones' to their collective bosom – albeit while holding them at arm's length, especially if the door to the silver cabinet was unlocked when the Black family came round for a visit. One of these neighbours was Vansittart himself, meaning it was through the established British method of social connections rather than merit that Yvonne's mother found out (albeit accidentally) about the voluntary scheme at *Clavier and Coldwell* designed (so Vansittart had it) for young people to learn about publishing from the bottom up. (In truth, the opportunity has more to do with Vansittart's cost-cutting than anything else).

And if the reader considers this to be a clumsy literary contrivance to place an outsider (Black, no social contacts, no Oxbridge networking, no generational wealth, or social breeding) on the inside of our *mise-en-scène* – well, they are probably right. But then, Yvonne would never get this close in real life:

The heads of the “big five” publishing houses (soon, perhaps, to become the “big four”) are white. So are 85 percent of the people who acquire and edit books, according to a 2019 survey. “There’s a correlation between the number of people of color who work in publishing and the number of books that are published by authors of color,” said Tracy Sherrod, the editorial director of Amistad, an imprint of HarperCollins that is focused on Black literature. (So & Wezerek, 2020).

Mind you, the astute reader may also notice there is absolutely no representation of poor or working-class characters in this volume at all. And that's because the poor and working classes can't get close to the cultural/political elite even in a work of fiction:

The level of income inequality in the UK means that high earners can protect their position and that of their children by buying education, assets and advantage. The ladder that might offer a way up for those on low incomes is effectively kicked away. The only way to improve equality of opportunity and outcome is to shorten the ladder in the first place. (Lawlor, et al., 2009).

But to return to the footnote. Vansittart was genuinely delighted to have Yvonne aboard, though not for any intrinsic qualities of her own; rather, Yvonne's presence meant Vansittart could congratulate himself on his impeccable cosmopolitan credentials in having a Black face around the place. In short, Yvonne unknowingly became the public face of Vansittart's ethno-credibility.

Having read all the above, the reader may be forgiven for thinking Yvonne is going to be our identifying character, the person we can cheer for as the work progresses, living vicariously through her innate integrity, experiencing her hope when she rises and experiencing a cathartic sense of safe proxy grief (for this is only fiction, after all) when she falls. Alas, this is a work of bitter fiction based on the misery of reality in which hardly anyone can be laudable or even nice, and hence our central character is also problematic; Yvonne herself is deeply prejudiced.

Despite having suffered from many racist incidents and attitudes over the years, Yvonne still actively detests Indians and Pakistanis (who she considers to be one and the same) for their supposed laziness, dirtiness, and religious extremism. She has been challenged (off page) on this bigotry and yet she sees no paradox, no immorality, and no hypocrisy in her attitude, for the character of “the Indians/Muslims” are (supposedly) well known to all. And on the rare occasion Yvonne has been pressed further, she has made use of the argument that racism is not the false belief “that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race” (Merriam-Webster, 2021) but is instead *only* to be defined:

...as a power structure that allows one group to put a system in place where they use their race to direct discrimination against people of different race based on the belief that their own race is superior (Woods, 2020).

Or, as former student union diversity officer put it after she was criticised for excluding white males from an event:

"I, an ethnic minority woman, cannot be racist or sexist towards white men, because racism and sexism describes structures of privilege based on race and gender.
"And therefore women of colour and minority genders cannot be racist or sexist because we do not stand to benefit from such a system..." (Mustafa, 2015).

This revelation does risk causing the novel's main character to lose sympathy with the readers, but this does raise the issue of how people in general can be messy and complicated, with bigots revealing unexpected kindness and empathy, (at least within certain sociological groupings), or pleasant, easy-going people unexpectedly demonstrating inhumane views:

Racists can be nice, kind, considerate, polite, intelligent, thoughtful, perhaps principled. In some instances, they even end up as your friends, at least until that shocking revelation that they hold your cousins in contempt not to mention the whole lineage from which you are descended. (Wu, 2020)

There is, however, no great revelation or solution be given, for bigotry is complex and any solutions offered toward it are flawed from the very beginning:

The reason... we prefer a stark, symbolic Black-and-White narrative of villains and victims is it offers us a remedy. We are promised progress if we eliminate the former to exalt the latter. The rest of us are not only comforted but also excused. If we are neither villain nor victim, we are bystanders both innocent and privileged. (Ibid).

Is the validity of the book destroyed because I have no solution to the sort of bigotry mentioned above? Has the hypothetical reader lost sympathy for the novel's main character? Is the concerned reader now pondering the ethics of the author – a white, male, middle-aged failure from the West Midlands – creating and using a character like Yvonne, i.e. a young, Black, London-born woman from a much wealthier background? Is the novel worthless if it centres on a character outside the author's own experience? Does the fact that Yvonne's worldview has been partially adapted from two real-life sources, a Black woman I met some twenty years ago who hated Indians, coupled with an actual statement of belief from a former diversity officer, make any difference? Does the need for intersectional works demonstrating how every outsider is being screwed by the elite override the issues of authentic authorship? Or is there even any such thing as authenticity?

This last question needs careful consideration, especially as Yvonne's thoughts and experiences are, in effect, wiped from (by) the dominant Establishment narrative and are instead relegated to the footnotes. But even here we glean very little, for Yvonne (as a character) is *representative* rather than *authentic*, and in any case, some will believe it is impossible for the narrator of the footnotes, i.e. me, to offer a factually correct observation or analysis on characters outside my own community and experiences. After all, while I can be told about, or read up on, genuine experiences from a variety of sources, I still won't know what it is like to be Black and female. (Or white and posh, for

that matter, even though I am permanently halfway to that one). So, can I genuinely write on these topics? Should I even try? Or, to put it another way, who has the right to write?

The outsider/insider distinction is probably the most frequently, and endlessly, debated issue within cultural authenticity. This question is often asked and answered from oppositional positions with both sides vehemently arguing their perspective. (Short & Fox, 2004).

Digging a little deeper, on one side of the issue we have the likes of Kathryn Lasky, who states that:

As writers elect to write about a culture other than their own, the voices of the critics are becoming increasingly strident. We are told with greater frequency that certain stories may be told only by certain people. (Lasky, 2003).

This certainly seems stark; there are those 'out there' who are trying to curtail authors from writing outside their experiences and culture. Lasky details an encounter with an anonymous editor who:

...discouraged me from attempting a book on Sarah Breedlove Walker, or Madame Walker as she was known, who came from my hometown and was one of the first women millionaires. She was also African American. She made her money developing hair products for African American people. I was told that it was a losing battle for a white person to take on a subject like Madame Walker. The book would be panned by critics and wouldn't sell. I was appalled. I was on the brink of begging to do this book because I am truly crazy about Madame Walker. But I realized it was a losing battle. These critics in essence have some publishers running scared. So I just said to this editor, "You realize that this is censorship?" And he said yes, he did. And wasn't it a shame? Eventually, my book, *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker* (2000), was successfully published to unanimously excellent reviews, and no one ever brought up the fact that I wasn't African American. (Ibid).

If we skip forward a few years to 2017, we find another example of a successful author describing the same situation:

Author Anthony Horowitz says he was "warned off" including a black character in his new book because it was "inappropriate" for a white writer. The creator of the Alex Rider teenage spy novels says an editor told him it could be considered "patronising". (BBC, 2017)

However, as with Lasky, no names are given, and we are instead told:

Horowitz, who has written 10 novels featuring teenage spy Alex Rider, said there was a "chain of thought" in America that it was "inappropriate" for white writers to try to create black characters, something which he described as "dangerous territory". (Ibid).

Building on this, author Lorraine Devon Wilke noted she had a book rejected (after her two previous books did reasonably well) entirely because of fears of cultural

appropriation. Although she also doesn't (frustratingly) name any individuals, Wilke describes how:

... agents from three different high-profile literary agencies specifically cite "appropriation" as their reasons for rejection:

1. The first felt my "whiteness is kind of a problem," she wrote: "This is a well written and serious novel; an issue-oriented novel that could not be more current... but there may be an issue of whose voice gets to represent race."
2. The second asserted she couldn't take it on because of "all the concerns about 'cultural appropriation' these days."
3. The third felt the black male protagonist "didn't sound black enough." I won't even parse that implication. (Devon Wilke, 2017).

Wilke goes on to explore the ethical and artistic implications of this mind-set becoming the dominant ideology:

...in following that paradigm, who, then, would be able to tell the story of an interracial relationship if neither race can write about the other?

...

If we can only write within our cultures, our demographics, that means, if interpreted fairly, science fiction writers can't write about aliens, men can't write about women; women about men. Straight writers can't include LGBT characters and vice versa. Catholics can't write about non-Catholics, Democrats about Republicans; Jews and Muslims about people who are not of their faith. Young people can't write about old people (though the reverse might be acceptable since old people used to be young people). And since white writers can't include black characters, or any characters that aren't white, we'd have to presume the commensurate would be expected of black writers, Asian writers, Hispanic writers, etc. (Ibid).

And finally on this side of the debate, Kathryn Lasky also rides home this point, culminating in the observation that:

To me this is not only ridiculous but dangerous. It represents a kind of literary version of ethnic cleansing, with an underlying premise that posits that there is only one story and only one way to tell it. (Lasky, 2003).

On the opposing side of the debate, we can see criticism of authors writing outside their communities in this observation by Thelma Seto:

I feel very strongly that it is morally wrong for Euro-American writers to "steal" from other cultures in order to jump on the multicultural bandwagon, unless they have direct, personal experience in the country where that culture originates—more than simply being a tourist or doing research in the library.

...

It is a different matter to "steal" from another culture without understanding that culture with one's heart. In such writing, there is a very noticeable lack of integrity—something is missing at its core. Writing is, above all else, a moral issue. If writers are not honest at the deepest level, their work will be hollow, no matter

how well they know their craft or how well-developed and interesting their characters and plots may be. (Seto, 2003).

This is certainly a stark point of view, and one difficult to refute. Again, however, I call upon my now well-established wriggle-room and remind the patient reader that *Constructing Churchill* is not in any way an attempt to appear culturally authentic but is instead an attempt to show how everyone outside the Establishment is being shafted *by* the Establishment, hence Yvonne, her parents, Vansittart, Hutchinson-Cockburn, Helen etc are all mouthpieces designed to put forward an idea or a point of view that can then be explored and (if required) challenged by the novel.

There are, however, several views stating firmly that it is fine for authors to write outside of their own cultural norms, though with the caveat that the author should have some idea of what they're actually talking about:

My belief is that there is room in the world for all stories, and that everyone has one. My hope is that those who write about the tears and the laughter and the language in my grandmother's house have first sat down at the table with us and dipped the bread of their own experiences into our stew. (Woodson, 1998).

Although this is a clear statement on the lines of 'go ahead, but do your research first', it does raise a personal problem for me; there is no way in hell I'm going to be able to dip bread with people I don't have access to i.e. the wealthy, powerful (and thus literally protected) Establishment simply because I can't – I do not exist in that world, and I have no access to it. Which is just as the Establishment likes it.

This means I can only guess as to the thought processes and assumptions of posh white Establishment drones based on the available evidence – research into social attitudes, interviews with the wealthy or those who have experience with them, and extrapolation based on the actions of the Establishment. As such, my characters may well be one-dimensional archetypes who only exist to spout pre-determined dogma to the reading public, but then, I think I just described every sodding English journalist, so at least I'm honest in my dishonesty by admitting to the dishonesty of having one-dimensional characters gleaned from second-hand sources.

There are, however, other issues to be considered on the topic, with writers such as Rudine Sims Bishop pointing out that cultural authenticity is "an elusive term that carries a number of different connotations," (Bishop, 2003), and further along she also observes:

... it is possible to have more than one valid reading of a text. It should not be surprising that critics who read a text from within one cultural context might discover that, from their perspective, that cultural context is misrepresented in the text. That is not a matter of political correctness, it is a matter of bringing differing perspectives to both the reading and writing of the text. (Ibid).

This observation fits very snugly with Roland Barthes' famous essay "Death of the Author", in which he argues we must cast aside the actual or supposed intent of the writer when reading or studying their work, and instead we should be free to read our own interpretations into the work, because:

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyché, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' – victory to the critic. (Barthes, 1977).

Oddly, this multiplicity of the text was seen in my own PhD; without wishing to spoil too much about the ending, one of the external assessors, Yvonne Battle-Felton, stated during the viva (the oral examination, and hence I can't quote exactly, or reference it) that she felt Yvonne is empowered at the end of the novel by her recognising the corrupt societal system she lives in, which means she is free of orthodoxy and constraint, whereas I (the author) saw Yvonne's final end as a crushing blow as she realises how only Establishment players are allowed to achieve anything, and for everyone else life is a futile struggle to pay bills.

My authorial intent was therefore overthrown by the interpretation of the reader, thus proving that we do indeed live in world of multiplicity in which personal experience, belief, philosophy etc all come together to assimilate form and content in our own unique, individual ways. And the above interpretation also meant I experienced my own literary death in real time. Which was an odd sensation.

Having explored the issue of who has the right to write, and drawn the conclusion that everyone has, (unless they haven't), it is worth making a quick digression onto the related topic of how those from the Black community suffer under a huge cultural weight regarding their identity, both as individuals and as a group:

Black was bad and white was good. As a child I'd have killed to be white, with long blonde hair, of course, the beauty ideal. I come from a generation of black girls who used to put cardigans on our heads so that we could flick our 'long' hair over our shoulder. (Evaristo, 2022).

And sadly, this issue is a constant across many other lived experiences:

By middle school, after years of being laughed at for being different, I knew that in order to survive socially, I needed to move as far as possible from anything Indian, so I chose to assimilate and render myself as culturally white as possible. (Kumar, n.d).

These two quotes, separated by countries and ethnicities but not by, alas, by experiences, give some insight to the issues of cultural oppression, expectation which bear down on those deemed to be outsiders because of background and, bluntly, skin colour. And yet, rather horrifyingly, these exact same assumptions can be found within Black communities, rendering them little more than Russian dolls of cultural conformity and bullying, with one set of prejudices being found nestling inside another set:

I soon encountered the notion of the Authentic Black, to which I did not measure up. Some folk had very clear ideas about what this involved, and instructed me on what to think, how to speak, how to dress, how to dance, who to date and what to write. It was a reductive and laughable attempt to essentialize the concept of blackness. All billion plus black people in the world should be fans of reggae – really? It was racial stereotyping from within the race, although the proponents of the 'How to be black' ideology thought they were doing the opposite...
The reality is that there isn't a singular black culture or community. We are not homogeneous and cannot be reduced to a few reductive tropes. (Evaristo, 2022).

There is, it seems, a stigma of authenticity running through every community which, in effect, says 'this' is the only way to be, and if you are not like 'this', then you are wrong. Which can lead to a few jarring moments in life:

As I gaze around me at the white middle-class paraphernalia, my amassed signifiers of success, I know I am culturally white. It's a sticky, uncomfortable feeling, like the fur on unbrushed teeth, or a door that doesn't close completely flush. That's not to say there are no successful black people on the same page as me, but I haven't lived out the reductive story of blocked opportunity so often associated with inner-city black men.

I wish there was a turning point, some clear moment I assimilated, but the whiteness and privilege were my climate and I just changed. Like any human, I adopted the values of the lives immediately adjacent to mine. (Smith, 2020).

The above is an insight from a man brought up by a white mother and stepfather, with disapproval coming from his Black father who felt his son "wasn't black (sic) enough". (Ibid), again demonstrating the powerful forces of conformity which hammer us all into subservience:

As a black woman, I frequently feel like society expects me to talk, act and dress a certain way...

...

Individuality is a human right, but it feels like a luxury for only a select few in that black people are not given an automatic right to individuality.

They are more strongly associated with their collective identity – so when a black person does something violent or irresponsible, there is a tendency for people to view that action as representative of the entire group.

When a white person commits a crime, however, other white people don't need to worry about being stigmatised as they live in a world where the colour of their skin doesn't determine their education or their criminality. (Adedeji, 2020).

Questioning the assumption of a single authentic Black community, and thus a single authentic Black experience, (while also recognising there are of course many shared experiences within many different communities), again give me some wriggle room for my depiction of Yvonne and her family – as the characters are drawn as representative of socio-economic issues rather than as real, living, psychological people:

... some authors write generic books... based in universal themes and experiences. The intentions of these authors are not to portray a specific cultural experience, so the ethnicities of the characters may be interchangeable and apparent only by skin color, not in the character's actions, dialogue, relationships, or ways of thinking. An author who intends to write a generic book does not need the same depth of experience as an author who intends to write a culturally-specific book. (Bishop, 2003).

In short, these generic books can be evaluated on a literary level but not for authenticity, as a specific cultural experience has not been portrayed. However, having stated this clearly and unambiguously, (partly for the justification on authenticity, and partly because I'm dealing with some hellishly big issues which are, to a considerable extent, outside my own lived experiences and are certainly outside my ability to deal with), I must be honest and show the flipside to this argument, as summarised thusly:

... Yenika-Agbaw (1998) argued that these universal or generic books are problematic because they are based on the

assumption that a unitary and homogeneous human nature exists. This focus on universal themes, separate from a specific cultural experience, maintains the superiority of the dominant culture and marginalizes and excludes oppressed cultures. Her discussion of this issue connects to the views of other educators on cultural arrogance and White privilege, where the dominant worldview is accepted as the "normal" one. (Short & Fox, 2004).

This is demonstrated in *Constructing Churchill* through the characters of Rogerson, Vansittart and Hutchison-Cockburn, who all assume that their way is the *only* way, and anything different must be wrong, socialistic, woke, PC, Marxist, and simply immoral. And any attempt to tell them anything different is doomed to failure:

I'm no longer engaging with white people on the topic of race. Not all white people, just the vast majority who refuse to accept the legitimacy of structural racism and its symptoms. I can no longer engage with the gulf of an emotional disconnect that white people display when a person of colour articulates their experiences...

This emotional disconnect is the conclusion of living a life oblivious to the fact that their skin colour is the norm, and all others deviate from it... They truly believe that the experiences of their life as a result of their skin colour can and should be universal. I just can't engage with the bewilderment and the defensiveness as they try to grapple with the fact that not everyone experiences the world in the way that they do. They've never had to think about what it means, in power terms, to be white, so anytime they're vaguely reminded of this fact, they interpret it as an affront...

The journey towards understanding structural racism still requires people of colour to prioritise white feelings. (Eddo-Lodge, 2018).

The point above dovetails neatly into at least some of the issues raised in this book, such as Black writers being marginalised within the writing community by editors who will only commission them on pre-established lines, i.e. writing about racism, slavery, etc, (see Chapter Eighteen). And another point of interest lies in Erik Rolfsen's observation (footnote #91) on how 'Shakespeare as representative of all human experience' is a flat-out lie, for this view comes from a dominant Establishment (which governs politics, education, the arts etc, and thus moulds – if not controls – all of society) laying down a narrative telling everyone what – and who – you are allowed to be/think/dream:

In English classes throughout high school, my classmates and I mainly read so-called classics centered around white male characters. At the time, I couldn't figure out why it irked me so much that we only read Eurocentric literature, but now I've realized it's because of the lack of diversity and representation in these books that we analyzed in depth.

It's not so much that we shouldn't read classics such as "The Great Gatsby" or "Jane Eyre," but instead, we should read beyond just those white-centric novels. Several classic stories have been written by writers not of European descent. Reading books from those authors, like Gabriel García Márquez or Leslie Marmon Silko, does not make someone less knowledgeable or well-read than those who solely read William Shakespeare or Ernest Hemmingway; if anything, it expands their views and makes them more knowledgeable. (Lakhiani, 2020).

Being cynical, this last point concerning people becoming more knowledgeable is precisely *why* the dominant culture discourages (via educational policy, police prejudice, tokenism etc) any real diversity, for diversity is knowledge and knowledge can, in theory, be power. Hence the importance of diversity and representation in literature, (the focus of this book), as it is in real life:

People question why representation matters when they are “just books”... This statement is harmful to marginalized communities because it doesn’t acknowledge the struggles and oppression they face in the literary community and the real world.

...
Representation is just as important in literature as it is in other forms in life, such as media, workplaces, positions of power, etc. By not including representation in books, it’s damaging to marginalized communities. (Lakhiani, 2020).

On a practical level, this does huge damage to authentic voices and narratives as we end up with situations in which any non-white character is little more than background filler, there to teach the Chosen (White) One a few needful lessons, or to assist the Chosen (White) One on their journey, and most disturbingly, to die to facilitate the Chosen (White) One’s character arc. This was noted by Neha Saju when discussing the character of Princess Nehemia in the novel *Crown of Midnight*, by Sarah J. Maas, in relation to the white protagonist, Celaena:

Nehemia is depicted as smart and capable. But, she would mainly use her own magic to save Celaena’s life on multiple occasions. Her storyline is only valued in connection with Celaena’s, even though there was potential for this character to be so much more.

...
... Nehemia’s death wasn’t just an unfortunate killing. It was done purposefully to move along the storyline of Celaena, our white protagonist.
It’s revealed that Nehemia orchestrated her own gruesome death to push the main character to rebel against the evil king that rules their world. While Celaena gets to be the chosen one, Nehemia is the sacrificial lamb. Maas treats Nehemia, and all of the readers who saw themselves in her, as collateral damage. (Saju, 2021).

This, then, shows the dangers of writers not thinking through their work and the messages (intended or otherwise) that work subsequently carries to the wider world; harm was done in that a BIPOC (as Saju describes her) character did not exist in her own right, but was instead only ever a prop to the main white character before being refrigerated:

“Fridging”, or “Women in Refrigerators” (WiR), is shorthand for a persistent sexist trope, named after a 1994 Green Lantern comic in which the hero returns home to find that his nemesis, Major Force, has murdered his girlfriend Alexandra DeWitt and stuffed her corpse into a fridge. So begins a tale of revenge in which Green Lantern reaches new heights of superheroism, but his female companion can’t make any decisions or enjoy any character progression, because she’s been sacrificed. She has died to give our hero something to do. (Seale, 2018).

Although here the scenario is slightly different, the theme is the same, but with racial rather than gender ideological assumptions at play:

“While the woman plays an integral part in the narrative, in terms of characterisation, the focus is on the trauma of the man, not what the woman has experienced,” explains Dr Miriam Kent, a lecturer on film and media studies at the University of East Anglia who specialises in gender and identity representations in superhero stories. “These things are ultimately connected to men’s and women’s roles in society: who’s active and passive.” (Ibid).

This last line is the key point; the male/active-female/passive trope has long been deployed within mainstream presentation into white/active-Black/passive narratives. The 1962 James Bond film *Dr. No* features Quarrel, a Black fisherman who dies helping Bond on his mission for Queen and country, while things are no better by *License to Kill* (1989) when Sharkey (Black) dies helping Bond (white) in his personal quest for vengeance. In both cases, separated by almost thirty years, the Black character exists only to serve and to die; this is what the audience sees on the screen or on the page, and so this is what the audience will assume is ‘normal’, and in doing so, they accept and thus uphold any one of several hierarchies (racial, sexual, class, gender etc) within society.

As mentioned above, there seem to be no easy answers, or at least, there are no consensual answers, as everyone views the world through their own prism/prison, and we can never be certain that my red is the same as your red, so perhaps the best point to bear in mind is “authors should ask themselves *why* they want to write a particular book [featuring experiences and people outside the author’s own immediate community].” (Short & Fox, 2004). Which certainly seems a valid point, and one which could fatally undermine this entire novel as I wrote outside own ethnicity because the PhD supervisor told me I ought to do so...

But what of Black fiction? Is there some thread of authenticity running through every novel by a Black female author that can be teased out and identified? A quick and random selection of novels would suggest not. *Queenie*, for example, by Candice Carty-Williams, is a tale of a young Black woman’s search for love and... not much else, really. There’s some filler about her career in magazine publishing, but apart from showing how Queenie’s ideas are shot down by an unsympathetic white culture, this doesn’t go very far. But then, serious social concerns (being Black in a racist society, being Black while dating, being Black while chasing a career etc) do seem to exist merely as glib tick-box barriers on Queenie’s journey to personal success as her struggles (family, work, mental health) are overcome by... the fact that we have reached the end of the novel. To say Queenie is overemphasised as a paragon who withstand the blows of life and comes out on top thanks to authorial intervention rather than genuine cultural/psychological grounding is harsh, but fair.

26a by Diana Evans fares better in that the main characters (twins Bessi and Georgia) have a far richer interior life about them than Queenie, with the focus being on the development of the twins over their first 25 years. Admittedly, the story is somewhat casual as we barrel episodically down the years, though it would be difficult to fit a full psychological account of the twins’ hopes, dreams, respective personalities etc within a 200-page book. Where *26a* succeeds beyond question is the prose, which demonstrates a lyrical quality which at times moves the narrative toward the edge of poetry, and which attains its highest form in the final pages with the passing of Georgia.

Helen Oyeyemi’s *Icarus Girl* likewise focuses on interior character, this time through the figure of Jess, the alienated child who doesn’t fit in. Jess as a character is handled well, as is her alienation, though this alienation arguably comes as much from her unconventional character as much as being biracial – though of course, the unconventionality can stand as a metaphor for being mixed race, and vice-versa. On the down side, the presence of a dead evil twin-surrogate who may or may not exist is perhaps a little ‘tropey’, but at least

the quality is good, and frankly, what isn't a trope these days, when everything has been done before?

Is there, then, some sort of formulae for Black fiction? The three books mentioned above would suggest not; remove the occasional and superficial social issues from *Queenie*, and the book would be a simple (and simplistic) Bridget Jones-alike novel, *26a* would be a coming of age novel featuring the standard tropes of an inadequate/oppressive father, a mother who holds the family together etc, and *Icarus Girl* would be a universal story of an imaginative and sensitive child suffering alienation in a world that doesn't understand her. But then, who am I to say a book should/should not be this way or that? And how much exactly should an author focus on an issue anyway? Does "the issue" have to be mentioned a few times before being considered a success? Or do you have to spend every line of every page examining "the issue" from every angle before the formula is complete? But even if an author does focus the entire book on "the issue", does it make much difference?

Yellowface by R.F. Kuang takes on cultural appropriation as its central theme, with the plot unravelling after a white author (Juniper Hayward) steals the manuscript of an Hong Kong born, British educated, recently deceased writer (Athena Liu) and publishes it as her own, after which the plot (in both senses) unravels as Hayward's deception slowly comes to light, allowing Kuang to explore (amongst other themes) the racism, insularity and hypocrisy of the publishing industry.

However, this aspect of the book does again seem to be universal, in that had Hayward stolen from any other author of any other background, the plot would still be the same, with just a few tweaks needed here and there. And Kuang's fury at being typecast, as shown through an author avatar; "They marked her as their token, exotic Asian girl. Every time she tried to branch out to new projects, they kept insisting that Asian was her *brand*..." (Kuang, 2024) is an issue shared by many other writers, as mentioned in footnote 167.

It may be that the human condition is truly universal, with no real genuine differences between any community – though obviously socially constructed differences based on race, sexuality, gender etc are real societal problems. The alternative view is that there are genuine fundamental differences between people and communities, but if this is the case, then the novels mentioned above would suggest that the gatekeepers of the publishing industry are working hard to ensure we will never see any work which falls outside publishing's preconceived ideas on what is acceptable, meaning the readers get what they are given – novels sufficiently bland and anodyne to travel across the book buying audience without causing them any undue upset or deep thought.

Having explored the issue of authenticity, and given this is a novel without much hope or optimism, perhaps it is fitting to end on some rather depressing observations. The first centres on the suspicion that the real reason for any unwillingness on the part of the publishing industry to deal with authors writing outside their own culture is the fear of mammon (lost) rather than offence (taken):

Contemporary children's book publishing in the United States is undergoing the same process of integration, consolidation, and downsizing evident in other sectors of the economy. In recent years, publishing companies that once were independently owned enterprises have been purchased by large multinational corporations... The increasing importance of the bottom line in these conglomerates undermines publishers' willingness to publish new, novel, or experimental books, or books having a limited market. (Taxel, 1992).

And the following observation from Sander Gilman, while springing from the world of visual art rather than literature, raises an intriguing point:

How do we organize our perceptions of the world? Recent discussions of this age-old question have centered around the function of visual conventions as the primary means by which we perceive and transmit our understanding of the world about us. Nowhere are these conventions more evident than in artistic representations, which consist more or less exclusively of icons. Rather than presenting the world, icons represent it. Even with a modest nod to supposedly mimetic portrayals it is apparent that, when individuals are shown within a work of art (no matter how broadly defined), the ideologically charged iconographic nature of the representation dominates. And it dominates in a very specific manner, for the representation of individuals implies the creation of some greater class or classes to which the individual is seen to belong. These classes in turn are characterized by the use of a model which synthesizes our perception of the uniformity of the groups into a convincingly homogeneous image. The resulting stereotypes may be overt, as in the case of caricatures, or covert, as in eighteenth-century portraiture. But they serve to focus the viewer's attention on the relationship between the portrayed individual and the general qualities ascribed to the class." (Gilman, 1985).

If humans are primarily a visual species, then this suggests the rather bleak conclusion that marked differences such as appearance (be it skin colour, build, height, clothing, hair colour etc) are always going to be taken and used as visible barriers of difference, as humans won't accept anything that deviates too far from their own self-image of what is 'normal' or 'natural'. Which implies the only way to leave behind prejudice is to somehow re-programme humanity so it no longer views people as little more than representative icons to be interpreted, categorised, and ultimately dehumanised. Which does rather crush any hope for the future.

Chapter Three

In which we see a little of Yvonne's character, prompting another extensive footnote musing on how we are all the products of society, with those at the top being handed the largest plates piled high with the food of opportunity while those at the bottom are lucky to even get the crumbs of minimum wage drudgery.²⁰ Not that Yvonne is anywhere near the bottom, so she at least gets close to the crust – while the rest of us don't even get the possibility of the crust.

Yvonne, having to be the first into work by an hour to open and prepare the office, had already sorted the post, (including the latest deliveries of several large, heavy boxes of books, all of which had to be opened, catalogued, and distributed to various desks, tables or bathrooms), swept the floor, done the washing up, polished the dark wood table and chairs in the meeting room, cleaned the staff bathroom, (for which she had to provide the cloths, bleach, sprays and rubber gloves, for Vansittart never thinks of such things), and turned on Vansittart's computer ready for his arrival at whatever o'clock. And Yvonne did all these jobs because they would facilitate her dream career of being an award-winning mega-successful millionaire author of the greatest books of the day.

As such, Yvonne was planning to put herself forward for the role of writing the company's new Churchillian biography, for a biography produced at such a young age, and by a Black woman, would get her name out there and clear the way for her to pick and choose her next project, and thus the wealthy career she had mapped out in her mind would be launched.

True, she had never thought about writing a biography before, but Yvonne *believed*. She believed a great writer could turn their hand to any genre. She

²⁰

If we want to look for great silences in our history, empire is hardly the only one. There has been a glaring hole where the history of British capitalism and the British capitalist class should be; in its place are overwrought stories of decline and of imperial finance. The neglect of the British working class is particularly stunning. (Edgerton, 2020).

also believed she had the necessary commercial knowledge (derived from her A Level in Business Studies) to carry her plan forward.²¹ And she firmly believed in the partnership of meritocracy with hard work, and the inevitable success this would bring forth.²²

²¹ What this demonstrates is how Yvonne has unwittingly absorbed the capitalist philosophy which states your dreams and hobbies should be monetized, for anything that doesn't make you hard cash is at best an irrelevance, at worst an abomination:

We live in the era of the hustle. Of following our dreams until the end, and then pushing ourselves more. And every time we feel beholden to capitalize on the rare places where our skills and our joy intersect, we underline the idea that financial gain is the ultimate pursuit. If we're good at it, we should sell it. If we're good at it and we love it, we should definitely sell it. (Conway, 2019).

²² And now the rather grim deconstruction on the falsity of this position. The myth of the meritocracy, and the concomitant idea that hard work will be rewarded, is one of the greatest lies circulating in society today:

As has increasingly been demonstrated by social science research, income and wealth inequality has increased at the very same time that meritocracy has been embraced as a guiding political principle. Beliefs in meritocracy, we show, actually go hand in hand with greater economic inequality. (Mijs & Savage, 2020).

Unfortunately, Yvonne has been spoon-fed this narrative since birth by her parents, (who bought into the fantasy by way of a family loan, and now look down on those who have not succeeded), by her schools, and by wider society, and hence she has unconsciously absorbed the myth of the meritocracy and views it as being true. In doing so, she has been rendered little more than a corporate serf, there to be exploited:

"Work hard and you'll succeed" has been the simple formula passed from generation to generation, each working 'harder' and becoming more 'successful' than the last, if you believe it. The advice fits snugly with those who romanticise working 'to the bone' and wear their sacrifices as medals. It's rooted in individualism; packaged as political weaponry. Except, when you listen carefully, you realise it's usually uttered by those at the top, looking down. (Beaty, 2020).

A direct correlation to be drawn here lies in the way the Establishment clearly values inherited wealth over those who have to work for a living; after all, Yvonne's fellow unpaid volunteer, Oxford graduate and inheritor-in-waiting Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn,* is never asked or even expected to fulfil the menial duties which form the greater part of Yvonne's early hours alone in the office.

A set of historically established political developments and conditions, cultural practices and social mechanisms, and, crucially, class practices, have hindered the creation of the 'meritocratic condition' [in the UK]. In order for the latter to be fulfilled, that is to say the creation of a meritocratic society, we not only need to change the system of allocation of rewards and opportunities

in the labor [sic] market, but the entire system of socio-economic and political organization. (Themelis, 2017).

In a capitalist society, the workers are little more than units designated to perform a certain job, and it doesn't take long to begin judging people solely through the doctrine of capitalist value, and seeing those without wealth as being without worth. And yet, it wasn't always this way:

Until the 1850s, in fact, by far the most popular and dominant form of social measurement in 19th-century America (as in Europe) were a collection of social indicators known then as "moral statistics," which quantified such phenomena as prostitution, incarceration, literacy, crime, education, insanity, pauperism, life expectancy, and disease. While these moral statistics were laden with paternalism, they nevertheless focused squarely on the physical, social, spiritual, and mental condition of the American people. For better or for worse, they placed human beings at the center of their calculating vision. Their unit of measure was bodies and minds, never dollars and cents. (Cook, 2017).

As such, the result of unregulated capitalism is easy to see; success and wealth are attributed solely (and incorrectly) to hard work, determination, and ability, meaning anyone who lacks success and wealth is viewed as being immoral and lazy, for the myth tells us we live in a meritocracy with a level playing field:

Can a single, working class mother-of-three, grafting away in a low-paid job to support her family really achieve as much in a day as somebody born into a well-off family who can afford to work in a part-time job? Who has better social connection and has been educated in a more favourable school? Can someone who is just trying to keep their head above water with minimal opportunities in a small town really be compared to someone who has exactly the same dreams, but for whom money has never been an issue? What if you have unconscious bias and racial gaslighting to contend with? (Snape, 2022).

Which brings us back to Yvonne, our representative member of this society. Stunted by her environment and schooling, brainwashed into the values of the status quo, we see how her dream of personal success equates solely with the idea that human beings are born to do nothing more than work, acquire money, and then die, a command which diminishes each individual as it gives our obedient labour to those in authority, thus explaining the UK government's insistence that schools are:

...not to use resources from organisations which have expressed a desire to end capitalism. (Busby, 2020).

Even those academic institutions which pride themselves on giving children the best possible start in life by doing things differently are, in fact, still doing the same damn thing, i.e. they are following the strictures of the capitalist way of life. *And they actually seem to be pleased about this:*

[The World of Work] is a significant innovation because education experts used to think that career education began in high school. *We start in kindergarten*, and we make a point to avoid pouring kids into career buckets. Instead, we begin early to help students understand their strengths, interests and values and to use those self-discovered

qualities to illuminate *potential career opportunities*. (Hidalgo, 2018).
Emphasis mine.

Yvonne's daydreams do at least serve the vital function of allowing her to temporarily escape (at least mentally) from the tedium of the office chores which have already become her routine. Her favoured scenario focuses upon the rewards of her literary success, (rather than the contacts and work needed to attain it), and sees her arriving at myriad film premiers and award shows in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce, passing through the adoring crowds, pausing to sign a few autographs, (for Yvonne tells herself she will always make time for her fans), being interviewed on both television and in print, (though not on radio; a dull medium, in Yvonne's view), before attending an after-party clutching an award in one hand and the latest hot footballer/actor/singer in the other: "Gone are the days when children's goals were to be something or do something important, replaced by the desire to be famous." (Dolan, 2020).

However, it would be cruel to dismiss the paucity of Yvonne's dreams or character as being shallow or immature, for she is merely manifesting the values she has absorbed from home, society and the media – that wealth and fame are the only signifiers worth anything, and if you don't have them, you are nothing – though society also makes sure the chances of attaining wealth and fame stand almost at zero, as noted by Javed Khan, Barnardo's Chief Executive:

"While material poverty is part of the problem, many children and young people today also feel there is little or no possibility of a positive future, what we call a 'poverty of hope'. (Barnardo's, 2019).

Yvonne will only ever see success in her dreams, so why begrudge her the spurious emotional fulfilment such dreaming brings to her?

Research by the charity Education and Employers suggests five times as many 17- and 18-year-olds in the UK want to work in art, culture, entertainment and sport as there are jobs available. (Sellgren, 2020).

Yvonne is most definitely a subject for pity, given she is unwittingly following the narrow, conventional path laid out by society. Especially as she will soon be railroaded onto the next (and only) "acceptable" ambition for a woman, in that she will start to feel the enormous social pressure of finding a man and having his children, with society judging her a personal disaster if she fails in this predetermined directive:

If ever there was proof that gender inequality is still alive and well it's the pressure on women in their 30s to have children. Bridget Jones, a story about the struggles of a single journalist, came out 20 years ago – and yet still the attitudes towards childless women beyond the age of 30 remain largely unchanged. (Alexander, 2019).

The author feels he should apologise for this rather brutal analysis of Yvonne's aspirations which (after all) are all socially ordained, with her character and future being moulded decades, if not centuries, before she was even born, so let us examine, for the purposes of contrast, those higher up the social scale who do have genuine opportunities – opportunities given to them time and time again by their families, their peers, by the entire corrupt institution of wealthy privilege, wherein mistakes are glossed over and incompetence doesn't matter, at least in the long term:

[Churchill] had an unfortunate knack of finding himself on the wrong side of too many arguments, over things that usually did not require the benefit of hindsight to be understood. In the 1930s his dismissal of the idea of Indian independence seemed reactionary

and inhumane even to many of his contemporaries, and his support for the plainly degenerate, weak and self-obsessed Edward VIII, though admirably motivated by loyalty, appalled so many of his contemporaries that it very nearly ended his political career. These misjudgements provided the background against which he was marginalized by Baldwin and Chamberlain when in his prime. (Heffer, 2015).

And on a contemporary note, to show nothing has changed in terms of (in)competence coupled with a complete lack of any real, independent accountability:

Chris Grayling's catalogue of failure - the Tory's 19 most memorable blunders
From privatised probation to the ferry firm without ferries, the Tory nicknamed 'Failing Grayling' finally left the government of his own accord in 2019 - without being sacked (Smith & Bloom, 2020).

And also:

The serial incompetence of Boris Johnson's government is not an accident. It may look like haplessness, but that is to mistake the symptom for the cause. Instead this government's ineptitude is a function of both the character of the man at the top and the defining creed of his administration. (Freedland, 2020).

And finally:

Boris Johnson's first year as PM: incompetence and maliciousness
Johnson's government shamelessly scapegoats to deflect blame for its own shortcomings (Fletcher, 2020).

This, then, is English society, wherein those at the top are only there by milking their contacts time and time again, a luxury beyond 99% of the country. Welcome to England.

* A character yet to be introduced, but the above footnote got moved from its original position, so the unknown name will just have to stay there as a reminder of the artificiality of all manuscripts which are edited, pruned, and amended over extensive periods. But at least it ties in with the book's central theme on the falsity of literature. And reality.

Chapter Four

*In which we see a little more of Yvonne's character, and we also meet Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn, an old Etonian who – unlike Yvonne – will have an incredibly rewarding life as he was born with the hackneyed silver spoon of inherited wealth, privilege, and contacts firmly ensconced within his mouth.*²³

The topic of Vansittart's *Zoom* meeting for extra funding had dominated office conversation for the past week, and as part of her cunning plan to get the job writing the biography, Yvonne had decided to see what previous material existed on Churchill so she could appear keen, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic in front of the man who had the power to confer both the biography and paid employment upon her.²⁴

Yvonne unpacked several large books onto her desk, some taken from her father's bookcase and some from the local library, which she then carefully arranged for maximum visual effect. Happy with her display of learning, she sat down with a cup of coffee, a drink she didn't care for but she had read many Internet memes on writers running on the bitter stuff and so she drank it accordingly, before finally selecting a tome at random.

This was William Manchester's *The Caged Lion*, (1989), which from the first few pages had her mind boggling at the sheer amount of research

²³ Apologies if the reader is getting impatient with the lack of Churchillian detail, but as previously mentioned, this book is *not* a Churchillian biography; rather, it is an examination of the society which enables the construction of Churchillian mythology to rise and then be endlessly replicated. After all, no written work exists in a vacuum, and no biography simply pops into existence; all writers are influenced not just by their research and their passions, but by their inherent assumptions derived from their family, class, upbringing, education, newsfeed, politics, etc.

But then, normal, everyday experiences also affect us; rude man in the queue ahead of you? Puts you in a bad mood. Yelled at from across the road? Puts you in a flustered mood. Criticised over something? Puts you in a defensive mood. Even an everyday event like breakfast can affect your outlook for the day; burnt breakfast? Hurried breakfast? Spilt breakfast? Argument over breakfast? Breakfast given you the trots? Then you won't be in the most receptive frame of mind when doing your morning's work. Context is everything.

²⁴ Vansittart had hinted on her first day that employment could be in the offing to the right candidate. But then, he always hinted this with the unpaid volunteers, thus doubling their work rate. And not one of them had been hired.

Manchester had put into the work – an entire year had been required to transpose all his taped interviews of family members – as well as the rich, varied life Churchill had led. It seemed incredible that one man could have done so much; who else could have joined the army, got swiftly promoted to second lieutenant, and then volunteer for a warzone in order to prove himself? And then come back, stand for parliament, and be a cabinet minister by thirty-three?

Yvonne was also astonished to find Churchill had anticipated World War One. And had founded the RAF. And planned the Jewish state. And created Iraq and Jordan. It seemed his actions with regard to Ireland held a darker edge, as Manchester noted he created the “Black and Tans – former British soldiers who became terrorist themselves”, though Yvonne assumed from Manchester’s phrasing the soldiers must have devolved into terrorists after Churchill’s involvement. And it seemed it was Churchill who “piloted the Irish Free State treaty through Parliament”, and while Yvonne had no idea what this was, it was clearly a Good Thing.

‘Wow!’ mumbled Yvonne; the man had been a dynamo. Could she achieve even a fraction of what Churchill had? Was it at all possible? Yvonne didn’t know, but she held hope she could make her way in the world; after all, Churchill had seized events by the neck and had shaken them into a shape that suited him, so why couldn’t she do the same?

One reason why Yvonne couldn’t do the same appeared at that very moment as the office door opened and Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn sauntered in.²⁵

²⁵ Or “Hutchinson-Coburn”, as Yvonne thought it was, for she had only ever heard the name spoken out loud. When she does see it written down, in Chapter Thirteen, she will be unable to repress a snort of laughter at the discrepancy between the written name and the socially correct pronunciation, which will in turn bring down the social disapproval of the establishment:

Making a glaring error when you pronounce someone’s name is a faux pas we all want to avoid, especially when moving in gilded circles.
(Brennan, 2017).

And many apologies for linking to a Daily Mail article, though it is at least a splendid example on how the media enforces conformity via peer pressure and, in this example, the fear of social embarrassment, thus tacitly reinforcing the philosophy of everyone

‘Good morning, Rupert,’ said Yvonne in some surprise, for it was only nine o’clock and Hutchinson-Cockburn usually arrived at around ten, long after the rest of the office staff, a peccadillo (she had noted) which drew no comment from Vansittart – who frequently didn’t appear until eleven(ish) in the morning.

‘Oh, er, yah, hi,’ drawled Hutchinson-Cockburn, realising the office was occupied by the Black girl whose name he couldn’t recall.

‘You’re in early.’

‘Yah, well, mother said she’d pop me in as she had an early start, and I think she wanted to chat about things,’ yawned Hutchinson-Cockburn, giving the impression that parents were a chore to be endured. He looked at his Black co-worker, wondering if she was going to offer to get him a cup of tea on the go, but she seemed to be more concerned – rather rudely in his opinion – with a large stack of books. ‘What are you doing?’ he asked, hoping the Black girl would take the hint about stopping whatever it was she was doing in order to get him a morning beverage.

knowing their place. See also footnote #17 on Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses.

But I digress; Hutchinson-Cockburn was a fellow volunteer within Clavier and Coldwell, and like Yvonne he was there as his parents knew Vansittart – though unlike Yvonne, this was down to the old boy network; Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn’s father had been at Eton together.

The disparity between Hutchinson-Cockburn and Yvonne’s social status was also echoed in the financial, for Hutchinson-Cockburn’s parents were perfectly happy to pay his way during his stay Clavier and Coldwell, a situation enabled by their hereditary wealth, hereditary contacts, and hereditary opportunities. In contrast, Yvonne’s parents had grudgingly told her she had but six weeks to acquire a paid job within the publishing house before she had to start searching elsewhere. Both offspring accepted their respective situations without murmur; Hutchinson-Cockburn because social-economic aggrandisement was built into his world, while Yvonne genuinely believed in the meritocracy and her own ability to fly up the ladder of success.

Thankfully for Yvonne’s mental equilibrium, she is unaware of the trust fund – and all it embodies concerning the difference between those who have, and those who have not. We could also mention the office keys in this context; Vansittart hands the keys over to each unpaid volunteer* so they can, as we have just seen, come in early and ready the office for the arrival of the staff. Which in effect means Yvonne is doing the hard, overlooked, and thankless work before Hutchinson-Cockburn breezes in without even considering why Yvonne is there so early, or what she’s been up to in the meantime.

*The only time Vansittart hesitated in handing the keys over was with Yvonne. He rationalised this away as being concerns about her age – even though she’s not the youngest unpaid volunteer Vansittart has ever exploited. Just the darkest skinned.

‘Just some research,’ replied Yvonne, trying to casually pass off the three teetering book piles as an irrelevance, for she wished to appear cool in front of her near-contemporary.²⁶

²⁶ Yvonne’s desire to look cool is in fact a manifestation of a much darker psychological issue; deep down, she wants to *be* Hutchinson-Cockburn, for Hutchinson-Cockburn is white, wealthy, and has contacts. His way through life is clear of the hurdles Yvonne has already faced (ethnicity, gender, class, and a lack of considerable inherited wealth) and will continue to face throughout her life:

Over a third of ethnic minority participants reported having experienced one or more racist assaults (verbal, physical or damage to property) over their lifetimes, with one in six reporting having experienced a physical assault. Responses from ethnic minority participants also indicated widespread experience of discrimination within institutional settings – close to a third of ethnic minority people reported experiencing racial discrimination in education, a similar proportion reported racial discrimination in employment, and around a fifth reported experiences of racial discrimination when seeking housing. Considering social settings, close to a third of ethnic minority participants reported experiences of racial discrimination in public, and almost one in six ethnic minority people report experiencing racial discrimination from neighbours. Moreover, more than one in five reported experiencing discrimination from the police. (Finney, et al., 2023).

Who wouldn’t want to avoid the prejudice, discrimination, and hatred that accompanies your skin colour? Especially when you come from a community that is also debilitated by sociological and cultural assumptions/oppression:

One of the issues we face is black representation. We spent a tedious amount of time being underrepresented in the media and now that we are, we are uneducated drug dealers, criminals and all live in under-privileged areas. So, when a black person deviates from this regurgitated narrative, they simply aren’t black enough. (Harris, 2021).

This is not just a commentary on wealth and social mobility, though these aspects are tightly bound up in our capitalist society. Instead, the issue raised here is that of Blackness v whiteness, and how these are social constructs with absolutely no other (real-world) validity, as noted by Bernardine Evaristo, the first Black woman to win the Booker prize:

... If you are light enough to be racialized as white, it’s an option, and sadly some people disassociate themselves from their backgrounds in order to maintain a new white identity. A number of famous people have taken that route in the past, such as the Hollywood stars Carol Channing and Merle Oberon. (Evaristo, 2022)

This, then, is the explanation for describing Yvonne as wanting to be like Hutchinson-Cockburn. To be white, male, posh and privileged is to have access not just to opportunities denied to others, but it is also to be accepted without question, without hesitation, without suspicion. Hutchinson-Cockburn lives in a world designed for him, and others like him:

Hutchinson-Cockburn looked suspiciously at the titles closest to him, feeling the Black girl was being less than forthcoming with the truth. The books included *Churchill*, *The Churchill Factor*, *All Behind You Winston*, *Churchill at War 1940 – 1945*, *Churchill*, *Churchill and Appeasement*, *Churchill and the Generals*; *Their Finest Hour*, *Churchill By His Contemporaries*, *Man of the Century: Winston Churchill*, *God and Churchill*, and *Churchill's Empire*. 'Are those books on Churchill?' he demanded.

'Yes; I thought I'd see what was on the market already, given that Michael was talking about doing a new biography.'

'Oh, yah, right, I see,' replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, grabbing the book the Black girl was resting her hands on.²⁷

'William Manchester; *The Caged Lion*,' read Hutchinson-Cockburn before opening the book. 'Ah, an excellent beginning!' he exclaimed before

Unlike 'blackness', 'whiteness' is an invisible construct. In the sense that its presence has become regarded as invisible, normal, neutral even... Critics might object that in a country where white people are in the majority, there is nothing wrong with normalising whiteness. But that misses the point. Whiteness has a history – it's an identity that was invented in order to provide the superior identity to blackness's inferior one. It's an identity that continues to operate on a political and economic level in the UK, only without anyone acknowledging it. (Hirsch, 2018).

In short, society dictates that Yvonne must walk through life as an interloper, seen but rejected by an uncaring society conditioned to view her as a construct of criminality, inferiority, pushiness, and wantonness. (See also footnote #92, as well as Chapter Twenty-Seven). The doors are closed, the path is pot-holed, and suspicion is the norm. Hutchinson-Cockburn, in contrast, ambles through a life in which doors are forever opened, flowers are strewn before him, and acceptance is not so much given as already awaiting his arrival, with a comfortable seat, several glasses of wine, and a rich meal set out in readiness. Hurrah for the social order.

²⁷ Hutchinson-Cockburn didn't see anything wrong in this; he was simply conforming to the unconscious values instilled in him by his family, class, and education, all of which taught him that everything was his for the taking. This was the way his world worked:

We are right to be angry and disappointed in a Prime Minister [Boris Johnson] who seems utterly convinced that there is one rule for us and no rules for him – if he was ever even thinking of us and our needs as something other than a nuisance. (Jardine, 2021).

puffing out his chest, holding the book aloft as though handling a plastic skull at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and declaiming the opening lines.

“‘This work is a biography, not a history. The two are often confused, and understandably so, for both recount the past. But there is a distinction.

History is a chronological account of prior events. Biography focuses on one figure, exploring the significance of his life by “examining “the earthly pilgrimage of a man,” in Thomas Carlyle’s words...””

“‘The earthly pilgrimage of a *man*’?”’ echoed Yvonne.

‘Well, obviously, back in the day, *man* also encompassed *woman*,’ smirked Hutchinson-Cockburn,²⁸ amused at the idea of a woman doing anything noticeable enough to get into the history books. Not that he considered himself sexist in any way, of course, but it was a simple fact that almost all history was created by men, with women only entering the public sphere through proper womanly roles such as nursing, as seen with Florence Nightingale. True, there was the honourable exception of the Blessed St Margaret Thatcher, but she *acted* like a man, and in doing so saved the country from the lefties and their demands for higher pay for the workers.

‘Have you read Carlyle? Fascinating chap.’

‘No, he didn’t tend to pop up much at Tower Heights Academy,’ deadpanned Yvonne.

‘Ah, pity, pity,’ murmured Hutchinson-Cockburn, who had never heard of Tower Heights and thus assumed it was some ghastly failing inner city comprehensive, a hypothesis bolstered by Yvonne’s colour and unrefined London accent.²⁹

²⁸ And assumptions like this are also a way of life for Hutchinson-Cockburn, and those like him. See also footnote #72.

²⁹ Both Yvonne and Hutchinson-Cockburn are, of course, formed by their upbringing, resulting in two widely differing personalities. Yvonne is from the lower-lower middle-class milieu of envying the elite while despising the poor, while her schooling – a mediocre academy run by a board of middle-management freeloaders sucking as much government money into their bank accounts as possible while regurgitating officially approved sociological conformity into the minds of the young – has likewise conditioned her to accept convention rather than to question it:

We advanced the position that schools prepare people for adult work rules by socializing people to function well and without complaint in the hierarchical structure of the modern corporation. Schools accomplish this goal by what we called the *correspondence principle*,

namely, by structuring social interactions and individual rewards to replicate the environment of the workplace. We thus focused attention not on the explicit curriculum but on the socialization implied by the structure of schooling. Our econometric investigations demonstrated that the contribution of schooling to later economic success is explained only in part by the cognitive skills learned in school. (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

And in case the reader is unconvinced by this, consider how educational issues are at the forefront of today's culture wars, as seen in stifling of the humanities in favour of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects, as witnessed in the reductive philosophy of Boris Johnson's Education Secretary, in which capitalist indoctrination is passed off as an education policy:

We have to end the focus on qualifications for qualifications sake.
We need fundamental reform: a wholesale rebalancing towards further and technical education.

And across our entire post-16 sector, we need a much stronger alignment with the economic and societal needs of the nation.

...

We must never forget that the purpose of education is to give people the skills they need to get a good and meaningful job.

...

We will be unstinting in our efforts to build a world-class further education system that delivers for the whole nation.
One that gives people meaningful careers that allow them to fully contribute to their community and serve as inspiration to their family... (Williamson, 2020).

Would it be jaundiced to look at Gavin Williamson's inadvertent admission (that education should be concerned solely with employment and the economy) and draw the conclusion that the ruling elite views education as a means of training the proles into accepting work? Would it be a little too cynical to assume the plebs are being conditioned to accept paid employment as the only way to achieve personal and nationalistic pride? Would it be thoroughly reprehensible to believe the killing off the arts and humanities in favour of STEM will, in the view of the Establishment, provide a means of controlling imagination, curiosity, and the ability to question, leaving instead minds conditioned to deal only with rote learning and facts, thus achieving the ultimate in corporate conformity?
Probably not:

The schools we go to are reflections of the society that created them.
Nobody is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them. (Shakur, 2001).

In contrast, Hutchinson-Cockburn (of the Ruling Elite) went to Eton, where "Everyone studies English, Mathematics, Latin, History, Divinity..." (Eton, 2019), and has the background (inherited wealth, public school, Oxbridge, personal contacts) to be able to move into a lucrative and fulfilling career with only a few minor hurdles to overcome, such as being in the right time and place to hear about any opportunities within his social circle.

The difference between them can be summarised by pointing out the Yvones of the world *must actually* work in order to survive in a capitalist society, while the Ruperts need only *play at the concept* of work while waiting for the opportunities to be handed to them. (See also Churchill, Winston).

Chapter Five

In which we are introduced to the other (all white) members of the staff; office manager Felicity Armitage, who dislikes Yvonne but won't recognise the fact even to herself, Sarah Cooper, a young woman in possession of a sharp business brain but a credulous attitude toward everything else, and Helen Hughes, a woman who, upon reaching middle age, has found herself increasingly unable to give a fuck about almost anything except her cat. Helen, incidentally, could have been the protagonist of the novel, for unlike Yvonne (who still believes the lies) Helen already knows she has been screwed by society. Unfortunately, the media rarely recognises the existence of middle-aged women:

In my Acting Your Age campaign survey, I found that only 9 per cent of people can identify more than 20 leading middle-aged female actors in the UK compared to 49 per cent who can identify more than 20 leading, middle-aged male actors. Middle-aged men get to play Bond, middle-aged women get to play the killjoy and there are still more documentaries in the UK about paedophiles, than there are comedies and dramas led by women over the age of 45. (Clark, 2020).

‘Morning all,’ called Sarah, beaming around the office as she entered.

‘Everyone have a good weekend?’

‘My cat got scabies,’ grunted Helen, entering behind Sarah and making the younger woman jump.

‘Oh dear,’ said Sarah, her mouth forming an “O” of sympathy and concern. Sarah was the Rights and Contracts Manager for Clavier and Coldwell; she was also the entirety of the rights and contracts team for Clavier and Coldwell, having accepted the prestigious title in return for rather lower remuneration³⁰ than would be expected for such a role, a situation which

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How important is a title? I’ve seen candidates trade as much as \$10,000 in salary for what they consider a more valuable title. The motivation behind seeking a particular title varies from candidate to candidate, but it usually comes down to a desire to shape the

suited Vansittart enormously as he was saving money which then could be spent on other important areas of the business.³¹

‘Oh, and my husband broke his leg,’ added Helen as a clear afterthought.

‘Oh dear,’ mumbled Sarah, rather lost for words. ‘What did you do?’

‘Took him to the vets,’ replied Helen, slumping down at her desk.³²

‘And your husband?’ asked Sarah.

‘What about him?’ replied Helen with a look of blank confusion.

‘Good morning,’ said Felicity Armitage as she walked in, her spiteful gaze raking around the area in the hope of finding some job left undone by the Bla- *young* intern who Felicity distrusted *not* because of her colour but because she, Felicity, knew a troublemaker when she saw one.³³

perception others hold, whether that’s a friend or a future employer. Think of it as “instant branding” more than a self-esteem boost. (Schur, 2019).

Vansittart was delighted with this arrangement; it meant he had more money for his own salary. And bonuses. And expenses. See also the next footnote.

³¹ Bosses earn ‘100 times lowest paid staff’ (BBC, 2020).

³² Helen was one of three editors employed by Vansittart, and the best read of the lot, hence she was the only one privileged with a full-time post in the office. She was also shrivelled by decades of dealing with awful manuscripts, appalling ideas and nonsensical grammatical monstrosities which wandered across the page before running into turning into a different sentence altogether on some other topic usually a feeble metaphor littered with redundant adjectives to show proper literary writing. Helen, to complete the thumbnail sketch of her thumbnail character, gave the impression she was surrounded by a haze of cigarette smoke even when she wasn’t, an illusion created by her eighty-a-day voice and the permanent acrid miasma of stale smoke which permeated her entire frame. She tended to sit by herself in the office, as even other smokers found her tobacco addiction mildly horrifying. An important point to make here is that Helen, alas, doesn’t exist as a fully drawn-out character in her own right; she is instead just a mouthpiece whose entire *raison d’être* is to make authorial points for me. Mind you, the cynical could claim (with some justification) that all the characters herein are little more than ciphers – but I’d argue any figure written down in a book becomes a cipher, given that 300 pages cannot hope to do justice to any human character; you’d probably need three times that just to explore one character trait.

³³ In truth, Felicity did have an issue with Yvonne’s ethnicity, but she could never admit this even to herself, and hence the explanation for her attitudes appears down here in the subconscious footnotes.

Felicity’s attitudes toward Yvonne were not helped by her intense dislike of all the recent female interns used by the company, as she felt increasingly threatened by their youth and determination to succeed, and hence she views all other women in the office as potential rivals rather than as friends, colleagues, or support:

‘Morning,’ replied Yvonne in a careful tone of neutrality, knowing exactly what Felicity was doing in her searching glance around the office. Yvonne also knew that Felicity, having found no unfinished job to complain about, would resort to another series of unconscious microaggressions, the first of which was checking the old Oxo tin on the shelf to ensure no money was missing from the kitty, after which she would tally the amount of tea, coffee, milk, and sugar against yesterday’s quantities.³⁴

Having verified the victuals, Felicity hung her jacket on the coat rack and sat down at her desk to check the letters deposited there by Yvonne, slitting through them quickly with a knife taken from her drawer. It was the third letter which caused a small smirk of satisfaction to spread over her lips. ‘I see we’ve had an invoice returned,’ she exclaimed in a loud voice, drawing the attention of the office. ‘It seems it wasn’t filled in correctly. It’s an order for the stationery cupboard.’ Her gaze drifted around the office, as though

Collective action involves women discussing their lives, analysing their shared experiences of injustice and oppression, and developing common goals. Fundamentally, it is about understanding and challenging gender-specific constraints on women’s options, which prevent them from achieving their true potential. (Sweetman, 2013).

In this, Felicity was forgetting what she had been like at Yvonne’s age, and she was also overlooking how every new generation of fresh hopefuls were willing to work harder, longer, and for less, in the desperate hope of getting ahead. Felicity’s own drive and ambition to reach an eminent position had been derailed by marriage, children, and a husband who proudly supported his wife’s career while assuming Felicity would also provide the traditional wifely duties of childcare, home care, and husband care. Unfortunately, Felicity had imbibed deeply at the same well of gender traditionalism, and hence she found herself being debilitated by years of performing the “double shift”:

In the UK alone, women carry out around 60% more unpaid work than men, spending more time on cooking, cleaning, and childcare. What we know less about, however, is the impact this work has on people’s mental health. (Reynolds, 2022).

Unfortunately, Felicity is a stunted character and has little awareness (or interest) in the above, and even if she did care, she divides her entire time between working administratively in the office and working domestically in the home, leaving no space for personal reflection or growth. Which is probably just as society wants it.

³⁴ Some examples of racial microaggressions include:

- assuming people of color [sic] are ‘dangerous’ or ‘deviant’ (Caporuscio, 2020).

she had no idea who had filled in the green chit. ‘Er, who last put an order in? It’s for some new reams of printing paper.’

You know who it was, you ancient crone, thought Yvonne, though she carefully kept her reply in its accustomed neutral tone. ‘That was probably me.’

‘Ah, I see,’ replied Felicity, gazing down at the order as though she had expected nothing less of the Bla—*youngest* member of the staff.³⁵ ‘Well, I’m afraid, my dear, you have made something of a mistake in this. Hence it’s been sent back by the stationers.’

‘Really?’ answered Yvonne, the neutrality in her tone breaking slightly. ‘I filled it in the same way as all the previous slips.’

Felicity’s upper lip trembled at the counterattack. ‘Not quite, I fear, otherwise it wouldn’t have been sent back, would it?’

Yvonne rose smoothly and quietly before moving over to Felicity’s desk, noting the tremor on the manager’s face who clearly feared the Black youth was going to become violent. ‘And where exactly is the mistake?’

‘It, um, just here,’ mumbled Felicity, cowed by the skin colour now standing in close proximity. ‘It seems that Cartwright’s haven’t been told which grade of paper we require.’

Yvonne stepped to the stationery cupboard³⁶ and pulled out the file containing the relevant invoices before returning to Felicity’s desk, opening the folder, and extracting a handful of carbon copies marked *Cartwright’s Stationary Supplies*. ‘In that case, it seems this one hasn’t been filled in correctly either,’ said Yvonne, placing the relevant paperwork down. ‘And

³⁵ Some further examples of racial microaggressions include:

- assuming people of color [sic] are less intelligent or capable than white people (Caporuscio, 2020).

³⁶ Located in Felicity’s self-imposed power zone and containing the precious staples, staple gun, paper, paper clips, rubber bands, and all other symbols of Felicity’s authority within the office. She exercised this authority by grudgingly doling out any required item in a manner which suggested she was undertaking a Herculean task for which she expected to receive no thanks whatsoever, thus allowing her to add a soupçon of martyrdom to the performance. Yvonne’s blatant invasion of Felicity’s cupboard exacerbated the older woman’s feelings of white fragility tenfold.

neither has this one. Or this. Or this. Oh, and here's another. And all filled in the same way. The way I copied.'

'Ah, yes, well, I think more training is still clearly needed,' blustered Felicity.

'I've never had *any* training,' retorted Yvonne.³⁷ 'That's why, when I had to order some fresh supplies, I simply copied what had been done before. I assume Cartwright's must have been in touch before about those other orders? Let's see, the last one was done by Rupert.'

'Oh, yah, right,' drawled Rupert, glancing up from the Manchester biography he was now clearly posing over, with one hand resting contemplatively at his temples while the other held the book ostentatiously for all to see. 'I did have a phone call from Cartwright after I did an invoice to them.' He shrugged in genuine unconcern, for his class and background did not permit such things as embarrassment or imposter syndrome; any mistakes he made were simply natural, trivial, and unremarkable in the wider scheme of things.³⁸

'And has anyone else had similar phone calls after sending off an order?' queried Yvonne, looking at the other two women; Sarah nodded, a smile of embarrassment spreading over her face, while Helen tried to reply, developed instead a rasping cough, and cheerfully held up two thumbs of acknowledgement. 'There we go. They must have decided to do it by paper rather than phone, this time,' concluded Yvonne.

³⁷ Had it been Vansittart claiming she had made the mistake, Yvonne would have been far more deferential – and she might even have taken the blame for something she hadn't done, conditioned as she was by her upbringing to be docile and compliant when dealing with the elite. And Vansittart was the traditional English elite personified in his class, wealth, sex, race, and in being her employer. This, of course, is an important theme of this novel, hence the anachronistic presence of carbon copies, which allows the scene to unfold in a way it never could if everyone was simply using the Internet to order the supplies.

³⁸

... young men are more likely to bullshit than young women, and ... bullshitting is somewhat more prevalent amongst those from more advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds... Strong evidence also emerges that bullshitters also display overconfidence in their academic prowess and problem-solving skills, while also ... providing more socially desirable responses than more truthful groups. (Jerrim, et al., 2019).

‘Yes, well, clearly more training for everyone in basic office management,’ muttered Felicity, looking in disfavour at the angry and opinionated Bla – *young* woman whom Felicity had unerringly identified as a potential troublemaker on the very first day they had met. Her eyes fell on the large pile of books on Yvonne’s desk, prompting suspicion as to how one so Bla – one so *young* could have gathered so many artefacts of learning together. ‘Are those company books?’ she demanded, her eyes flying around the shelving in the room, checking for tell-tale gaps of guilt between volumes. ‘No; they’re ones I brought in,’ replied Yvonne, her voice hardening slightly at the implication in Felicity’s expression before swallowing down her irritation, partly because she needed the work experience and partly because of her inculcated deference to authority. ‘What have you brought them in for, Yvonne?’ asked Sarah. ‘I just wanted to see what was out there,’ replied Yvonne, glossing over her hopes of impressing Vansittart for fear of being ridiculed by the hierarchy.³⁹ ‘This is excellent stuff, you know; listen to this!’ interrupted Hutchinson-Cockburn, eager to put himself back at the centre of attention where it so rightfully belonged, for he had the schooling, the education, and the grounding to lead while others followed.⁴⁰

39

When asked what they had learned about leadership, many of the Creative & Cultural... participants felt that there was a mismatch between what they perceived as desirable leadership qualities, such as being open, listening, facilitative and collaborative, with the predominance of hierarchical and ‘heroic’ styles in senior positions. These mainly female participants often felt disenfranchised by the cultural dominance of this heroic view of leadership (Pedler, 2011).

See also the next footnote and how those born to elite privilege don’t struggle with imposter syndrome. And you may want to track back to footnote #17 on the Great Man Theory, as well as #154 for the section on ‘heroification’.

40

The Oxford Tories were climbing the greasy pole before most students had even located it. The majority arrived at university uncertain, terribly dressed, trying to find themselves, often wrestling with imposter syndrome. Only at Oxford did they acquire the qualities that Johnson et al already had: a ruling-class accent, rhetorical skills and the ability to feel confident in any establishment setting. (Kuper, 2019).

Relating this back to imposter syndrome, as far back as 1978 it was known that:

‘Listen to what?’ asked Sarah.

‘*The Caged Lion*, by William Manchester,’ muttered Yvonne in irritation at having had her book (and thunder) appropriated by Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘I was just reading some observations on Churchill,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn with the solemn dignity required for such an activity.

‘Oh, gawd, no,’ sniggered Helen. ‘I’ve had enough of that in this job.’

Hutchinson-Cockburn stared, but being unable to comprehend the idea of anyone being uninterested in a subject he was holding forth upon, he filtered Helen’s comment out of existence and returned to the Manchester biography, ready to selflessly inform, educate and to entertain the gaggle of females gazing at him. “‘In the view of this writer, there can be no... life which does not include an account of the man’s times. This need for context is even greater when the central figure is a towering statesman.” Absolutely true, of course; context is indeed everything, and any attempt to write a full, honest life of a such a Great Man needs to be meticulous, unbiased and with everything presented succinctly in exactly the right place.’

‘No, really?’ rasped Helen in mock amazement, something Hutchinson-Cockburn missed as he was too absorbed in finding the next suitable section for his one-man dramatic recital.

“‘The grandson of a duke,’” began Hutchinson-Cockburn before immediately being interrupted.

‘Yes; Churchill was born into wealth and privilege,’ interrupted Helen in a scathing tone, much to Yvonne’s discomfort, for the younger woman was still firmly bound upon the altar of Churchillian worship. ‘I wonder how

women tend to attribute their successes to temporary causes, such as luck or effort, in contrast to men who are much more likely to attribute their successes to the internal, stable factor of ability. Conversely, women tend to explain failure with lack of ability, whereas men more often attribute failure to luck or task difficulty. Given the lower expectancies women have for their own (and other women's) performances, they have apparently internalized into a self-stereotype the societal sex-role stereotype that they are not considered competent (Clance & Imes, 1978).

that affected his life? You know, having access to all the opportunities denied to the lower orders?’⁴¹

“Winston Churchill was born in splendidous Blenheim Palace during the autumn of 1874,” continued Hutchinson-Cockburn, before grimly noting there was a reference to the British empire looming just ahead in the sentence, and given the Black girl was clearly a bolshie, (a fact he deduced from her skin colour), he skipped over a few lines.

“Winston rebelled against school authority...”

‘Hang on, when did he suddenly become “Winston” in the biography?’ grumbled Helen, her editor’s senses tingling.

‘Well, that was his name,’ sighed Hutchinson-Cockburn at the latest rude interruption to both Churchill and himself.

‘Shouldn’t a biography be impartial?’ queried Helen, sarcastically. ‘I mean, if Manchester is going round calling his subject by the familiar name of “Winston”, then it seems there is no impartiality at all.’

‘Ah, well, no, you see,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, speaking with considerable authority,⁴² ‘the biographer will have a relationship with his subject, and it’s quite in keeping when talking about such a great man as Churchill that occasionally, you know, on and off, you may well slip and call him by his first name, in a familiar gesture of respect, because, you know, you feel that you know that person well, from all your research. *Abbat, medico, patrono que intima pande,*’ he added, rather grandly.⁴³

⁴¹ An essential aspect of this novel; Churchill was allowed – and enabled – to be Churchill by both his privilege and his peers.

⁴² Hutchinson-Cockburn’s authority on the subject was in fact non-existent:

One thing you learnt at Oxford (even if you weren’t in the Union) was how to speak without much knowledge. Underprepared students would spend much of a tutorial talking their way around the holes in their essay. (Kuper, 2019).

⁴³

Using Latin phrases is often just verbal bullying, Bullingdon style.

...

There is really no denying that in public discourse dropping a Latin phrase is — whether intended or not — an exclusionary tactic.

...

[Quoting Latin] becomes a way of robbing people of a right to reply to the argument or — more bluntly — a way of spotting and calling out

“Conceal not the truth from thy physician and lawyer?” replied Helen, after taking a moment to mentally translate the words. ‘What’s that got to do with anything?’

“Winston rebelled against school authority,” continued Hutchinson-Cockburn, somewhat heavily, demonstrating he was not to be interrupted again by any prattling objections by anyone, especially by a woman unexpectedly revealed to be almost his equal in intelligence, “first becoming a disciplinary problem and then, at Harrow, the lowest-ranked scholar in the lower form. His dismal academic record ruled out Oxford or Cambridge, so he went to Sandhurst, England’s West Point.” ‘Sandhurst?’ mumbled Yvonne, almost intimidated beyond speech by Hutchinson-Cockburn’s accent, familiarity with Latin, and social breeding.⁴⁴

your bullshit. It may seem like clever oratory but it’s the exact opposite. It’s lazy. (Bull, 2017).

And the issue of the Classics being class-conscious has been noted by the University of Edinburgh:

Dr David Lewis, Lecturer in Greek History and Culture at Edinburgh, was appointed Classics Outreach Officer just before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and believes there is the potential to engage more people with Classics study, but wider education policy will do nothing to prevent the subject from becoming increasingly elitist. “There’s an enormous appetite for engaging with this topic,” he says. “Education is not just about skilling people for the marketplace, it’s about the intellectual formation of citizens... It is not just the case that bright students in state schools don’t get the opportunity to study Classics or classical languages and have to work hard to catch up later: it’s that Classics often isn’t even on their radar,” David continues. “It is something largely taught in fee-paying schools. *This fact has an impact on various other kinds of inequality, where students from the BAME community for example are on average more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background.*” (Simpson, 2023) emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ It’s interesting Yvonne should feel this, yet not be able to analyse where the reaction originated – i.e. from a lifetime of sociological brainwashing stamping a code of deference and diffidence onto the lower orders. And this has been going on for centuries:

A DEFERENTIAL SOCIETY IN THE CLASSICAL-that is, eighteenth-century English and American-sense is usually conceived of as consisting of an elite and a nonelite, in which the nonelite regard the elite, without too much resentment, as being of a superior status and culture to their own, and consider elite leadership in political matters to be something normal and natural... Deference is expected to be spontaneously exhibited

‘Where posh people learn how to give orders in the military,’ explained Helen. ‘As opposed to Eton and Oxbridge, where they learn how to give orders to the plebs.’

‘Sandhurst is simply a military academy for officers,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, glaring at Yvonne as he was too nervous to direct the expression toward Helen.

‘Oh, right,’ mumbled Yvonne, feeling her face glowing with embarrassment. ‘I didn’t know that.’

Hutchinson-Cockburn smirked at Yvonne’s admission of ignorance, while a thought flitted across his mind that he could definitely teach her a thing or two. His eyes roved over her dark skin⁴⁵ as he contemplated the things she would no doubt do in bed. Because, you know, he’d heard stories...

rather than enforced. A slave or a serf is flogged into obedience, not deference, and the deferential man is frequently depicted as displaying deference as part of his otherwise free political behavior [sic]. He defers to his superiors because he takes their superiority for granted, as part of the order of things. It is often suggested that what makes him do so is the conditioning effect of tradition and that the deferential society is closely akin to another favorite [sic] conceptual tool of historical sociologists—the traditional society. (Pocock, 1976).

45

Black women in the media are portrayed as sexual objects and this is not on accident. Hollywood works hard at perpetuating dehumanizing stereotypes of people of color, and Black women often take the target hit for this. In this era, we know that the media is a powerful outlet to the world, not just the nation, and has a significant impact on molding the general public to think a certain way. (Matthews, 2018).

Chapter Five (a)⁴⁶

With footnotes galore, as there is a lot to unpick here...

‘To continue,’ declaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn, shifting back from personal priapic speculation to the public oratorical stance taught by the Oxford debating clubs he had attended during his undergraduate years. “‘On February 20, 1895... Young Churchill was commissioned a second lieutenant and gazetted to the Fourth Hussars, preparing to embark for India.’”

‘He got his commission rather quickly, didn’t he?’ said Sarah, admiringly. ‘How did he manage that?’

‘The wealthy just bought them, in those days,’ said Helen, checking her phone for any message from the vet concerning her cat, but the only unread text came from her husband, which she dismissed with a grunt. ‘Yet more jobs for the boys. Or commissions for the boys, in this case. No special ability required.’

‘This is Winston Churchill you’re talking about,’ sniffed Felicity, using the hallowed name as both rebuke and a demand for greater respect.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Having moved yet more material around via cut and paste, I couldn’t be bothered to renumber every sodding chapter yet again, and hence the alphabetical labelling.

⁴⁷ Please note the significance of this.* The staff at Clavier and Coldwell represent a macrocosm of society, and as such, their comments and beliefs can be mapped outward onto the wider community; Felicity’s attempt to use the very name “Churchill” as a way of maintaining order in the office is *exactly* the same methodology employed by the Establishment and their followers to suppress the voices of anyone outside their hegemonic order:

A baleful silence attends one of the most talked-about figures in British history. You may enthuse endlessly about Winston Churchill “single-handedly” defeating Hitler. But mention his views on race or his colonial policies, and you’ll be instantly drowned in ferocious and orchestrated vitriol.

...

Yet providing a fuller picture is made difficult. Scholars who explore less illustrious sides of Churchill are treated dismissively. Take the example of Churchill College, Cambridge, where I am a teaching fellow. In response to calls for fuller information about its founder, the college set up a series of events on Churchill, Empire and Race. I recently chaired the second of these, a panel discussion on “The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill”.

‘And he was a self-educated man,’ interrupted Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Listen to this! “In Bangalore Churchill succeeded where his schoolmasters failed. During the long, sweltering siestas, he educated himself, reading Plato, Aristotle, Gibbon, Macaulay, Schopenhauer, and poring over thousands of pages of parliamentary debates.”’

‘There, you see?’ demanded Felicity in acidic triumph.

‘See what?’ rasped Helen in exasperation. ‘You mean the incredible snobbery and classism on display?’

‘But his learning!’ insisted Felicity, though with a less strident tone than she used against Yvonne, for Helen’s position commanded respect, as did her learning, experience, and no-nonsense attitude.

‘Churchill was the elitist son of an elitist aristocrat, educated in the elitist way in various elitist establishments,’ replied Helen. ‘His supposed self-learning was just him doing in his own time what his school had done beforehand, so he was already immersed in that educational context; it’s hardly surprising he should develop an elitist education and outlook. What would be surprising is if he picked up books like *The Communist Manifesto* for any reason other than his own benefit. And he wanted a career in parliament – just like his father – so it’s hardly surprising he read up on parliamentary matters.’

‘That’s a shocking thing to say,’ muttered Felicity, shifting uneasily in her seat. She would have said more but her stomach was beginning to curdle, and she rather suspected the milk on her breakfast cereal had been on the turn. And being shouted at by her teenage son had unsettled her, as had her husband’s implied criticism of her work outfit. She glared at an email

Even before it took place, the discussion was repeatedly denounced in the tabloids and on social media as “idiotic”, a “character assassination” aimed at “trashing” the great man. Outraged letters to the college said this was academic freedom gone too far, and that the event should be cancelled. The speakers and I, all scholars and people of colour, were subjected to vicious hate mail, racist slurs and threats. We were accused of treason and slander. One correspondent warned that my name was being forwarded to the commanding officer of an RAF base near my home. (Gopal, 2021).

* If you feel that the author blatantly pointing out what he’s doing lacks nuance or sophistication, then please consider what a meta-novel is.

containing an unsolicited romance submission to the company and brusquely rejected it with a copy and paste message. She wasn't a fan of the romance genre at the best of times, and this morning was definitely not the best of times, digestively speaking.⁴⁸

'You're saying Churchill was formed by his background, meaning he came out in the mould dictated by his environment?' said Yvonne, slowly, as a fresh way of contemplating the world began flowering in her mind.

'Yup,' nodded Helen. 'And the warping of any individual into any particular set of ideologies should be a matter for deep discussion and analysis, but instead it just becomes an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo.'

"Developing a flair for the language," continued Hutchinson-Cockburn, ignoring Helen's points to instead wonder at the sheer rudeness of those interrupting him, "he found he could earn money writing newspaper and magazine articles and books."

'Because everyone just stumbles over the fact they can simply make money from writing,' sniggered Helen. 'I mean, it's not like anyone common has to keep on submitting and being rejected time and again – oh, wait, it is *exactly* like that. But not for old Winston. Because he had contacts.'

'He had talent!' snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn.

'He had connections and time to write,' retorted Helen. 'How many rejections did we send out last week?'

'Um, I don't know,' replied Yvonne, feeling a little apprehensive at Helen's ongoing blasphemy against the Great Man.

'Fifty-six. And how many of those will ever get anywhere with another publisher? Probably none. If they had the connections, they'd have already used them. Instead of which, they approach us blindly and get knocked back. Regardless of talent.'

48

Chekhov's Gag: Most times, jokes come and go; they get their set up, make you laugh, and then they're done and you move on to the next joke. But sometimes, jokes aren't done with you. Sometimes, you find yourself not only going back to the joke, but having it bring a whole new twist - the first joke wasn't just a gag, but also set up for something else that blindsides you later on. It's Chekhov's Gun being used as a joke in its first appearance. (TV Tropes, n.d.).

Hutchinson-Cockburn's lips thinned at the totally unfair criticism toward the Hero of the Country, but rather than risk engaging Helen in debate, he instead raised his voice and continued to read from the script. "At the same time he felt strong stirrings of ambition. He would, he decided, seek a seat in parliament. But first he must become famous."

'Oh, yeah, everyone decides to enter parliament just because they feel ambitious,' gurgled Helen. 'Well, if you're rich and already part of that social level, you do. Everyone else, however, can take a running jump! I wonder if that crucial aspect of English society gets a mention?'

'Oh, surely that's not right?' protested Sarah, her eyes widening, for though she carried a devious and somewhat twisted set of values into any argument concerning contracts with authors and agents, she was oddly gullible in many other areas of life.⁴⁹ 'Surely Churchill must have been special, to decide to go into politics and to succeed?'

'He was just following in daddy's footsteps,' replied Helen. 'His father was Chancellor of the Exchequer, you know? Do you think *you* could just walk into a newspaper or magazine and get commissioned, and then walk into a parliamentary seat without any social contacts? And without pay? Members of Parliament didn't get paid back in those days; that's why it was a sport only for the wealthy. And it still is today, even though the parasites now pay themselves a massive wage to screw us all over.'

'Yes, I mean, no, but Churchill was different, wasn't he?' replied Sarah.

'He certainly was,' said Hutchinson-Cockburn, indignantly. 'Listen to this! "Appointed president of the Board of Trade, he joined with David Lloyd George, the new chancellor [sic]⁵⁰ of the Exchequer, in the move to abolish sweated labor [sic] despite die-hard peers in the House of Lords. In 1908, working in tandem, they conceived and then guided through the Commons

49

The term "meta-cognitive myopia" (MM) refers to the phenomenon that people are pretty accurate in processing even complex information, but they are uncritical and naïve regarding the history and validity of the information given. (Fiedler, 2018).

⁵⁰ Hutchinson-Cockburn doesn't actually say "sic" here; that's just an academic convention to show the quote is accurately copied from the source.

an unprecedented programme of liberal legislation; unemployment compensation, health insurance, and pensions for the aged, all of them to be financed by taxes on the rich and the landed gentry.” What do you think about that, eh?’⁵¹

⁵¹ It is instructive to compare this with Churchill’s attitudes as reported by his contemporary, Virginia Cowles, who published her biography on him in 1953. She starts approvingly, noting how:

... breeding automatically opened the doors to the powerful oligarchic society which ruled Britain. (Cowles, 1953).

For Cowles, and certainly for Churchill and his ilk, breeding seems to be on an equal footing with the laws of physics, with both being built into the very fabric of the universe. And she later vigorously masturbates out a gushing panegyric to the elite which also reveals her hatred of the poor:

The age of the Common Man had very little appeal for Mr. Churchill... This paternal, benevolent and oligarchic Britain was the sort of Britain Winston had been brought up to love and revere... The class warfare of the post-war period was very different; it appeared to be undermining the common sense of the British working man and making him wonder whether he wished to continue being ruled by his betters... He wanted security, higher wages, a better education, and a larger share in the nation's wealth. He also appeared to want a larger influence in the nation's industrial and political life. This last made no sense at all to Winston. Let the working man climb the ladder first; why should he demand the prizes while he still stood at the bottom? (Ibid).

The malicious arrogance, unfairness, and snobbery emanating from Churchill, his peers, the wider elitist system, and Cowles herself, simply drips off the page. But has anything changed since? Have we progressed as a nation? Has genuine meritocracy started to spread across the land?

No:

One of the leading members [Jacob Rees-Mogg] of the David Cameron generation of new Tories created a storm yesterday by comparing people who were not privately educated and did not go to Oxford or Cambridge universities to "potted plants". (McSmith, 2011).

No again:

During his [Boris Johnson’s] time as editor of right-wing political magazine the Spectator, he wrote: “The modern British male is useless. “If he is blue collar, he is likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless and hopeless, and perhaps claiming to suffer from low self-esteem brought on by unemployment.” (Andersonn, 2019).

No for a third time:

Ex-chief whip Andrew Mitchell probably did call police officers "plebs", a High Court judge has said as he rejected a libel case against the Sun. (BBC, 2014).

And no for a fourth:

Mr Gove boasted that current justice minister Lucy Frazer, who had invited him to speak, was “actually capable of tempting me into bed with her”, and implied that one college’s entire rugby club had had group sex with her.

He then referred to her “preference for peach-flavoured condoms” and said she had done “remarkably well” to come from “the back streets of the slums of Leeds”. (Bancroft, 2021).

And why is society like this? Simple:

The leaders tell all their people that everyone is equal and that everyone has the chance of becoming a leader. But this isn't true because the leaders have made it impossible for the people's children to become leaders.

Today all the great institutions of state - government, judiciary and military - are run by an elite who have attended private schools. (Verkaik, 2019).

Perhaps the best way of summing up this footnote is to point out that although Churchill fought in his earlier days for greater rights for the workers, he never once fought to change the Establishment itself in any fundamental way. And this, really, is the cornerstone of this book; politicians come and go, squawking about equality, greater pay, and more job opportunities for all, but none of them make any meaningful attempt to change things because the world works for them and them alone:

...there are two sorts of MP... those who see being an MP as a public service... and those who see it as a conveyor belt to a private sector job... There seem to be many more of the latter... (Jones, 2015).

And so nowhere is there a genuine alternative for those who don't want to be corporate serfs for all their days. Nowhere is it possible for the poor to escape the class system, or their economic servitude to the capitalist state. Nowhere is there any hope. And this is English society, forever.

And this explains why the media is part of the problem, for no journalist or reporter is ever going to attack the system itself, for the system is run, and owned, by the same capitalists who own the press. Meaning the capitalists own the reporters themselves. The compliant, weak, pathetic, inadequate reporters who would never dare run a story against their owners:

Who owns the media shapes what stories are covered and how they are written about. The UK media has a very concentrated ownership structure, with six billionaires owning and/or having a majority of voting shares in most of the national newspapers.

...

True editorial independence often doesn't exist in these papers. The owners can – and do – interfere with what is published in their publications, which editors and journalists are promoted or fired as well as which political parties the paper supports. (Jones, 2019).

Even at news operations that aren't owned by billionaires we see the same commitment to preserving the status quo at the expense of truth, honesty, and wider society, demonstrating just how sick UK journalism is:

Jenifer Arcuri's new revelations about her affair with Boris Johnson have gone largely unreported by the BBC.

The story appears to have everything – sex, betrayal, abuse of power, lies told in high places – so, on the face of it, it is somewhat surprising to find it covered only grudgingly, and at the margins of the BBC's huge range of output.

It is, however, completely consistent with the corporation's desperation to avoid a fight with the Government... (Howse, 2021).

And it's not as if this is a recent issue; the BBC has been little more than a tool for government propaganda since day one:

Like all cultural dictatorships, the B.B.C. was more important for what it silenced than for what it achieved. Controllers ranked higher than producers in its hierarchy. Disturbing views were rarely aired. The English people, if judged by the B.B.C., were uniformly devout and kept always to the middle of the road. (Taylor, 1985).

And this is hardly surprising when we consider how BBC journalists:

...remain answerable to their superiors who, like many of them, are often drawn from the same social strata as politicians and state officials and are, moreover, responsible for maintaining good relations with senior politicians and other elites who ultimately determine the BBC's future. (Mills, 2016).

Perhaps the last word should go to Professor Hannu Nieminen, who bluntly states that the media cannot be trusted to do its job:

We have entered times when increasing inequality feeds growing distrust in social and political institutions. Together, these two tendencies – diminishing equality and a lack of trust – create a challenge to liberal democracy. The media have a pivotal role in these developments. On the one hand, they are central to democracy; on the other, they are part of the process of normalizing inequality. (Nieminen, 2019).

And this is not just the fear of an academic:

It has become increasingly common for members of political and economic communities to warn about the dangers of increasing inequality and the threat that it poses to our societies. We hear these high-level warnings from, among others, the leaders of the World Economic Forum, the Munich Security Conference, the US National Intelligence Council and EU experts... (Ibid).

This chapter is not, therefore, simply a rant about the corrupt political establishment, the corrupt media, and corrupt capitalism, but is founded on genuine fear on where we are and where we are going – not just as a country, but as a species:

Growing numbers of people in developed countries feel that they have been abandoned by the elites as well as by the legacy media (Nicolau & Giles, 2017; Ipsos, 2017; Swift, 2016). A central dimension of this development is that distrust in institutions is prevalent not only among less advantaged groups but also, increasingly, among the educated middle classes (Chauvel &

Hartung, 2016; ETB, 2017; NIC, 2017; WEF, 2018b: 15). The radicalization of the middle classes facing uncertain futures and downward social mobility has introduced a new element to traditional political populism. Distrust in the elites is not just expressed in traditional forms – through political passivity, abstaining from voting or voting in protest. Anti-elite protests are channelled into more organized forms, in new right-wing parties as well as in left–radical movements. These organizations have the potential to challenge seriously the “old” parties, which are perceived as protecting the privileged elites. This tendency can be seen all over Europe, from Greece and Italy to Sweden and Norway and from Hungary and Slovakia to Germany, France and Britain. What is perhaps different from the earlier forms of popular discontent is the recruitment of the middle classes to populist politics that can supply anti-elitist criticism with a stronger voice at a bigger volume. The leaders of the new right-wing parties are also increasingly well connected and well trained for public performance, and they often either own or have an influence over major media outlets. (Ibid).

Chapter Five (b)

With ever increasing footnotes, as there is even more to unpack in this chapter...

For an answer, Helen delved into Yvonne's stack,⁵² withdrew John Ramsden's *Man Of The Century*, and flicked it open with one practiced, nicotine-stained finger. 'It's in here somewhere... oh yes, here we are: "he tended invariably to give the impression that social policies were being generously handed down by a benevolent government of the people's betters, rather than as a vindication of their 'rights'". What do *you* think of that?'

'And what exactly is wrong?' demanded Hutchinson-Cockburn.

⁵² Not a euphemism. This isn't a *Carry On* film.

⁵³ Helen could also have mentioned Virginia Cowles' mealy-mouthed defence/airbrushing of Churchill's early anti-establishment policies which inadvertently reveal not only her own adoration of the establishment elite but also how little – and how weak – Churchill's intentions were:

It was true that Winston himself had once attacked the privileged classes, but that was long ago when he was very young and *the privileged class was very safe*; his actions could be classified as political wild oats and forgotten. (Cowles, 1953). Emphasis mine.

For a much clearer view of Churchill's attitudes toward the workers, consider this on the General Strike of 1926 from AJP Taylor:

Churchill brought out an official government organ, the *British Gazette*... in which he denounced British workingmen as 'the enemy'. He demanded 'unconditional surrender' – a demand he repeated, more appropriately, against the Germans in the second World war. (Taylor, 1985).

Bear in mind the workers arraigned by Churchill, the government, and big business, were miners who were seeing their wages decrease while their hours were lengthened, and all for a job both dangerous and filthy. It seems that Churchill, the government, and big business all failed to see, or failed to care, that they were dealing with their fellow men; men who were suffering under appalling living and working conditions. But then, it seems to be entirely in keeping that Churchill, the government, and big business all viewed the workers as something less than human. A resource to be used and abused. Something that could (and should) be policed, brutalised, and shot at. No wonder the workers lost.

‘What’s wrong with a patronising elitist man conferring basic human rights on the population as though he’s personally doing them a great favour?’ asked Helen rhetorically as she spun the volume back onto Yvonne’s small desk, almost dislodging the three piles of books on top.

‘How did you know about that?’ asked Yvonne.⁵⁴

‘I’ve been in this ghastly business for over twenty years, and I’ve worked on over a dozen Churchill biographies in that time,’ replied Helen, puffing on a well-chewed pencil in the absence of any real cigarettes. ‘You soon get to know the game, believe me. It’s played by the same people, in the same way, and with the same results.’

‘This is history!’ exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn in genuine shock at the Cultural Marxist agenda⁵⁵ being forced on him. He swiftly plunged back into the Manchester biography, as much for the sense of stability it gave him as for any facts therein. “‘Today military historians agree that the Dardanelles strategy could have ended the war in 1916 with a German defeat”. See? Military historians agree!’

‘No, really?’ sneered Helen. ‘A military strategy could have defeated the enemy if only it had worked? Amazing analysis! That’s like saying I would have been a great footballer if only I could pass, dribble, shoot and score at the highest level.’

⁵⁴ What actually happened here is that Yvonne yelled in alarm at seeing the ordered piles of the Establishment being scattered by independent thought, and unconsciously flung herself across the books to keep them safe, before asking of Helen; ‘How did you know about that?’ Note the discrepancy between what the Establishment narrative on the page is telling you and what’s actually happening down here in the footnotes. And then think about how this applies to the media in the real world.

⁵⁵ A handy catchall term of abuse for those on the political right against anything they don’t like, originating in an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory:

According to the theory of “Cultural Marxism,” a group of Jewish Marxists called the Frankfurt School have profoundly reshaped society and public opinion; deciding to abandon the original Marxist goal of an international working-class revolution, they sought to implement socialism through a slow, creeping takeover of “culture.” Under such names as “political correctness” and “multiculturalism,” so the theory goes, “Cultural Marxists” indoctrinated and shamed “the West” into abandoning Christianity, family, and nation in favor [sic] of a new worldview and system of control, involving mass immigration, sexual liberation, and moral and aesthetic decline. (Braune, 2019).

‘But it was all down to external factors beyond Churchill’s control,’ blustered Hutchinson-Cockburn, ignoring Helen’s point. ‘It was all down to a “timid British admiral” and “equally incompetent British generals” – but it was Churchill who paid the price. Listen! Churchill, “as the stratagem’s most flamboyant advocate, was dismissed from the admiralty.” He took the blame!’⁵⁶ He suffered for it. His career was derailed and everyone thought it was the end of him!’⁵⁷

‘It was certainly the end of the two hundred and fifty thousand Allied soldiers killed in the campaign,’ rasped Helen. ‘But yes, you worry about the effect on his career. That’s the real tragedy here, isn’t it?’⁵⁸

‘And look at how patriotically he reacted,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, again ignoring the inconvenient point. “He joined the army, crossed to Flanders, and, as a lieutenant colonel, commanded a battalion in the trenches.” He went out to defend his country!’

⁵⁶ In fact, Churchill tried to shift the blame to the First Sea Lord, John Fisher, “... in what was at best an over-simplification and at worst a travesty of the facts.” (Ponting, 1994). Yvonne had the above – and other similar quotes – at her fingertips, but social conformity coupled with the need to ingratiate herself with authority kept her quietly compliant.

⁵⁷ It’s certainly difficult to imagine how a commoner would have been able to survive such a disaster, but this wasn’t an issue for Churchill:

Had his ruling class credentials been less estimable, he might have been unmade by his failure. Instead, he returned to parliament in 1916 and once again rose through the ranks... (Seymour, 2018).

It’s almost as though the law and consequences exist only for the poor, but not for anyone else...

⁵⁸ It seems all of Churchill’s sympathy was preserved for Churchill himself at this point, for he was:

...deeply depressed... [and] unable to see a way of rebuilding his career. (Ponting, 1994).

There seems to be no mention or concern given by The Right Honourable Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill, MP, to the quarter of a million slaughtered men, their lives, hopes and dreams torn apart by political decisions. Instead, Churchill’s thoughts dwelt on his own career. But then, as Gordon Corrigan notes:

There is no question that Churchill was personally brave and completely unafraid of death. The trouble was that he was not afraid of anyone else’s death, either... (Corrigan, 2006).

‘He already suspected he’d need a way out of the political disaster – that’s the political disaster, not the humanitarian disaster, which he didn’t seem to mind about at all – so he contacted an old friend to get him a command in the army,’ snorted Helen.⁵⁹

‘Nonetheless, he did it,’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘He went out and served on the front and you can’t deny his bravery; he was in the trenches; it says so right here!’⁶⁰

‘He was barely over there for a few months before he came back after being given the opportunity to resign his commission,’ said Helen with a deep sigh of exasperation.⁶¹ ‘Yet Manchester’s comment makes it seem Churchill was out there for some considerable time. You can’t take anything at face value, you know; everyone in the Establishment has an agenda, and they shamelessly use language to distort reality, not to reveal it.’

⁵⁹ In early May 1915 (after the initial failure at Gallipoli but before the political crisis), sensing his career might be in trouble, [Churchill] had written to his old friend [Sir John] French [commander of the British Expeditionary Force] asking for his help... French offered to find him a command in France. (Ponting, 1994).

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During his period of attachment the battalion was in the trenches on and off for eighteen days... and had five men killed, two died of wounds, thirteen wounded and seven men slightly wounded. It was not a time of great activity.

Now the War Office stepped in, and the notion of Brigadier General Churchill was vetoed. Instead Churchill reluctantly, and with some ill grace, accepted command of a New Army battalion, 6 Royal Scots Fusiliers... and then spent five months pretending to be a lieutenant colonel and battalion commander, most of it in Ploegsteert Wood, South of Ypres, a relatively quiet area at that time... irritating his officers and the brigade commander by constantly rushing off to London when an opportunity arose to do a bit of political lobbying... Churchill unashamedly used the military communication system to bring him political gossip from London, and described his corps commander as a ‘villain’ when he refused him leave on the very sound grounds that if a battalion was in the trenches then its commanding officer should be there too. (Corrigan, 2006).

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[Churchill’s friend, Sir Archibald Sinclair] turned down Churchill’s offer to leave with him and make a career in politics, having the decency to reply that as he was young and unwounded, his place was at the front. Churchill returned from his self-imposed exile and resumed life as a politician. (Corrigan, 2006).

‘I’m really confused now,’ said Yvonne, indicating the book still clutched in Hutchinson-Cockburn’s hands but addressing her comments to Helen.

‘Are you saying the whole introduction isn’t true?’

‘I’m saying it’s nothing but a series of broad-brush statements that assumes the reader will be compliant enough to accept rather than to question.’

‘This is scholarship!’ protested Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘But Helen’s just told us things about Churchill’s past that aren’t in the book!’ exclaimed Yvonne. ‘I mean; what are we supposed to believe?’

‘I’m sure it’s the truth,’ snorted Felicity. ‘It wouldn’t be published, otherwise.’

‘It may be the truth, but that doesn’t mean it is honest and accurate,’ replied Helen. ‘There is a difference. And it’s damn dishonest to omit or gloss over the full details.’⁶²

‘But his bravery!’ insisted Hutchinson-Cockburn.⁶³

‘Churchill thought he was anointed by Destiny to do great things, so running off to battle when you honestly think you have divine protection is not bravery; its narcissism verging on mental illness.

‘But that’s the posh wealthy bastard classes for you.’⁶⁴

⁶² Indeed. And the entire point of this novel is to plead for honesty and integrity in all forms of media, for without honesty and integrity, society will never be able to understand itself and thus grow into something better. Idolising Churchill, and turning him into something he never was, is actively harmful and dishonest. And yet the Establishment does it. Repeatedly.

⁶³

Churchill decided that politics was, after all, his first love, and was permitted to leave the army provide that he did not apply for military command again... (Edgerton, 2020).

⁶⁴ In case the reader is wondering at the rather sarcastic humour coming through, I would like to point out that when you are born with nothing and you have no real opportunities, then humour is all you have left. You can either laugh, or you can go under: “Humor [sic] just feels good; it distracts us from our problems and promotes a lighter perspective.” (Lonczak, 2021). They may have taken our freedom and opportunities, but they’ll never take our sense of humour!

Except if the wealthy elite do see us laughing, they’ll use this as a justification for pouring more economic scorn and cultural misery upon us in the belief that we can’t be having it too bad if we’re going around sniggering at everything. So, in fact, they win again. Which is the entire point of this novel.

Chapter Five (c)

And a slight easing of the footnotes. Yay!

Hutchinson-Cockburn placed the book back onto Yvonne's desk⁶⁵ with a snort of well-bred disdain, thus sparing him the need to articulate a proper response, before sulkily sitting down at his desk and burying himself in his blank computer screen, which he hastily turned on as Vansittart breezed into the office.

Vansittart checked his watch as he entered, seeing he was right on time for his early morning 11 o'clock (ish) start. His plan was to check his emails and post, browse a spreadsheet or two, and then head off to lunch with an agent who was pitching some new comedy writer as the next PG Wodehouse. Vansittart wasn't really in the market for humour, but neither was he averse to spending a few hours at the Chummo Club before returning home. Especially as the agent would be paying the bill.

'Good morning, Michael,' purred Felicity. 'How was the meeting?' She didn't ask how the meeting had gone as this could imply some doubt on Vansittart's ability to handle the occasion; instead, Felicity let the unspoken assumptions of Vansittart's capability twine their way through her opening question like a cat's tail winding around a pair of human legs.

'Very good indeed,' beamed Vansittart, cheerfully oblivious to Felicity's coded message. 'I think we ought to get the submission guidelines out today for the biography, to show we're on the ball.' His eyes fell on the artfully arranged pile of biographies on Yvonne's desk. 'Good lord; what have you got there?'

'We've been looking at what's already on the market,' replied Hutchinson-Cockburn before Yvonne could even open her mouth.

'Excellent stuff!' beamed Vansittart at Hutchinson-Cockburn. 'What have you started with?'

⁶⁵ Compare this carefully controlled action with Helen's almost identical move a while ago; Hutchinson-Cockburn's attitudes preserve the Establishment piles on Yvonne's desk, while Helen's learning threatens to scatter them, with only Yvonne's servile reaction saving the whole lot from toppling over. Symbolism, people!

‘Manchester’s *The Caged Lion*.’

‘Hm; not sure I can recall that one,’ said Vansittart, though he carried no doubt the book would be a splendid paean to the Great Man.

‘A splendid work,’ simpered Hutchinson-Cockburn, echoing Vansittart’s thought processes.

Jesus wept! thought Yvonne in annoyance at both Hutchinson-Cockburn for taking credit that wasn’t his, and at Vansittart for simply accepting Rupert’s annexing of her research. In this, however, she was fighting a battle that was already lost; in Vansittart’s world, the mound of books could only be related to the Oxbridge educated Hutchinson-Cockburn, for Vansittart’s assumptions and behaviour were moulded and limited by his upbringing. Not that Vansittart was aware of this. In fact, he wasn’t even aware there was anything to be aware *about*, for this was the way the world worked – at least, for him and others like him.

‘Jesus wept!’ exclaimed Yvonne out loud as she flipped through a few pages of the Manchester biography and saw a truly upsetting comment.

‘What’s up?’ asked Helen,

“‘Like most men of his generation, he regarded blacks as an inferior race.’”

Yvonne stared round the office and was met by sympathy from Helen, bewilderment from Sarah, and carefully neutral expressions from her remaining three colleagues. ‘Page one hundred and sixty, if you want to look it up.’

‘That was just the era,’ muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘You can’t judge Churchill by modern standards. You have to look at the society he was in at the time.’⁶⁶

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Since the 1920s, the Communist Party had campaigned against colonialism, the “colour bar” and racial discrimination (and racist violence) in the colonial sphere and in Britain. The Communist Party was one of the first organizations within the British labor movement to have an explicit anti-racist agenda, opposing the “colour bar” in the British Empire/Commonwealth then opposing it in the domestic sphere, as the number of Commonwealth migrants rose in the 1940s and 1950s. (Smith, 2017).

This does seem to knock a bit of a hole in the “you can’t judge him by today’s standards” argument; antiracism didn’t pop into existence last Wednesday. People have been protesting it for years. See also footnotes #145 and #146.

‘I notice Manchester doesn’t judge him at all,’ replied Yvonne, her anger momentarily lifting the brain fog of deference and giving her the bravery to speak. ‘He seems to pass it off as a minor issue, scarcely worth mentioning. ‘Maybe Manchester is a little forgiving of Churchill’s contextual attitudes,’ interrupted Vansittart, deciding his kind yet firm opinion was needed to “reassure” (by which he subconsciously meant “silence”) Yvonne. ‘Let’s look at the publication date,’ he continued, grabbing the book from Yvonne’s hands. ‘It was probably an early book from the fifties, before everyone got so sensitive.’

‘It was published in 1988,’ deadpanned Yvonne.

‘Ah, yes, well,’ squirmed Vansittart. ‘Still; things are different now. And the art of the biography has moved on. The readers can make up their own minds.’

‘And this is serious scholarship,’ interrupted Hutchinson-Cockburn, disliking the amount of attention the Black girl was getting from Vansittart. ‘Just look at Manchester’s research – an entire year of interviews with the people who knew Churchill intimately; his family and servants.’

‘Surely true scholarship is sifting material to try and find the truth, not just being told something and then obediently writing it up?’ demanded Helen.

‘His family and friends are bound to be biased.’

‘An excellent point; we must make sure our biography will be innovative, and will stand out from the madding crowd,’ announced Vansittart, throwing in the literary reference with ease. He had originally started dropping such allusions to impress people with his learning, but now, thirty years later, it was mostly just habit. As were his routine promises to publish new and exciting works before defaulting to his usual practice of bringing out yet more of the same.

‘Any ideas on what to put in the submission call?’ asked Yvonne, repressing her distress for fear it was harming her career chances within the company.

‘Let Michael settle in and check his letters and e-mails, dear,’ replied Felicity with a razor-sharp smile as she put the pushy intern in her place; if there was one thing Felicity could not abide, it was people thrusting themselves forward. Her eyes flickered to her notebook as she resolved to

visit Michael's office as soon as possible, to ensure she was the one Michael told his ideas to, so she could then write them up and post them on the company website. Before anyone else could usurp the role from her. 'Oh, just put the usual stuff up,' replied Vansittart with an airy wave of the hand as he walked through to his own office. 'Use the old template and adapt it; that should do. You know the drill.'

Chapter Six

The call to publishing!

And a footnote deconstructing the call.

Clavier and Coldwell are delighted to put out a call for a new and vibrant reconstruction on the life of our greatest ever leader – Winston Churchill! This will be a dynamic and ground-breaking fresh interpretation which will break boundaries inside publishing and out!

For all non-fiction, please send:

- *A synopsis (no more than one page) telling us why your book is different to all the rest, complete with the unique selling point. Please use bullet points rather than prose for this.*
- *The word count and delivery date.*
- *Your relevant qualifications.*
- *The most recently published books you have read on the topic, (please give all publishing details including author, date, publisher, sales figures etc), and tell us how your manuscripts fits in with these latest releases, e.g. how you will build upon the research and arguments made by your peers.*
- *The expected readership demographic.*
- *Your previously published books and articles on the topic.*
- *Your social media presence and the number of people following you.*
- *Any organisations where your book can be advertised, with costings.*
- *The first three chapters, fully edited and ready for publication, with referencing.*

To improve your chances of success, we strongly advise you to obtain some of our previous titles so you can see the type of work we publish – and the quality we strive for. And before submission, please consider:

How familiar are you with our publishing list, and how confident do you feel about your work fitting our requirements?

How confident are you in working with us to make your book a success?

Do you have the time to promote your work thoroughly and widely?
Are you prepared to work with us and our partners in the trade to promote
the book to the public? ⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The above is an amalgamation of varying calls for submissions from genuine publishers. Depressing, isn't it? And so very, very elitist. Who has time to write? Who has time to research? Who has the spare money to blithely purchase previous titles to see the type of work the publisher wants? Who has sufficient spare time to promote their books by traveling from one distant venue to another, as well as posting online at any given time of the day? The answer? Mostly the privileged. Welcome to the corporate world of publishing. Enjoy trying to get in without contacts or generational wealth.

Chapter Seven

Social media reacts to the new call for submissions.

This social media site is very like Twitter while not actually being Twitter in case I get sued for saying it is Twitter. (Or 'X', as we're supposed to be calling it these days). So, think of it as a constructed façade. But then, the whole point of this book is that it's a constructed façade which invites the reader to consider the fact that the book is a constructed façade, and to further consider how all other books, fiction and non-fiction alike, are also constructed façades. So please apply this awareness of fakery to all media relating to Churchill.

And any other subject, for that matter.

Mahad Korhonen: That's all we need; yet another biography about a racist warmonger.

Hatim Sethwi: Yeah. Shelves are already full of Churchill. What else is there to say about him??

Mahad Korhonen: Maybe the truth about his racism?

Rich The Smith: LOL! That would be a surprise.

Gabrielleinspires: Why can't we have more books on people like Rosa Parks?

TheDoctorsdog: I like the bit about "our greatest ever leader." Shows they've already made their minds up!

Rich The Smith: Rosa really inspires people!

Washingline387: Yeah, nothing like a call for new books which are just like all the other old books, is there?

Gabrielleinspires: Bet some rich white guy gets the job and gives us another whitewash.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ A reasonable suspicion, given how the Establishment works:

A detailed analysis of his [Boris Johnson's] parliamentary register of interests by Byline Times reveals how the Prime Minister operates within an interlocking web of financial elites – from the worlds of banking, investment, property development, construction, logistics, and luxury services for the super-rich.

Patriotman: Cant beleive im reading this lefty hate on our greatest prim minster.

Leftybaiter: Yeah, we'd all be speaking German now if not for him.

Mahad Korhonen: "Greatest Prime Minister?" Then why did the public vote him out straight after the war?

Leftybaiter: And then voted him straight back in again after! That don't fit your narrative does it?

Mahad Korhonen: Voted in by the first past the post system. Labour increased its voting share but lost in a corrupt electoral system.

MaureenFreebody: Churchill voted against the NHS several times. He hated the idea.

Taratime: Is that right? I didn't know that about him!

Rich The Smith: I know, we just keep on being told how great he was and how he won the war! Nothing else matters to the Right.

RobynwithaY: I think the Russians and Americans would disagree with Churchill winning the war!

Patriotman The Russians are commies!

RobynwithaY: What's that got to do with anything?

Mahad Korhonen: It's just whataboutery.

MaureenFreebody: Churchill thought the NHS was a "first step to turn Britain into a National Socialist economy." He honestly viewed the NHS – the actual NHS – as a precursor to Nazism!

Britbadboy1939: So much for the tolerant left!

Engandalways: He saved us from the fascists!

Since 2015, Johnson has received £1,000,700 in political donations (excluding small gifts) – almost exclusively from a group comprising of a few dozen of Britain's super-rich.

The pattern exposes a great flaw in British democracy and raises a suspicion that, in Boris Johnson's Britain, little more than a million pounds can – in effect – buy the Prime Minister. (Ahmed, 2022).

Thus we see another example of how varying wealthy Establishment individuals and cliques work together to shape the narrative and to keep things as they are. And this truth permeates through every level of society, from politics to art to education etc. This is why decency and democracy has already lost. The Establishment holds the power. The people do not. And nothing will ever change that.

Mahad Korhonen: And never forget he was instrumental in the murder of millions of Bengals, and he hated the Arabs as well.

Gabrielleinspires: Churchill hated anyone who was dark skinned.

AttackHelicopter279: No one is saying Churchill was perfect, but he saved us from the Nazis. He was an inspiration.

Mahad Korhonen: Face facts; Churchill had no problem with fascism. He only eventual fought Germany when they threatened Brit interests. Morality had nothing to do with his decisions.

Africangirl: And we still have to explain even now Churchill was an imperialist who hated foreigners.

Ukisbest: we had a empire until you lefty scum bought it down⁶⁹

Britbadboy1939: The left are the new nazis now!

Englandalways: Yeah, it was the National SOCIALIST movement!

Britbadboy1939: Immigratns are cancer!

Yorkshirepatriot: He saved us from the nazis!

Cornwallenglander: He stood up to the nazis!!!⁷⁰

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Sigmund Freud made a distinction between “mourning”, in which a person suffers some loss or injury which they slowly and painfully move on from, and “melancholia”, in which they turn in on themselves in a hateful search for what’s been lost, refusing to accept that it is gone. In the early 2000s, cultural theorist Paul Gilroy adopted the same language to diagnose Britain’s “post-colonial melancholia”, suggesting that an unrelenting culture of flag-waving and Churchill-worship signified an unhappy, angry quest for something that had been mislaid. Our new era of enforced union jacks and government yachts has proved Gilroy righter than he could possibly have feared. (Davies, 2021).

⁷⁰ Even this simple belief on Churchill being against the Nazis is not as straightforward as popular perception would have it, as traitors and Nazi collaborators from Churchill’s own class often faced no real punishment for their behaviour, as shown in Tim Tate’s excellent book *Hitler’s British Traitors*, (from which this section is drawn). For example, William Forbes-Sempill, a member of the House of Lords, was known to be spying for Japan in the early 1920s.

Despite the very clear evidence of spying, the Attorney General had advised against mounting an Official Secrets trial... Ostensibly this remarkable decision was made to prevent disclosure of MI5’s use of Home Office warrants to intercept suspicious correspondence. But this seems to have been a fig-leaf to disguise the more likely explanation; a desire not to expose a man of his rank and privilege as a traitor. (Tate, 2019).

Truepatriot: Wed all be speaking German if it wasnt for him!

Britpatriot: Wed all be speaking German if it wasnt for him!

Georgepatriot: Wed all be speaking German if it wasnt for him!

Forbes-Sempill was thus told his spying was known about, presumably as a hint to stop. He responded by continuing to spy for Japan right up to the Second World War. When he asked for – and was given – a job which gave him access to “sensitive information about military aircraft.” (Ibid). Which he again passed on to Japan. He was eventually called in to the Air Ministry, but rather than be arrested and prosecuted, it seems he was simply asked to stop spying. He gave his assurance. And then carried on spying. After which:

Sempill’s Security Service file shows that Churchill ordered his dismissal from the Department of Air Matériel and that MI5 plan to have him arrested under regulation 18B. Inexplicably, neither happened. He was, instead, left free to enjoy all the privileges of his rank and status throughout the war. (Ibid).

Similarly, Hastings William Sackville Russell, (or Lord Tavistock, to give him his title), was an open admirer of Hitler, a known anti-Semite, and a funder of British Nazi groups. He travelled to Dublin:

...for a meeting with officials of the German Legation. His aim was to negotiate peace terms between Britain and the Third Reich. (Ibid).

Despite the illegality of this, despite the matter being raised in the House of Commons by two MPs, despite even being named openly and his actions revealed, Tavistock faced no prosecution:

Other, lesser mortals had been interned under Regulation 18B for expressing such naked pro-German sympathies, but Tavistock’s lineage and privilege appear to have been crucial in insulating him from detention. (Ibid).

This, then, blows away the idea that Churchill was heroically committed against Nazism in all its forms, for he did nothing significant against the posh white UK Nazi sympathisers in his own land. Contrast this with the fate of working-class Nazi sympathisers, who were routinely imprisoned or executed: Joseph Kelly, a labourer, was sentenced to two ten-year jail terms for spying for Germany; hairdresser Jessie Jordan was imprisoned for four years in 1938; Conman Edwin Heath was interned; freelance journalist and racing tipster Donald Adams got 10 years in jail, and George Johnson Armstrong became the first British man to be executed for treachery in 1942:

... There was... a lingering uncertainty about whether he [Armstrong] had, in fact, betrayed his country. But the most serious (and unanswered) question was why he was charged, tried, convicted and hanged while other British men and women whose guilt was much clearer received considerably more lenient punishment. (Ibid).

The answer, of course, is class, wealth, privilege, and Establishment corruption.

Chapter Eight

The writers start to write. In doing so, they will share a purpose (writing a biography) though not necessarily a vision (all approach the work with differing motivations), and their success (or lack thereof) will also be different in each case, for those who are born into privilege are already half-way round the track before the starting pistol is fired.

Also, this chapter is devoted to telling rather than showing, done purely to annoy the “show don’t tell” brigade. Though it does also allow the snarky narrator a direct chance to write on the pristine main page for a while, rather than being marginalised within the chapter headings and footnotes. Though the footnotes do continue, for it is hard to break the chains of my own literary deference. And it’s not like I can fit all the snark (and accompanying facts) onto the main page, you know...

And so, as our minimal plot rolls forward, we can be introduced to the first of our literary and sociological constructs as he becomes aware of Vansittart’s call for “a dynamic and ground-breaking fresh interpretation” of Churchill. And we shall do as society does by starting at the top and giving full details of a man who already holds the golden keys of success simply because of his birth.⁷¹

This, then, is Terrance Rogerson, a man whose father was a wealthy Labour MP in the 1990s. Rogerson senior attended Cambridge as a matter of course, worked for a short term as a barrister in the family law firm, and then moved seamlessly into politics. Once ensconced in his safe Labour seat, Rogerson senior was barely indistinguishable from any other wealthy Labour (or Conservative) politician in that his every thought and vote while in parliament was guided toward making sure a genuine meritocratic society never had any chance of materialising. As such, he was rewarded with

⁷¹ As the events depicted in this novel are taking place in winter, it is not entirely inappropriate to include the following joke which has some relevance to this chapter:

I've got an Eton-themed Advent calendar, where all the doors are opened for me by my dad's contacts." (Graham, 2019).

several consultancy jobs and a life peerage on his retirement from public life, while also enjoying a thoroughly undeserved reputation in the media as a man of principle.

Rogerson's mother made her reputation in the approved manner of the upper classes; by being posh, pretty, and pliable. The most significant act in her life was birthing – a year apart – two sons, (one heir and one spare, both promptly passed on to the nanny), and having served her purpose the unnamed Mrs Rogerson can be dismissed from this account as readily as she has been in real life.⁷²

Rogerson himself, like his father, takes his privilege for granted. He attended Eton, (naturally), where he failed to get the grades required to enter Cambridge, but his father had a discreet word and Rogerson's place was assured – though in a determined effort to prove he was his own man, Rogerson joined the Conservative Party rather than Labour. In terms of ideology, either would have done, but statistically the Conservatives have been in power far more often than Labour, thus making them the only logical choice for a man of Rogerson's limited character and minuscule ability.

Although Rogerson has yet to publicly start his political career, this is privately already in hand as he is merely waiting for a safe seat to be made available for him. In the meantime, he has made himself useful to the Establishment by editing many newspapers and magazines on the political right, (all utilising the same trick of claiming to be at the centre of political ideology), in which he routinely copy and paste his politics from disaster capitalism, his populism from the Murdoch press, and his jokes from the 1970s, thus presenting himself as an anti-establishment non-PC bloke you could trust.

Astonishingly, Rogerson genuinely believes he is an original creation; never

⁷² If this seems a harsh dismissal of Mrs Rogerson's character, ambitions, interests etc, do bear in mind this is pretty much how Rogerson views his mother. And how his father views Rogerson's mother. And how Rogerson's younger brother views his mother. And how his father's secretary views Rogerson's mother. And how his's father's mistress views his mother. And even how Rogerson's own mother views his mother, i.e. herself, thanks to social conditioning.

once does he suspect he is the construct of a class whose members spend more hours at play than work, busying themselves only when giving and receiving nepotistic favours, running up large expenses, marrying into identikit families, duly getting the wife pregnant before knocking up the au pair, the secretary, the mistress, and the best friend's wife and mistress, before trading yet more favours while also impregnating the new secretary, the divorce lawyer, the replacement wife, the next mistress and the new au pair. And thus are the Rogerson's of this world replicated down the generations.⁷³

Picture Rogerson, then, in his office at the *Daily Crier Magazine*, a self-styled "modest operation which seeks to comment judiciously and fairly upon all British life and society," which was founded in 1863 and which currently inhabits a modest three level Grade II Georgian townhouse of 5 bedrooms, 3 bathrooms supplemented by 4 shower rooms, dining room, study, drawing room, kitchen and utility room, all overlooking St James' Park, London, and rented for the modest fee of just over £40,000 per month.⁷⁴

More importantly for Rogerson, however, the house is located geographically and spiritually in the centre of the known universe, for as described by the letting agency, Knight, Knight & Knight Holdings, the house "sits most attractively in the heart of London, abutted by Knightsbridge, Mayfair and Belgravia, and the area is known to those who matter as having sheltered innumerable men of power and women of grace,

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Winston Churchill was... born into the small, immensely influential and wealthy circle that still dominated English politics and society. For the whole of his life he remained an aristocrat at heart, deeply devoted to the interests of his family and drawing the majority of his friends and social acquaintances from that élite. (Ponting, 1994).

If one were to be cynical about the English social elite, one could wonder how any of the insular buggers living in their small cloud of privileged complacency can ever hope to serve the entire country rather than just their own interests. Which probably explains why they don't.

⁷⁴ This figure derives from the last known rental on the five-bedroom house at 22 Old Queen Street, Westminster, London, as shown on the website Rentberry. Correct as of 27/7/21.

including royalty, the aristocracy, prime ministers, politicians and businessmen.”

It is the political angle which interests Rogerson, and it was to attain high office that he embarked on his career in journalism – though Public Relations would be a truer description of his profession as he hides, excuses, and deflects from Establishment greed and corruption on a daily basis.⁷⁵ His work rate only really picks up, however, when he turns to self-promotion, and hardly a week goes by without a TV or radio appearance, as well as several photo opportunities held in the offices of *The Daily Crier* so the people can see his casual yet determined aura.⁷⁶

The office is particularly suited to transmitting a sense of power and authority, consisting as it does of antique fixtures and fittings which denotes (according to the *Crier's* website, and quoted thereafter by innumerable other media outlets) “a sense of nineteenth century stability and Victorian rectitude.” The wood is highly polished on the chairs, the shelves, and the desk Rogerson uses on the few occasions he is in each week, carefully buried under artfully arranged paperwork and books selected almost exclusively for the public view.

The books Rogerson actually refers to when in the office, such as the small dictionary, thesaurus, and the latest copy of the *Easy Guide to the Internet and Microsoft Office*, are carefully hidden in one of the desk drawers, along with a few spare fountain pens, bottles of scotch, cocaine, and sealed boxes of expired condoms, explaining his many (publicly unacknowledged) children arising from his affairs.

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With six billionaires as majority voting shareholders for most of the UK national newspapers, it is unsurprising that they mostly supported the Conservatives in the last general election. The Conservatives reduced the top tax rate, and want to reduce it further, giving millionaires and billionaires massive tax breaks. Under the current media ownership structure, how much hope is there of genuine progressive agendas to reduce wealth, income and power inequality that also threatens the interests of the billionaires and companies that own the press? (Jones, 2019).

⁷⁶ The reader may be wondering about the sudden lurch into the present tense. If it's a good enough literary device for William Manchester to use in *The Caged Lion*, then it's good enough for Rogerson to use here. Or indeed anywhere.

Rogerson himself fits in well with the general air of untidiness and learning, for he has paid a lifestyle coach to select his look of carefully constructed shabbiness, giving the impression he is the man in the street – assuming the man in the street can pay thousands to a life coach and thousands more for the best suits, shirts, and shoes, as well as hundreds for the carefully tousled hairstyle. Rogerson can afford these items thanks to his family wealth and the substantial wages he draws from the magazine, though he is always meticulous in claiming his “image money” back on his expenses.

He is far less meticulous in his articles and opinions, at least as far as the facts are concerned, and he uses his position at the magazine either shamelessly (according to his critics) or else brilliantly (to those who hope to receive favour from him) to promote himself in the public eye, and upon seeing the call from Clavier and Coldwell for the new biography on Churchill, Rogerson knows his time has come.

This is his break into the mainstream, for while Rogerson’s name is known amongst those who matter, he is still only a peripheral figure on the part of the hoi polloi who only know of him as “that bloke on the telly who tells it like it is”, and unfortunately (for him) Rogerson needs the great unwashed to further his ambitions by voting for him when a safe political seat becomes available.

And Rogerson knows the people should vote for him, for his needs – naturally enough – align with the needs of the country, and he knows without even having to articulate the thought that what the country needs is Rogerson in politics and, in due course, Rogerson in Number Ten, Downing Street.⁷⁷ This is Rogerson’s destiny, for Rogerson, like most of his peers, is a firm believer in the Great Man Theory of history.

And what better way to manifest his destiny than by championing that other true hero of the country, Winston Churchill? True, he knows only a little about Churchill, but a bit of research will soon put that right. And after all,

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True or not, his [Conservative ex-Prime Minister David Cameron] answer [to why he wanted to be Prime Minister] perfectly captured the public image of the man: “Because I think I’d be rather good at it.” (Sandbrook, 2016).

Rogerson does feel a profound and genuine connection to Britain's greatest man; both were men of Destiny, born to Greatness, and Destined to lead by that Greatness to Great and Destined things.⁷⁸

Excited by the self-comparison, supreme in his confidence that he merely has to dash off the tome and reap the rewards, Rogerson reaches into his lowest drawer and pulls out the Smythson notepad bought for him one Christmas by his second – no, his third – wife, which he has stashed away ready for a suitable project. And what could be more suitable than this, a biography of the Greatest Man in British History, and the tale of how England⁷⁹ stood alone against the Nazi menace and no, wait, it was his mistress who had given him the notebook, shortly before she became his third wife. Now his soon-to-be ex-wife. He should have known she wasn't quite top-drawer when she presented him with the Smythson rather than a Metier notepad, even though he'd directed several thousand pounds of the magazine's money her way when she'd been acting as his "researcher" – a pattern he will repeat with taxpayer money and a fresh series of mistresses. Unscrewing the top from his fountain pen, Rogerson jots down a few practice sentences, to get the creative juices flowing.

Churchill was exactly what England needed at that time; a hero, a man of honour, a man committed to standing against the Nazi jackboot.

Rogerson smirks, knowing this is the stuff to give them. But, of course, a real genius is one who can see the other side, one who is aware of all issues,

⁷⁸ The reader may have noticed Rogerson has absolutely no time for the theory that "In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing... it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears." (Foucault, 1995). For Rogerson, the whole point of the book is to create a Churchillian-Rogerson-shaped space so he can manifest himself into the public consciousness in this pre-determined form.

⁷⁹ Today, some still consider "England" and "English" as being synonymous with "Britain" and "British":

For most people around the world, Great Britain or the United Kingdom are the same as England. When they think of British goods, services, products, or cultural phenomena, they think of cricket, tea on the lawn, bowler-hatted city gents or the monarchy. (Kavanagh, 2018).

Please note that when I refer to England, I am being specific in the geographical, cultural, or political sense. Unlike certain characters within the novel.

and Rogerson knows he needs to pay a little lip-service to the moaning lefties who insist on calling Churchill a racist just because he said a few perfectly reasonable things about the darkies.⁸⁰ But for now, he'll press on with Churchill's finest hour, teasing out the self-same qualities that he, Rogerson, possesses, so that the future readers will see the similarities between himself and Churchill and draw their own conclusions.

It is no coincidence that these elements of his character would prove to be the lynchpin of his victories over not only the Nazis, but of history itself, for just as England was threatened by Germany in the dark decade of the 1940s, it was Churchill himself who said we must fight against all history and those who consider oppressing us from abroad and in on the beaches...

Rogerson pauses, feeling he has lost the sentence. He scribbles out the last few words and tries again.

For when England was threatened by a nationalistic tyrant who would happily sacrifice millions to see his vision of an Aryan future come through the ranks to take on the enemy, it took one of their own to...

Damn, lost the sentence again! Rogerson frowns at the words. He'd have to rework that last bit, as he's made Churchill sound the same as Hitler.

Preposterous thought! And he'd better remember to change "England" to "Britain", in case the lefties start moaning again.

Of course, the issue with his false starts, as Rogerson knows, is that he's

⁸⁰ For real life examples of these attitudes on the part of our politicians:

Boris Johnson said colonialism in Africa should never have ended and downplayed Britain's role in the slave trade, an article written by the prime minister while he was a Tory MP reveals. (Stone, 2020).

And also:

Referring to the practice of British rule, [Michael] Gove said that "Eton took the cream of the colonial system, it took fettered foreigners and it turned them into gentlemen." (Bancroft, 2021).

And with regard to Churchill himself:

...Ghana... was the first African country to win its freedom from Britain... [this] helped stoke up demands elsewhere in British Africa. If the Gold Coast had his own Prime Minister, why shouldn't, say, Nigeria have one too? Churchill thought that it was 'Crazy' to give universal suffrage to 'these naked savages'. (Toye, 2011).

always better at talking than writing, for it is a pleasure for all to listen to his smooth words pouring forth, entertaining, and enrapturing his audience. But these first few attempts to write have revealed a definite snag; during his entire journalistic career, Rogerson has only ever written in glorified soundbites, and he often (always) relies on his staff to “prepare” his articles for publication by dropping in extra words, sentences, paragraphs – even complete pages – as and when needed. Meaning anything longer, such as a book, could prove to be a stretch...

The solution is clear, prompted by the thought “book”. He will dictate the work as he did with his own bestselling novel of some two years ago, *And There She Rides a Revenant*, a searing insight into modern human relationships and the unfair advantages held by women in society.⁸¹

And this will also give Rogerson an excuse to pop round to Clavier and Coldwell, for they are the publishers of *And There She Rides a Revenant*, and he can tackle Michael Vansittart about his (Rogerson’s) disappointing sales, as well as finding out further particulars on the Churchill biography. Rogerson nods in modest wonder at his own genius – but then, he knows he is at his best when allowing his amazing free-flowing mind to rove over the issues at hand, improvising and elucidating, turning defeat into victory. And afterward he can give it to his secretary (that is, he can give the biography to his secretary, for Rogerson’s amazing free-flowing mind has now jumped back to the upcoming Churchillian account that he knows is his by right) to transcribe and to fact check, as she has done on many other occasions when he’d been too busy to pop into the office and type anything up. Which was uncannily how Churchill himself worked,⁸² and Rogerson is acutely aware

⁸¹ The innumerable criticisms of *And There She Rides a Revenant*’s inaccuracy and sexism were merely blunt facts which bounced off the impenetrable armour of Rogerson’s socially constructed superiority.

⁸²

If [Churchill] is researching a speech, a magazine essay, or a newspaper article, he needs little help. But for a major effort – his four-volume *Marlborough* or his *History of the English-speaking Peoples* – he requires a staff, most of them young Oxford graduates to whom he assigns readings and investigations; they then submit precis or memoranda which he studies between bursts of dictation. (Manchester, 1989).

of yet another remarkable resemblance twixt himself and England's other Greatest Man.

Yes, Lynne will sort out that end of the affair. She was technically on maternity leave, but Rogerson knows she will be pleased to do the work for him. Although – and a chill went down his spine at the very thought – she may want to talk about the pregnancy. Again. And what he's going to do about it. So perhaps he'd better get Grenville in the office to do it. Bright lad, Grenville, if not quite top-drawer material, for he only went to Harrow. Not that it matters, at this stage. Find out the money being offered first, then deliver and bask in the inevitable glory.⁸³ Unless the money isn't up to much, but he can always sell the book to a better, bigger publisher, no doubt about that; he knows most of the corporate publishers for they are all part of the same social circles. Being accepted was not – and never would be – an issue.

The reader may notice the above glosses over the actual work involved, almost as though Manchester is hiding something about Churchill's working methods and the division of labour involved. And further research justifies this cynical thought, for it seems that Churchill didn't actually 'write' at all:

A wide variety of visitors came and went... including... his wife and his children... and more frequently his literary assistants restarting work on his monumental *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. (Browne, 1995).

And also:

In 1957, a single-volume edition of the War Memoirs was in the course of preparation. It was to contain a terminal essay rounding up events after 1945. There was great pressure of time... Dennis Kelly and I were bidden to draft it. (Ibid).

Or, if one wishes to be blunt: "Much of it was written by ghost-writers." (Toye, 2011).

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If impostor syndrome is really an obstacle then Michelle Obama might want to work on hers in order to become more like, say, Jacob Rees-Mogg, a man who has indicated by lying down and closing his eyes, how little he struggles with being promoted far beyond his microscopic abilities. Instead of a warning, habitual posturing secured him a book contract, resulting in *The Victorians*, described as "so bad, so boring, so mind-bogglingly banal that if it had been written by anyone else it would never have been published". (Bennett, 2020).

Rogerson knows he deserves an early lunch at the Chummo Club for all his hard work this morning. Humming the “Matter Patter” from Gilbert and Sullivan, he strolls from the office, leaving the rest of the day’s edition to his assistants.

Chapter Nine

In which the snarky narrator of the footnotes extends his chance to appear on the main Establishment page and immediately renders the entire story as a populist superhero comic rather than as a highbrow literary art form. The justification for this is that Chapter Eight was constructed entirely from the omniscient narrator's point of view,⁸⁴ with no action of any kind, thus committing the cardinal sin of "telling" rather than "showing". And so we get the chapter again, replete with footnotes, but also with added spandex. Specifically, we see the muscular costumed superhero Zatman!TM taking on his arch-nemesis; the 1%er!TM (All rights reserved. Zatman and all related characters, and their distinctive likenesses and related indicia are trademarks of KidtastixTM ComixTM InkTM).

Page 1 panel 1

A FULL WHITE MOON SHINES DOWN ON OLD LONDON TOWN.
THE BUILDINGS ARE IN DARKNESS, LITTLE MORE THAN
SILHOUETTES. WHITE SNOW LIES ON THE GROUND.

Caption: Night! The city sleeps, but it doesn't rest.

Page 1 panel 2

WE PULL BACK ON THE VIEW AND SEE THE ZATMOBILE
MOVING THROUGH THE SNOW.

Caption: This city never rests – can never rest – because it has too many secrets.

Page 1 panel 3

FOLLOW THE ZATMOBILE AS IT DRIVES THROUGH THE EMPTY
GOTHIC STREETS.

Caption: This city has too many sins to ever rest easily. Believe me. I know.

⁸⁴ And dear God, do some editors and reviewers hate the omniscient third. "How can anyone possibly know that?" they demand. "It's head-hopping!" they state, unable to comprehend how third person omniscient actually works:

If the story is told in omniscient third person, you can share what the narrator, who is not a character in the story, knows—which can be everything. (Grimes, 2019).

I've not just seen the darkness beneath the light...

Page 1 panel 4,5 and 6 run together

ZATMAN LEAPS UP FROM THE ZATMOBILE, SPREADING HIS
ZATWINGS LIKE A DEMON.

Caption: I am the darkness beneath the light.

Page 1 panel 7

ZATMAN RISES ON HIS ZATROPE TO THE HIGHEST BALCONY OF
THE OFFICES OF THE DAILY CRIER MAGAZINE

Caption: Where there is darkness, there I am.

Page 1 panel 8

ZATMAN OPENS THE FRENCH WINDOWS ON THE BALCONY
USING HIS ZATPICK

Caption: Where light is needed, I bring it.

Page 1 panel 9

CLOSE UP OF ZATMAN'S HORRIFIED FACE AS HE SEES
SOMETHING.

Caption: But sometimes the light isn't enough. The light can be dimmed...
by utter darkness.

Page 2, complete spread:

WE SEE TERRANCE ROGERSON IS WAITING IN HIS BLUE
ROMPER SUIT WITH LASER ATTACHMENTS, GIGGLING
INSANELY, THE OFFICE IN DARKNESS AROUND HIM, NOTHING
VISIBLE AS WE FOCUS ON THE VILLAIN. BENEATH ROGERSON,
IN AN EXCITING FONT WITH BLOOD DRIPPING FROM IT, WE
HAVE THE TITLE:

The 1% Returns!

Rogerson: Expecting someone else, Zatman?

Page 3 panel 1

CLOSE UP OF ZATMAN AS HE STEPS INTO THE DARK OFFICE

Zatman: So, 1%er, you survived the fall from Tower Bridge?

Page 3 panel 2

SWITCH BACK TO ROGERSON, CLOSE UP, HIS MAD EYES
GLEAMING IN THE DARK, NOT MUCH ELSE VISIBLE.

Rogerson: Of course! It would take more than a 500-foot plunge into an icy

river as my Doom Missile rebounds with a ten killaton explosion to stop me! Not when I have so many consultancies on the go, shares to sell, and jobs to give away to my friends who have donated time, money and influence to my political aspirations!

Page 3 panel 3

SWITCH TO CLOSE UP OF ZATMAN'S EYES AS THEY NARROW EVEN FURTHER IN REALISATION (BUT DON'T MAKE HIM SQUINT; THAT WOULD LOOK TERRIBLE)

Zatman: So, that's your evil plan? To continue living off your inherited wealth while accumulating yet more wealth until you have all the wealth, after which you will move into government by taking a safe seat before back-stabbing your way to the top after which you will dedicate yourself afresh to gathering yet more wealth?

Page 3 panel 4

CLOSE UP OF ROGERSON'S SURPRISED EYES, A HINT OF SWEAT ON HIS BROW

Rogerson: Damn you, Zatman, how did you discover my evil plan?

Page 3 panel 5

CLOSE UP OF ZATMAN'S COOL, KNOWING LOOK

Zatman: I know you, 1%er. God damn you to hell, after so many years locked in battle, I know you well. Besides, it's the same plan you used last week. And the week before that. And the month before that. Seven times. And your father used it before you. As did his father, and his father's father before him.

Page 3 panel 6

BACK TO THE FACE OF ROGERSON, AN INSANE GRIN BREAKING OUT

You know too much, Zatman. Your knowledge is a burden unto others – and to me. Allow me to relieve you of that burden! To me, my mooks!

Page 3 panel 7

5 MOOKS, DRESSED LIKE STEREOTYPICAL 1930S ROUGH GOONS, RUSH FORWARD. THEY FIRE THEIR GUNS AT ZATMAN, WHO FLINGS UP HIS ARMS IN A DEFENSIVE ZATMAN POSTURE

Page 3 Panel 8

CLOSE UP OF MOOKS 1 AND 2 AS THEY REACT

Mook 1: Gulp! Our bullets are bouncing off his Zatarmour!

Mook 2: Argh! I've slipped on his skilfully thrown Zatmat!

Page 3 panel 9

ZATMAN STRIKES A DRAMATIC POSE

Zatman: My Zatclaws will make short work of these goons!

Page 4 panel 1

CLOSE UP ON THE 1%ER

Rogerson: Curses! He's taken out my goons! I'd better summon all my forces. After all, they've never failed me yet!

Page 4 panel 2

THE 1%ER SPEAKS INTO HIS GOLD-PLATED RADIO:

Rogerson: Mainstream Media! Cronyism! Tax Avoidance! Flag Shagger! Get out here and kill Zatman! And don't bother using comic book panels anymore; that is a convention we don't need to follow, like morality and paying taxes. Because we're rich! We're different to the common herd! We're special, and favoured by God! We're white English toffs!⁸⁵

FOUR NEW GOONS RUSH FORWARD, THE FIRST THREE - MAINSTREAM MEDIA, CRONYISM AND TAX AVOIDANCE - ARE ALL IN SUITS, WHILE FLAG SHAGGER IS IN JEANS AND A UNION JACK T-SHIRT. HE IS ON A LEAD HELD BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA
Flag Shagger: 'Ere, what's going on?

Mainstream Media: Zatman wants to raise taxes on the wealthy— and this is

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It has become the defining theme of Boris Johnson's misrule: one rule for them, one rule for us... (Moore, 2022).

The above article goes on to mention how Conservative politicians Owen Paterson was sanctioned for breaking lobbying rules, Jacob Rees-Mogg broke covid restrictions by traveling from a tier 3 area into a tier 4, Nadine Dorries employed her own daughters (after complaining about nepotism at the BBC) and paid them £80,000 of taxpayers' money, Rishi Sunak got permission to extend his family home (by building leisure facilities into it) despite this seemingly being against the local council's policy, Robert Jenrick broke the law by approving Tory-donor Richard Desmond's £1bn luxury housing development, (which the government's own planning inspector was against), and the lobbying scandals affecting previous Tory Prime Minister, David Cameron, are also mentioned. All this from one short article...

a bad thing!⁸⁶

Flag Shagger: I'm too fuck to realise raising the taxes on the wealthy to pay for vital services is actually a good thing,⁸⁷ so I'm gonna hate him for his tax plans!

Tax Avoidance: We must encourage enterprise and initiative with entrepreneurs, because they are the wealth generators of the country!

Flag Shagger: You what?

Mainstream Media: He means wealth will trickle down to you. But Zatman wants to stop that because he's a lefty allowing immigrants into the country!

Flag Shagger: Bastard!

Mainstream Media: Zatman is anti-Semitic!

Flag Shagger: Great, bloody Jews, they control everything!

Mainstream Media: How many more times? Not Jews, you moron, Lizards!

We now say Space Lizards!

⁸⁶ A longstanding belief amongst the wealthy and their sycophants. Here are two examples from *The Spectator*, almost a decade apart. And in keeping with their right-wing views, you can only read two articles and then you have to subscribe, because God forbid that just anyone, i.e. the poor, should have access to the media:

Wealth taxes are not the answer to our financial woes (Andrews, 2020).

And:

The dangerous attraction of wealth taxes (Nelson, 2012).

Oddly, the wealthy aristocratic politician, the Right Enriched Winston Churchill, was also against wealth taxes. A staggering coincidence. His quote on the matter can be found all over the Internet:

I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle. (Quotepark, 2021).

⁸⁷

As the government raises taxes on working people and plans the biggest benefit cut in the history of the welfare state, many are calling for rich people to pay their fair share. A new net wealth tax could redistribute wealth, galvanise public support and generate huge revenues for the government. At the University of Greenwich, we estimate that such a tax on just the top 1% of wealthiest households in the UK could raise £70bn to £130bn a year – more than enough to pay for a high-quality universal care service, the NHS and more. (Tippet, 2021).

Flag Shagger: Oh, yeah, right. Same thing, though, innit?⁸⁸

Zatman: I'm taking you all in, to answer for your crimes!

Cronyism: What crimes? All procedures were carried out in accordance with the rules laid out by the system. We have done nothing wrong, as any investigation will show.

Flag Shagger: You hear that? He's done nothing wrong, so leave him alone!

Mainstream Media: He's a socialist!

Flag Shagger: Well, I dunno what that actually means, but as you're always telling me it's wrong, I hate him for it anyway.

Mainstream Media: Zatman is a Muslim immigrant woke Muslim lefty immigrant atheist PC immigrant Muslim Marxist trans gay immigrant!

Flag Shagger (HIS FOREHEAD PULSING ANGRILY): I hate him!

Aaarrggghhhhhhhh!

ZATMAN IS DIMINISHED BY MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S ATTACKS
AND FADES AWAY

Rogerson: Excellent! That deals with him. Flag Shagger?

Flag Shagger: Yeah?

Rogerson: Get back on your knees where you belong.

Flag Shagger: Yes sir, right away sir. I'm an individual, I am. No one tells me what to do or what to believe. I'm on my knees now, sir.⁸⁹

⁸⁸

The notion of shape-shifting, blood-sucking reptilian humanoids invading Earth to control the human race sounds like a cheesy sci-fi plot. But it's actually a very old trope with disturbing links to anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic hostilities dating to the 19th century. (Parramore, 2021).

⁸⁹ It was mentioned earlier how Vansittart and his ilk never question their assumptions or good fortune in being born wealthy; It's far more difficult, however, to understand why those born with nothing should likewise never question the massive imbalances in society and instead simply accept being railroaded along society's pre-laid tracks of unending drudgery.

The best conclusion this novel can offer to explain the above is deference to authority, coupled with the effectiveness of mass media manipulation and sociological conformity, all of which deflects blame from where it belongs (a corrupt and incompetent ruling elite) onto the far more innocent targets of immigrants, socialists, feminists, gays, young people, transsexuals, the EU, Black people, Muslims, Pakistanis etc:

Indeed, a theme that emerges from research on social class and attitudes is that ideological factors have a powerful influence on attitudes. The neoliberal ideology that has dominated political discourse... has influenced attitudes to such an extent that even

Mainstream Media: Good! Tomorrow, we want you to hate on Doctor Binita Khatri.

Flag Shagger: I hate her! Why do I hate her?

Mainstream Media: She's a woman of intelligence and colour who calls out the racism we perpetuate. Hence we're running a hate campaign against her,⁹⁰ but we can't do it without you.

Flag Shagger: What a bitch! She needs to be raped! I'll fucking have her tomorrow, I'll get the lads onto it, you'll see. The whore needs to go back where she comes from! After being raped and watching her family be killed!

Mainstream Media: That's my boy. Now get sucking down there...

A SHADOWY FIGURE SPRINGS INTO THE FRAME, LEGS AKIMBO,
HANDS ON HIPS

supporters of left-of-centre political parties, such as the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, regard poverty as arising from individual factors and tend to hold negative beliefs about the level of welfare benefits for the unemployed. Such attitudes are shared to a perhaps surprising extent by working-class [who] endorse ideologies that endorse and preserve a social system that materially disadvantages them. (Manstead, 2018).

This also hints that ignorance and bigotry both play a large part in keeping society as it is, which would certainly explain the unthinking acceptance of the status quo. See also Chapter Thirteen.

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Although people of all genders can experience violence and abuse online, the abuse experienced by women is often sexist or misogynistic in nature, and online threats of violence against women are often sexualized and include specific references to women's bodies. The aim of violence and abuse is to create a hostile online environment for women with the goal of shaming, intimidating, degrading, belittling or silencing women...

...

Violence and abuse against women on social media, including Twitter, includes a variety of experiences... Sometimes one or more forms of such violence and abuse will be used together as part of a coordinated attack against an individual which is often referred to as a 'pile-on'. (Amnesty International, 2018).

And more specifically in terms of curtailing academic freedoms and non-Establishment narratives:

Media attacks on high-profile academics who speak out on issues of race, imperialism and British history are intensifying. (Norris, 2021).

Momentary Awareness Man: Not so fast, you foul fiends!

Rogerson: Gasp! Momentary Awareness Man!

Momentary Awareness Man: Yes, it is I, Momentary Awareness Man, here to give a moment of awareness to your man, Flag Shagger.

MOMENTARY AWARENESS MAN RAISES HIS MOMENTARY AWARENESS RAYGUN AND SHOOTS FLAG SHAGGER WITH IT, THUS GIVING HIM A MOMENT OF SELF AWARENESS
PANEL 1, FLAG SHAGGER, ENVELOPED BY SELF-AWARENESS, LOOKS UP IN SUPPLICATION AT ROGERSON

Flag Shagger: Mm, slurp, slurp, Establishment dick, I have been conditioned into eating it, and now I believe in it totally because I have nothing else and never will and I even think I have choice to be down here slurp slurp!

PANEL 2, TEARS ARE NOW FORMING IN FLAG SHAGGER'S EYES

Flag Shagger: I really am just a whining welp of the Establishment slurp keeping the status quo in place by my unthinking slurp deference and obedience to all their slurp pronouncements as seen through the pages of the mainstream slurp media, the education system, the political system, and every other manifestation of the oligarchical slurp society in which we are born, raised, and die without ever slurp having a chance to become something better, something slurp more slurp. Dick... sliding... too far down throat... can't breathe, being choked... slurp!

PANEL 3, THE SELF-AWARENESS FIELD FADES

Flag Shagger: At least it's not woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay dick! Mm, slurp, good English sausage, slurp, I love my country, we'd all be speaking German if it weren't for Churchill, slurp, slurp, bloody woke snowflakes no sense of humour you can't say anything now SLURP SLURP *SLURP!!!*

Caption:

Next week: expect the unexpected as the 1% unexpectedly returns! And join us the week after that as the 1% unexpectedly returns... again! And the week after that when we find in truth the 1% never left! They were always

here, running things for their own convenience!⁹¹

⁹¹ The purpose of this novel is to examine how the Establishment perpetuates itself via the codification its own nationalistic interpretation of history, and how this effects wider society. To do this, the book focuses specifically upon Churchillian mythology, with questions being raised on who creates - and thus holds the power - of the Churchillian narrative, what form this power takes, how and why it is transmitted to the public, and how the public responds. Here, however, in a ridiculously long footnote, we shall expand beyond the figure of Churchill to focus upon on the nature of heroes, society, history, and nationalism. Though not necessarily in that order. And we begin with a comic book character.

This above chapter should have featured Batman, but DC/Warner Brothers would (obviously) sue my arse off if I used their copyrighted superhero, hence the cunning creation of a brand-new costumed superhero clearly modelled on a previous costumed superhero – standard practice, it appears, in comic book history:

“...a lot of characters are either heavily influenced by or outright ripped off from other, pre-existing properties. This practice has become standard in the comic book industry and has been going on for so long that some of the most famous rip-offs in the medium's history have outshone their predecessors and become iconic in their own right.” (Segall, 2020).

And thus we see in comic books the same replication of archetypes we see in wider society/culture/mythology. The desire for heroes is seemingly inbuilt into our collective psyche, (or maybe it has been built-in by sociological conditioning?), and English society has obligingly moulded several mythic heroes (of marginally differing types) for public consumption: King Arthur, who fought the invading Saxons. Beowulf, who fought the monstrous Grendel. Shakespeare; the greatest playwright ever. Sherlock Holmes; the world's greatest detective. Churchill, who saved us from the Nazis. James Bond, who saves the world from super villains. The Doctor, (*Doctor Who*), who saves the Earth/galaxy/universe from outer space monsters.

These, then, are our heroes, our personal identifiers, our cultural landmarks who anchor us to a shared heritage and consciousness. But in this we see a problem with our national mythic heroes, for they all seem to be looking backward to preserve things as they supposedly used to be rather than forward to a new tomorrow – unless tomorrow can be turned into the past:

Archaism is an attempt to resurrect a supposed 'golden age'... This 'golden age' is usually not in the disagreeable recent past, but in a more remote period, and it can only be recovered by historical research and interpretation. For example, Mussolini gloried in imperial Rome and the medieval 'corporate state'... (Matossian, 1994).

Take a second look at the heroes above. King Arthur? The *once* and *future* King, ready to lead us forward to earlier times, wherein the status quo is preserved. Beowulf? Protects society from the external threat, so the status quo is preserved. Shakespeare? A man always careful to preserve the status quo in his plays. Sherlock Holmes? Preserves the status quo at the resolution of each case. James Bond? Preserves the status quo at the end of each adventure. The Doctor? Ditto.

And thus all are bound by the same ideal; protecting the existing social order from any “external” (i.e. different) threat. They win when society is put back the way it was, with the ruling elite safely at the top and everyone else below. And it was ever thus. King Arthur, for example, has long been used by the elite to mould public opinion, with Tom Shippey noting there is a:

...deep attachment to the image of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain and their comrades as mounted knights in armour, preferably shining. That is how they were presented from the 12th century onwards, when armoured cavalry ruled the battlefield and acted as patrons of poets and chroniclers (Shippey, 2018).

Thus we see how one particular interpretation, based partly on reality, has stuck in our mythical mindset. Nicholas Higham, in his *King Arthur The Making of a Legend*, notes how the myth is an ongoing product of contemporary interpretations rather than historical accounts:

...how we view King Arthur has long reflected how we feel about the past, and particularly the deep past – the ancient and early mediaeval past. Arthur has been pressed into service time and again to support any number of causes. He has represented the Romans and the British (in opposition to the Saxons), the Welsh and the Cornish (in opposition to the English), the Bretons (in opposition to the French), the Campbells (in opposition to various other Scottish clans), various claims to the whole island of Britain, and the English, and ultimately the British, in opposition to continental neighbours. (Higham, 2021).

Arthur's origins are, of course, obscure. Some like to point at the Roman name *Artorius*, thus locating Arthur to early centuries AD, specifically around 500 AD when the Saxons were repelled (at least temporarily) from the mainland at the Battle of Badon. A key sixth century text is *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain*, by the cleric St Gildas, whose:

...conception of 'history' was very different to ours. Later writers have often regarded it as a sermon, in the form of an open letter written for the purpose of moral exhortation. It is heavily influenced by the Bible - indeed, it consists very largely of biblical passages which he held up as a mirror to contemporaries to reveal the causes of their difficulties and recommend remedies. (Ibid).

Interestingly, the fact that Arthur doesn't appear in this document, (no such name appears even when discussing the legendary battle) is but a minor hurdle for the keen Arthurian:

Though Gildas does not mention Arthur, it is hard to refuse credit to the renowned battle-leader for this memorable triumph. (Loomis, 1963).

The next evolution in Arthurian myth seems to be the ninth century text the *Historia Brittonum*, usually attributed to a Welsh monk, Nennius. Higham, however, patiently pulls apart the historical validity of the document, pointing out that Nennius (or whoever) was writing through a particular point in Christian history, and thus a particular Christian slant is taken:

...the religious and political backdrop to this work is fundamental. Perhaps the most neglected aspect is the religious. As Bede remarked, in his day the British and Roman churches had long been in conflict... This impasse ended c. 768, when Elfoddw... persuaded the Welsh clergy to adopt the Roman formula for dating Easter... in the decades after 868, Welsh clerics were having to work through the

implications of this reconciliation with the Roman church and rethinking the British past accordingly. The *Historia Brittonum* is our principle witness to this process. (Higham, 2021).

Higham also notes how Nennius was pursuing his own agenda in that he was:

reinterpreting Gildas's version of British history and developing a case for the Britons as modern-day Israelites, once again using Old Testament parallels (ibid).

Also, Arthur's role/title, *dux bellorum*, is that of a commander rather than a King, something which would:

...have alerted a biblically literate audience to the parallel [of Arthur being compared to Joshua, who succeeded Moses and led the Israelites to the Promised Land]. (Ibid).

In short, Higham details how the *Historia Brittonum* is filtered through the socio/religious politics of Nennius' era.

Geoffrey of Monmouth is the next figure of note in Arthurian legend for his *History of the Kings of Britain*, which featured new Arthurian elements such as Merlin, (adapted from the Welsh *Myrddin*), as well as Arthur being taken to Avalon after his final battle. What Geoffrey also did, however, (apart from making his *Kings*... look like a researched, historical document), was to take Arthur the war leader who successfully repelled post Roman invasions and recast him as a cultural and national unifier, an element:

...with considerable appeal to the sons and grandsons of the Norman Knights who had brought English power crashing down. It chimed also with the ideological needs of the kings ruling the mid-twelfth-century English state - the present was represented in and justified by the past...
...[Arthur] was represented as having thrust back Britain's invaders; he then conquered or over-awed his neighbours and rose to dominate Atlantic Europe, even crushing a great army sent against him by the Roman emperor. (Ibid).

The parallels here with Churchill and the Second World War scarcely need teasing out. Neither do we need to overthink the benefits the text had for both Geoffrey and the ruling elite, as Geoffrey's:

...status as a famous author presumably contributed to Geoffrey's appointment to the bishopric of Saint Asaph (though he is not known to have taken up the appointment). His readers seem to have found his work empathetic, uplifting and entertaining - just what history should be, leading to large numbers of copies being made. And it aligned closely with the ambitions of the Anglo-Norman political elite not just in England but throughout the Celtic world and France as well. (Ibid).

This also neatly demonstrates the intertwined relationship between historians and the Establishment. After all, do the privileged ever allow critical biographers anywhere near them? Or are they more likely to call upon someone who knows the code, someone who can be relied upon to ask the right sort of (non)questions such as "What makes you such a remarkable leader?" rather than, for example, "Why are people suffering while you have your snout in the trough?"

Perhaps the most important aspect of Geoffrey's retelling of the Arthurian legend was that of legitimising 'nouveau monarchs', for here was a figure idolised by the masses who could therefore be used by the powerful:

It can be no coincidence that the Arthurian legend received so much royal attention after the loss of Normandy and other French possessions under King John. England, and eventually Wales and parts of Scotland too, were ruled by a French-speaking aristocracy, cut off from their ancestral homeland, but with no clear tie to their new lands and peoples, either in the Germanic heartland or the Celtic fringe. Tapping the already ancient, pre-Saxon Arthur as a symbol of the English monarchy was a brilliant move. Here was a rare unifying figure in a cultural landscape shaped by conquest and displacement. The cult of Arthur reached its height during the reigns of Edward III – who explicitly modelled himself as a new Arthur – and his successor Richard II, at precisely the time when Chaucer and his contemporaries were fashioning a national language, a linguistic compromise between Old English and French that was accessible to everyone. (Damluji, 2019).

This was a trend followed by Henry VIII, who went as far as to paint the Winchester Round Table (dated to the time of Edward 1st, though its provenance remains unknown) with the legendary Arthurian Knights gathered around the Tudor rose – the rose being Henry's calling card to remind everyone of his presence and royal legitimacy, hence the repeated appearance of the emblem in so many cathedrals during his reign. But then, Henry VIII is perhaps the prime example of nation building, in that his actions changed the nature of the UK in a manner that still lives with us today:

The Reformation was the greatest revolution in English history. It meant that England was suddenly separated from the Europe of western Christendom, of which it had formed an important part for more than a Millennium... This was the first great element in the Revolution, the establishment of an independent nation state which was to be isolated from Europe until 1973. The Act of Supremacy (1534) made the king supreme head of the Church of England for the first time... the state was now in control of the church as of everything else... Centralised action was taken by the Tudor government to ensure that everyone, particularly preachers and teachers, obeyed the government line as stated in the Reformation statutes. (Jones, 2003).

This isn't to say the Tudors just casually come along and united the people with little or no effort; the groundwork had already been done by centuries of Christian dogma, with its brutal and elitist message that non-Christians would suffer eternity in Hell, while those in the Jesus Club would find themselves in Heaven – but only if they behaved in this world by turning the other cheek, paying taxes, and not questioning authority:

Local landowners could remove their lands from royal taxation by setting up a monastic church, administered by a family member. This was clearly not in the spirit of how monasteries should be established and such monasteries were more of a tax loophole than a statement of individual piety. In a similar way, estate-churches were often set up near a lord's hall and administered by the landowner, who appointed the priest. This provided a focus for the local community under aristocratic control. (Whitlock, 2009).

Interesting as the Christianisation of the early King Arthur myths is, space is short and we must return to Tudor England and the snug fit between religious and state tyranny:

Henry was now supreme ruler of church and state in England. Thomas Cromwell, the pioneer of state propaganda in England, took the matter much further... The enactments of 1533-4 led to the adoption of the 'obedience' theology of William Tyndale's *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (1527), and the introduction of this Protestant theology into government policy and propaganda was the work of Thomas Cromwell and his followers, for political purposes... it was Cromwell who orchestrated the flow of government propaganda, in the form of tracts, sermons and plays, which was meant to start this new belief on the nation as a whole... [the] identification of God's will with obedience to Henry explains much of that submission to the will of monarchy which was to characterise the English people under the Tudor's. (Jones, 2003).

Depressingly, we have much the same ideology going on today, even though the concept of God has dropped out of the model somewhat in our more secular times. I can only assume that after so many generations of ideological indoctrination, submission to authority via bigoted nationalism has become an inbred trait which no longer needs a deity (though one is always welcome) to make people conform:

...the English were also encouraged by the government at this period to be xenophobic... from now on it was to be a strong force in the psychology of the English people, strongly influencing their attitude towards English politics and religion, as well as their outlook on the outside world... Xenophobia has been an unfortunate feature of English life ever since, typical examples being irrational outbursts in sections of the tabloid press against the continental 'foreigners' during the BSE crisis in 1996 and during the 1997 general election. (Ibid).

Jones' view on the tabloid outbursts being "irrational" sadly misses the point – they are anything but; the British press has long cherished its hatred toward anyone different (see most of the rest of this book). But to continue:

The mentality which characterized the writing of history in England from the 16th century onward reflected also the rise of the nation state, fighting for supremacy over other nation states... Conquests in the new colonies overseas were to make the British Empire supreme. All this added a sense of reality to the notion of English history as a continuous and unique story of national success achieved by a special people. It is hardly surprising that the English people were tempted into the dangerous view that they represented a superior species of mankind – the 'elect nation' – whose destined role in history was exalted above that of others. (Ibid).

Feeding into this, King Arthur became not just a prop fabricated for Tudor legitimacy; he was also an excuse for colonial expansion:

From 1577 to 1580 the English polymath John Dee was engaged in manufacturing and disseminating some extraordinary claims on behalf of the English monarchy and its imperial ambitions. Most intriguingly, Dee, generally seen as the originator of the phrase "the British Empire," argued that Queen Elizabeth could assert dominion

over a vast tract of the northern globe and the New World, partially by dint of its having once been conquered and ruled by the Tudors' reputed early medieval ancestor, King Arthur. (Green, 2013).

Facts, then, are no match against myths and nationalism, and this is why Arthur has endured; he can be remade for each generation in their image, sharing their concerns or leading their ambitions, as noted by Tom Shippey in his review of Nicholas Higham's *King Arthur: the Making of the Legend*:

... Arthur has regularly proved hard to finish off, even by the most determined of historians. There is one evident reason for the 'historical' Arthur's unexpected revival in the 20th century, and that is contemporary experience. If [historian Robin] Collingwood was seeing Arthur in terms of fighter planes, and [Hollywood director Antoine] Fuqua in terms of Vietnam, a number of authors saw him very clearly in imperial or post-imperial terms. (Shippey, 2018).

And it's not just Arthur who has been used for ongoing socio-political-cultural commentary – real figures also share this fate. Though it took centuries for the mythic forging of a past playwright into England's Greatest Writer to begin, because before then, he was largely forgotten. And dead.

(ii)

William Shakespeare! Actor! Poet!! Our Greatest Ever Playwright!!!
William Shakespeare. Propaganda tool and modern-day capitalist:

London playhouses closed during the summer months, which meant that in the off-season periods Shakespeare had the coin, time and freedom to pursue the serious business of sustenance... Appropriating the means of production as well as the produce itself, Shakespeare acquired local control over the only thing no one could do without: food. With his profits, minus a few fines for illegal hoarding and tax evasion, he bought up land in around the place of his birth, finally returning there on a permanent basis some time before 1616 as one of the most powerful property owners in the region, a purveyor of bread, beer and plays. (Archer, et al., 2015).

Like Churchill, Shakespeare has ceased to be a man and is now a myth, one promoted to ludicrous levels wherein his flaws, such as his food hoarding and price gouging, are ignored:

It might come as a surprise to suggest that Shakespeare considered his work as a manager of land and commodities to be at least as (if not more) important than his work for the public stage. Scholars remain complicit in silencing the former part of Shakespeare's life. Bart Van Es's (2013) brilliant and bold *Shakespeare in Company* shows the playwright to be a skilled and savvy businessman. But it makes no mention of Shakespeare's involvement in the lucrative and sustainable business of hunger. In perpetuating the myth of writers as selfless slaves to the muse rather than people who need to stay alive if they are to write, academics do the public a disservice. (Ibid).

Instead, the “genius” narrative has become the standard, perhaps fuelled by the literati sub-text “I enjoy Shakespeare, therefore I am cultured and clever.” (See the quotes from van den Haak and Strong Hansen further on in this very footnote). But before the culture vultures come and peck me apart with their Daily Mail outrage, I will acknowledge that Shakespeare’s literary output is good in places – indeed, he is brilliant in the tragedies – but he is shockingly awful elsewhere. Many of his plays are, for example, as boring as fuck:

There’s nothing worse than watching a certain kind of English actor trying to ham it up as, for instance, Dogberry in *Much Ado*. It’s desperate stuff. We even draw a veil over the whole buttock-clenching business by calling the comic device he employs in that instance *malapropism*—after Sheridan’s character Mrs Malaprop, who does exactly the same thing only funny in *The Rivals*. And it’s no good saying it’s something to do with the fact that Shakespeare was writing in the sixteenth century. What difference does that make? Chaucer had no difficulty being funny as hell way back in the fourteenth century when the spelling was even worse. Maybe it’s because our greatest writing genius was incapable of being funny that we have decided that being funny doesn’t count. (Adams, 2002).

Once you start examining Shakespeare’s life, you’ll find he was just like everyone else – a product of his time and privilege – and his work and views reflect this cultural straitjacket. As noted by Jonathan Bate, Shakespeare’s schooling was the perfect preparation for his later career in the playhouse:

Shakespeare’s education would, then, have begun with the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, as laid out in the catechism of the Anglican church. From there, it would have proceeded to a thorough grounding in Latin grammar. Having been drilled in his grammar, the young William would then have been led line by line through a range of set texts – first, a variety of anthologies and selections, then some original works by the major authors of classical Rome. (Bate, 1998).

This recalls Churchill’s schooling, wherein he suffered under the “classical dominance of the period [involving] Greek and Latin grammar and texts.” (Jenkins, 2002). But returning to the sixteenth century:

Shakespeare’s first attempts in the art of literary composition would have come a little further up the grammar school. He would have been set the exercise of writing letters in Latin in the style of different characters from classical myth and history. The art of fitting the emotion to the moment would have begun here. Thereafter, he would have been made to write compositions on particular themes, perhaps beginning from an edited version of Erasmus’ great collection of proverbial wisdom, the *Adagia*. Many of the ‘wise saws’ for which Shakespeare’s plays have become so renowned... can be traced back to the *Adagia* or comparable textbooks.

...

Grammar school techniques of composition, and in particular the emphasis on rhetorical elaboration or copiousness, stayed with Shakespeare throughout his career. He learnt in school to read a source and embellish it, expand upon it; sometimes he would have to turn prose into verse. This is exactly how he worked as a playwright.” (Bate, 1998).

Putting it bluntly; Shakespeare was trained into a particular mindset by the dominant political forces of the day, wherein he was squeezed through a pre-determined mould and came out in a pre-determined form. And this is the central point of this novel; that we are all the products of our culture, and hence an elitist training ground will sustain and replicate elitism, (see Eton's curriculum, above), while ensuring that everyone else remains far below on the sociopolitical ladder. And this is exactly what happened with Churchill, who was born into an upper-class family and who went through a typical upper-class schooling and other typical upper-class experiences before emerging, surprisingly enough, as a typical upper-class archetype.

It's almost as though getting a good, broad, ongoing education is essential in developing critical, intellectual, and artistic sensibilities, perhaps explaining why our contemporary interpretation of a 'good education' is merely a construct that feeds its students into a capitalist sausage-grinding machine in which the unthinking replication of Establishment dogma and the pursuit of jobs/careers/wealth/hegemony is the entire aim of the process, rather than achieving any form of self-actualisation via critical-thinking. No wonder the political elite has long been against any course encouraging creativity and freedom of thought:

Arts could be hit as ministers consider controls on admissions to curb costs and channel people towards subjects the Government favours (Hazell, 2021).

But this is nothing new. Shakespeare's schooling was not so much an institute of learning as a programme of cultural conformity, meaning Shakespeare was the product of his culture – and this culture constructed his perceptions at every level. Schooling, (then as now), was the product of political machination and concerns for the state rather than the individuals within:

...the network of 16th century grammar schools was essential to Queen Elizabeth I's unification of the nation. Education was the seedbed of Britain's prosperity, its burgeoning empire and its energetic cultural life. The King's School, [note the reinforcement of loyalty and hegemony by the school's name] Stratford upon Avon... imported a rigorous grounding in the arts of eloquence and debate via the Latin language." (Bate, 1998).

But then, *everyone* is the product of their environment. Ludwig van Beethoven, today recognised as a colossus of composing, owes his life and reputation to an abusive father:

From a very early age, Beethoven's father pushed him to follow in the footsteps of Mozart, to become the music world's next child prodigy. The young Beethoven was forced to play at all hours of the day and night. One story tells of his drunken father returning from a bar late at night with friends and forcing little Ludwig to get up and perform on the pianoforte for their entertainment. Standing on a stool to reach the keys, he was beaten for every missed note, torture that went on throughout the night. (Furlotti, 2021).

III

A genius requiring a collaborator (or several) is another recurring motif of any National Mythic Hero. The Old Masters, i.e. "any of the distinguished painters of the 16th, 17th, or early 18th century" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), employed the guild system, meaning apprentices were "allowed to work on the less-important sections of the master's own paintings, such as large areas of unmodulated color or monotonous background foliage"

(Janson, n.d.) but “the apprentice could not sign and sell his own paintings. Instead, all the works the apprentice produced became property of his master.” (Ibid). A very nice piece of capitalist investment...

The official striking of these collaborators from the public record through the devious policy of admitting to their existence but then hardly mentioning them again is also seen with Shakespeare – and Churchill. We could, for example, ask about Shakespeare’s collaborators including George Wilkins, Thomas Middleton, and John Fletcher, and while it’s true that their names are out there, we have yet to see an entire industry based on the figure of Fletcher, or a conspiracy theory stating Middleton’s works were written by the Earl of Oxford, or find a film entitled *Wilkins in Love* at our local cinema. But then:

...an Elizabethan play was a collaborative work that belonged to the theatrical company which performed it every bit as much as to the dramatist who wrote it. For this reason, plays were rarely the medium for self-portraiture on the part of the writer.” (Bate, 1998).

Which suggests that Shakespeare’s true genius was that of a hogging the credit while exploiting the real workers, while Churchill – not changing the topic at all – made use of a battery of underpaid assistants to do the actual research for his books; he then looked over their notes and spoke his thoughts out loud while another assistant wrote everything down. Yet these assistants, like Shakespeare’s co-writers, have been glossed over on the windowsill of time by the painter-decorators of history.

As such, we again we see the common threads of Mythical genius beginning to unravel; early education, cultural context, the world these supposed heroes were born into; all these ingredients form the child who becomes the adult who later becomes the socially constructed myth, and we see this with Shakespeare and Churchill, for both were (and are) creations of their time, trapped by their socially created perceptions of the world. Another such figure who exemplifies being trapped by the cultural norms of the day is Leonardo da Vinci, as explained by Stephen Jay Gould, who summarises the pop culture view of Leonardo before deconstructing that view:

... Leonardo stood alone and above, we are told over and over again, because he combined his unparalleled genius with a thoroughly modern methodology based on close observation and clever experiment. He could therefore overcome the ignorance and lingering sterile scholasticism of his own times. (Gould, 1999).

The issue, as Gould then clarifies, is that Leonardo spent years trying to map the supposed parallel relationship between the Earth and the human form – which was the standard dogma of the time – and which basically runs thus; the human body has bones, while the Earth has rocks. The human body has blood, while the Earth has oceans. Blood flows around the body through the veins; hence the oceans must flow through the Earth’s veins. Blood circulates around the body from top to bottom, and so water must also run upward within mountains and hills before flowing down again.

Add on the idea that both the Earth and human bodies are formed of the four elements – earth, water, air, and fire – and we see how Leonardo, despite his undoubted (and hellishly impressive) understanding of the world, was still bound very much within that world and its basic beliefs:

Leonardo operated in the context of his time. He used his basically mediaeval and Renaissance concept of the universe to pose the great questions, and to organise the subjects and phenomena, that would generate his phenomenal originality. If we do not chronicle, and respect, the mediaeval sources and character of Leonardo’s thought,

we will never understand him or truly appreciate his transforming ideas. (Ibid).

Returning to Shakespeare; it was the cultural norm of Elizabethan writing to copy someone else's work, be it a play, poem, myth etc, and then give it a twist:

... to the Elizabethans, this procedure would have been admirable, not reprehensible. For them, there was no higher mark of artistic excellence than what they called the *lively turning* of familiar material. This was the art of copiousness which they were taught in school: take a piece of received wisdom (a proverb, a phrase, a historical incident, a story out of ancient myth), *turn* it on the envelope of your inventiveness, and you will give it new life. The genius is in the embellishment. (Bate, 1998).

You would think this surely gives the "Shakespeare as Genius" narrative a damn good kick in the fundamentals, at least to a modern audience, but no. (On a side note, I think for my next book I'll do a story about an orphan boy sent to boarding school who discovers he's a secret agent with a license to magic. And he's part of a superhero team pledged to defend the Earth from intergalactic mobile dustbins armed with sink plungers. The money should just roll in).

But to resume; it wasn't just Shakespeare who hogged the credit for himself; the cultural elite have been ascribing non-Shakespearean credit to the Bard of Avon for years past, as noted by David McInnis in his research into the common belief that Shakespeare practically invented language:

But did Shakespeare really *invent* all these words and phrases?
The short answer is no. His audiences had to understand at least the gist of what he meant, so his words were mostly in circulation already or were logical combinations of pre-existing concepts.
So why do we think Shakespeare invented so many words and phrases?
To understand this, we need to understand the history of the Oxford English Dictionary (or "OED").
When you look up a word in the OED, it provides a definition, followed by a history of examples of the word in use. Currently there are over 33,000 quotations from Shakespeare in the dictionary! About 1500 of those are the first evidence of a word's existence in English. About 7,500 of them are the first evidence of a particular *usage* or *meaning*. But the OED is biased: especially in the early days, it preferred literary examples, and famous ones at that. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* was frequently raided for early examples of word use, even though words or phrases might have been used earlier, by less famous or less literary people. (McInnis, 2016). (His emphasis).

And this demonstrates perfectly how (elitist) society reproduces itself by replicating previous ideas and assumptions which are then presented as fact, with these 'facts' being unthinkingly accepted as they come from authority – in this case the authority of the *Big Clever Book Written by Establishment Hacks Who Can Speak Latin and Who Therefore Know Better Than You Do, So Accept What We Tell You and Don't Think For Yourselves*. But returning to Shakespeare's conventionality; most Elizabethans lucky (i.e. wealthy) enough to go to school would have proceeded into the approved lanes of trade and business though a few, like Shakespeare, would have been able to turn to more artistic ends – though Shakespeare seems to have absorbed the business ideals well enough, given his later wealth and evasion of tax collectors. Which provides another neat link to

Churchill, who employed his own lucrative and morally corrupt tax evasion scheme while in power:

As chancellor he [Churchill] was responsible for the tax system; yet he owed £400,000 of tax in today's money and had no means of paying it. Churchill summoned Richard Hopkins, the young chairman of the Inland Revenue, and asked for suggestions. Hopkins spoke to his technical staff before writing to Churchill in his own hand on plain notepaper. Helpfully he pointed to an 'anomaly', which would halve Churchill's tax liability: he should 'retire' as an author, then claim any unpaid fees as capital receipts (which were untaxed) rather than income. All went well until Churchill discovered a year later that it was impossible for him to live on a Cabinet minister's salary (worth around £250,000 today). Anxious to resume writing without invalidating his 'retirement', Churchill re-summoned Hopkins, who duly consulted his senior staff again before sending another private draft letter for Churchill to send him. 'It should be OK', Hopkins forecast; it was. (Lough, 2016).

(Incidentally, does this mean tax evasion is an essential part of National Myth? Did King Arthur have a complicated and corrupt tax system signed off by the very people who were supposed to be upholding the system? Or did he just employ a financial hedge wizard?)

(v)

Returning to the concept of the "Hero as National Myth Used by the Establishment to Maintain Cultural Conformity and Control" brings us to the moment that Shakespeare's reputation really started taking off for him. Which was after he was dead. *Long* after he was dead. You might think from the current level of Bardwank that he was recognised in his own time as a genius, but although he was popular, and rated highly by fellow playwright Ben Jonson, theatrical writing in general was seen as a lower form of endeavour, a bit like soap opera writing is today. So Shakespeare was just the *EastEnders* of his era, albeit without his characters screaming 'You slaaaaggg!' at each other. In fact, his reputation in his own time, because of 'modern' plays being viewed with suspicion, was based more on his poems than his stage writing, but even here, while some contemporaneous lists of leading poets mention him, he seems to have been less well regarded than Philip Sidney or Edmund Spenser. Admittedly one of Shakespeare's works, *Venus and Adonis*, was enormously popular at the time, but it was actually a dirty poem and the public lapped it up for the titillation. So the great Willy Shakespeare, as well as being the *Eastenders* of his day, was also the *Fifty Shades of Grey* of his day. Think on that. It wasn't until Ben Jonson printed his own works in 1616, the year Shakespeare died, that attitudes toward playwriting started to change. It was Jonson who pioneered the canonisation of plays (and thus playwrights) by producing his own works in folio format. Shakespeare's plays did appear in his lifetime but only as cheap and unauthorised quartos which were usually produced (badly) from memory – the norm for many playwrights at that time. And Shakespeare was very normal for his time. Shakespeare did eventually get a poor-quality folio in 1623, but it didn't go into a second edition until 9 years later – suggesting that the first edition didn't sell especially well, or it was intended only for the wealthy elite, or else the publishers were given cash up front by someone (possibly Shakespeare's widow) to produce it. And by 1668, his reputation had declined to the extent that Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were being performed more frequently than his own. What finally established Shakespeare's reputation was plain good fortune. For one thing, not many plays had survived from before (and during) his era, meaning Shakespeare's output takes up quite a chunk of the available market:

Availability, the contingency of whether or not particular texts and other cultural artefacts survive, is crucial [to popularity]. It was when the theatres were reopened with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660... [that] the canon of English drama was established. The plays that were performed and revised most frequently, and that became most highly admired by critics, were those that had been collected in print. There were only three substantial bodies of work... Ben Johnson... [Shakespeare]... [and] the 'Beaumont and Fletcher' writing team. (Bate, 1998).

By the time of the 18th century, literacy was increasing and textual criticism was emerging, both boosted by developments in mass printing and publishing. Another lucky break for Shakespeare's reputation lay in the first copywrite law, established in 1709, which was exploited by numerous publisher who could produce their own editions of Shakespeare's work:

So decade by decade there was an ever-greater proliferation of editions, each presenting Shakespeare in subtly different ways and choosing different textual variants. Adding together 'Complete Works' and 'Individual Plays', there have been thousands of editions of Shakespeare. And, roughly speaking, every 20 years or so... there has been a new *Collected Works* that embodies, to a greater or lesser extent, a rethinking of the principles and practises of Shakespearean editing. This is the feedback loop taken to an extreme... in publishing, as in the theatre, availability is one of the things that keeps him going. (Ibid.)

The ego of actor David Garrick was also essential in founding today's Shakespearean myth as he ruthlessly used Shakespeare plays to boost his own profile by such means as commissioning several portraits of himself as various Shakespearian characters for the people to ogle and admire. He also organised the first Shakespeare celebration in Stratford Upon Avon, raising his (and the bard's) profile still further, while Shakespeare's reputation took another boost thanks to the Licensing Act of 1737, which was passed to prevent theatrical outbreaks of critical satire against the government. Or, to put it another way, the only works allowed on the stage were those deemed acceptable by the Establishment...

And finally, we should consider how good solid English xenophobia boosted the bard:

Ironically, the construction of Father Shakespeare, his canonization, was inspired by the English desire to defend him against the strictures of French neoclassical critics. Voltaire and many others complained that Shakespearean drama was barbarous, untutored, violating the 'rules' at every turn... During the century, Shakespeare's defenders gradually realized that instead of pruning Shakespeare to follow the rules, as the French wished to do, they should reformulate the rules themselves... Shakespeare, in short, was established as 'sublime', a new aesthetic that shifted significant reader response from the realm of judgement to the realm of feeling. (Desmet & Williams, 2009).

Or, to put it another way, if your side is losing because you're not good enough, change the rules, do away with intelligence in favour of emotional reactivity, (very Daily Mail), and then claim to be the victor. As long as you have an Empire to back you up, not many are likely to disagree too hard, or too loud.

The above quote, incidentally, comes from *Shakespearean Gothic*, which describes how:

As 'Shakespeare' materialised as the father of English literature in the eighteenth-century imagination, his figure cast a growing shadow, which from Horace Walpole onwards came to be called Gothic. Beginning with Walpole, enthusiasts of the 'barbarous' and the medieval argued that Shakespeare's plays justified their sensational material, 'monstrosities' of all kinds. Thus, a complete portrait of Shakespeare must include his Gothic 'shadow'. (Desmet & Williams, 2009).

Which means that as well as being the *Eastenders* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* of his day, Shakespeare was also the *Twilight* of his day. The horror! And if you think it unlikely that attitudes on what is artistically valid can change so drastically, then consider this:

In the 18th century, critics grumbled about a new literary form that supposedly threatened the abilities of youth to distinguish between reality and artificiality. This kind of text, the criticism ran, misinformed its readers about love, morals, social class, and everything that society most valued. This form was the novel, one of the literary forms that critics now hold dearest. New forms often attract scorn, which is why "novel," meaning "new," originally was a term to disparage this Johnny-come-lately style of writing. (Strong Hansen, 2012).

Old v new. Tradition v modern. Establishment v meritocracy. Orthodoxy v innovation. By now, the reader should be seeing the main theme coming through, loud and clear, over and over again. And it's not even a hidden subtext:

The first and most common way to classify cultural items as high or low culture is the direct relation with social hierarchy and cultural distinction: high culture is what high-status people (whether based on social class or educational level) prefer, and with which they distinguish themselves from lower status people. (van den Haak, 2018).

So; technology was advancing, culture was changing with it, Shakespeare's reputation was being constructed thanks to these elements rather than for any actual merit... and it is here we finally reach the truly disturbing ideology behind the bardolatry – Shakespeare's complete lack of any genuine revolutionary ideals in his work, which made him the perfect figure for the ruling elite. (And I'll make the point here that Shakespeare's *intentions* within his own plays is supremely irrelevant; it is how the Establishment *used* them – and Shakespeare's reputation – that concerns us here. Not that Shakespeare seems to have held any genuine anti-Establishment views, or engaged in any anti-Establishment behaviour, the food-hoarding, tax-dodging, property-buying tosser that he was). The Bard's conservative attitudes, in which disorder is controlled and the Establishment is always reaffirmed, suited the elite perfectly. Even *Hamlet*, which ends in a royal genocide, sees stability and normality restored with the immediate acquisition of a new ruling royal household for Denmark. And thus Shakespeare became a political weapon to hammer the population into unthinking obedience, as noted by Peter Beech, who states that after the power of the church had been damaged by the developing sciences:

...the Victorian upper classes [had] to cast around for another way to control (sorry, civilise) the masses. Shakespeare was elected to the executive board of English Literature, the new academic subject devised to do just that." (Beech, 2009).

And this happened just as the British Empire was dominant, thus providing a neat echo of Christianity's arrival into Britain on the back of the Roman Empire. Shakespeare was exported out to the world along with English Christianity and English cultural imperialism, all three aspects of which fit snugly together with the shared central messages of "do as you're told, accept your lot in life, and don't cause trouble." And so it was that Shakespeare became *the* cultural icon, as noted by researcher Sylvia Morris:

Shakespeare was seen as a pillar of the establishment, enormously popular in the UK and a symbol of its values in the Empire. Being able to say that Shakespeare was on their side was a great plus for the suffragettes, struggling to be taken seriously by the political establishment." (Morris, 2015).

The Chartists had tried something similar before the suffragettes, calling on Shakespeare to bolster their position with the public, hence their adoption of the Bard as one of them: "Why depend on the works of Shakespeare or Milton? Because they provide "pedigree" or give strength and lend credence to the Chartist argument." (Pennino, 2014). And some may claim this is Shakespeare's true genius – that we can find points of reference with him and recognise ourselves in his work. But what if we step outside this dominant Eurocentric view?

... Shakespeare has long been deemed as "universal"—as having the unique ability to speak to concerns that all humans share. That is a deeply racist view. How could a white man from 16th-century England represent, speak for and speak to humans—who have diverse experiences and ways of being in the world—across time and space? Of course, white Christian Europeans often refused to see non-whites, non-Christians and non-Europeans as fully human in order to justify slavery, settler colonialism and genocide. It is hard to separate claims about Shakespeare's universality from the issue of who has historically been considered fully human. (Rolfson, 2022).

And bear in mind you can find a certain level of universality anywhere; in Christopher Marlow, or Ben Jonson, Terry Pratchett, crime fiction, romance, farce, Marvel films or even the *Beano*, but these don't get the same level of academic and cultural posturing that Shakespeare enjoys. And *anyone* can use Shakespeare for their own ends. The Third Reich *loved* the plays, with *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III* all proving to be very, very popular, so clearly the Nazi High Command found much to admire in the Shakespearean canon.

What this ultimately seems to prove is how thoroughly the Establishment controls everything; want to change society? You can only do so by *becoming like the ruling elite*, in this case by co-opting Shakespeare for support, which means you are playing the elite's game, by the elite's rules, on the elite's playing field. Shakespeare was a gift equal to the Bible for an Establishment looking to maintain social dominance, while his reputation has become an industry blindly reproducing itself in theatres, popular culture, and educational institutions, as each generation slavishly worships and repeats the assumptions of yesteryear. No wonder our political masters insist on Shakespeare being taught in the school curriculum: "...for Tory politicians in the 1980s, Shakespeare was spokesman for national pride and hierarchal social order." (Bate, 1998).

Shakespeare the Myth is little more than a form of cultural oppression, a shortcut to intellectual credibility, and a self-replicating industry. His reputation and ongoing success are both assured, for anyone taking an opposing view will be ridiculed and dismissed not only by the cultural elite, but by all who follow that elite. (Think of the way tabloid readers bleat the opinions of the newspapers they read). Acquiescence is the only safety.

This helps explain the frothing outrage directed against any who criticise Churchill for his bigotry or Shakespeare for both his Establishment conformity and sheer dullness. Indeed, there appears to be quite an overlap, with the defenders of both men relying more on sarcasm and ad hominem attacks than any refutation of the points raised, as shown in the reactions to Beech's article in the Guardian, in which a lack of original thought is no barrier to sharing an opinion:

Oh look. I've found a sacred cow and poked it. And I already know how drole [sic] I am so I'm going to pre-empt the reaction of the reader.

User id "Sameturn", not discussing any of the points raised.

...

So Shakespeare is not politically correct. So what? Politics is not everything. NuLabor, however, is politically correct, and they are foisting fascism upon us.

User id "haveatye", not discussing any of the points raised. (Beech, 2009).

And this is English Myth; an eternal paean to nationalistic dogma, protecting social stability from harm – and the greatest harm is change. Keep the outsiders out. Keep the ideas out. Keep equality out. For all these things threaten the Establishment, and they must therefore be suppressed.

(vi)

This historical mythologizing leads us nicely into modern-day England, which like its ancient forefathers uses "the nation state, national symbols, histories... [for the purpose of] exercises in social engineering which are often deliberate... (Hobsbawm, 1994). And the result of this? We live in a society in which the ruling elite can do as they wish with little or no genuine scrutiny, and certainly with no real repercussions for mistakes, incompetence, or even corruption. Churchill himself:

...had an unfortunate knack of finding himself on the wrong side of too many arguments, over things that usually did not require the benefit of hindsight to be understood... By the 1930s he had long been an intensely controversial figure, appearing sometimes as one who combined the worst sort of pre-Reform Act Tory arrogance and harshness with an occasional and deeply self-serving lack of principle (Heffer, 2015).

And yet Churchill was simply allowed to carry on. Had a system been in place ensuring that politicians who made unforgivable mistakes were deselected, he would have been out after returning the UK to the gold standard in 1925, a disastrous economic policy, or Gallipoli in 1915 – assuming he hadn't already been sacked for the siege of Sydney Street of 1911. But Churchill had the privileges of rank, money, and class, and these gave him the privilege to make mistakes with no genuine consequences, the privilege to keep trying to work his way up the governmental ladder, and the privilege to lay waste to hundreds of thousands of lives.

And this privilege was, and still is, shared by the rest of his class. Politicians can be serial incompetents, adulterers, liars, and bigots, and yet they face no real repercussions; the police won't investigate even blatant illegality until threatened with legal action, (see footnote #194), while the capitalist media stands forever ready to defend the billionaire elite who hold power over the rest of us, with the best form of defence being attack – even to the point of attacking reality:

Rightists claim that professional historians are leftist partisans making mere political fodder of history. Historians who point out that

Athens was especially xenophobic and a slave state, for instance, are being anachronistic; those who draw attention to Lincoln's support for deportation of the formerly enslaved are engaging in "woke" moralizing; classicists who describe the ethnic diversity of Roman culture are ivory tower elitists. (Broich, 2020).

Nills Gilman summarises the motivation for the above policy rather well, and although speaking about the American Right, Gilman's observations fit snugly around the UK media also:

Over the last forty years, the production of American historical memory has been quite radically transformed. With the effective victory of a capacious, polysemous understanding of the past - which is the hallmark of professional history today - those who prefer a smaller, more politically or religiously sectarian view of the past have withdrawn into (or perhaps less pejoratively, have developed) their own historical epistemology, one that is barely in dialog with what professional historians do. The creation of this parallel, unprofessional historiographic universe is a politically self-conscious project of the American right, central to their effort to roll back the twentieth century's expansion of political inclusiveness, social tolerance, and the welfare state. (Gilman, 2010).

And this reinforcement of the national consciousness replicates itself throughout history, with the means of communication (be it education, literacy, access to the means of publication etc) forever being concentrated in the hands of the few, with the resulting "authoritative history of everything" being nothing more than the skewed perspectives gleaned from one small section of a much wider society:

The late 1940s and early 1950s have become synonymous with austerity... but despite the allegations from some quarters of malnutrition, people were in fact healthier than they had ever been and certainly had a better diet than they do today. We have to remember that the history of those years was written by the middle classes; that the opinion formers, such as journalists and novelists and diary-keepers and letter-writers, were predominantly the people who had never experienced the dire poverty of the 1930s and were now enduring the *comparatively* mild peacetime shortages for the first time. (O'Farrell, 2010).

And as Jeremy Ullmann observes:

Before the Second World War, the working class were barely mentioned in British literature and media, despite being the largest social class for centuries. If it was represented at all, it was often as caricatures, such as Fagin in *Oliver Twist*. It received more attention following the Labour Party's 1945 election victory, which passed social reforms in support of working people, but these portrayals became overwhelming negative with the rise of Thatcherism. (Ullman, 2020).

Society's national(ist) myths are thus forged by those who can inflict their will on the rest of society, a pattern replicated down the generations until we reach our modern age of hatred and intolerance for anything different. And this lack of fairness, empathy, or any attempt at even-handedness from the Establishment and its minions genuinely seems (to

this author) to be a deliberate process of sociological propaganda; witness the herding of public consciousness to a state of Saint-like veneration wherein Churchill becomes a Mythic Temple, where all must enter with their heads bowed, voices hushed, and brains disengaged, for questions are a Sin unto the Almighty (Elite) and no dissent is tolerated:

Groupthink arises when members of a group unconsciously seek to minimize conflict by failing to critically test, analyse, and evaluate ideas. As a result, decisions reached by the group tend to be more irrational than those that would have been reached by any one member of the group acting alone. (Burton, 2015).

(vii)

Having started this footnote with a fictional comic book character, let us end there also, not just because of the symmetry but also because the icing on this nationalistic/mythic/metafictional cake is that Churchill himself became a comic book character in *Eagle Comics*, (1957-8), written by Clifford Makins and drawn by Frank Bellamy. In just one page of this depiction of reality, Churchill is posed in front of a Union Jack overlaid with the (white and wholesome) British people while making his “Finest hour” speech. And the proof of the effect this sort of thing can have on a population of credulous Little Englanders?

I’ve lost count of the number of people who, over the years, have told me that they learned all their German vocabulary from Commando. They freely admit that Commando hasn’t taught much of the language but every single one has started the list of words they know with “Achtung!” We’re glad we’ve done our bit for international understanding, you know. (Laird, 2011).

No wonder the Right has such a moronic, jingoist view of the world; their hero has been rendered (both literally and figuratively) into little more than a two-dimensional character. And this goes some way to explaining the Myth that Britain won World War II alone, (thus overlooking the contributions of the Russians, Americans, Indians, Australians, and countless others), as most English people are fed this tripe from birth onward in just about every single medium that exists. Including toys:

Why did the picture on my box of Airfix soldiers not reflect the reality of the imperial, multiracial, multi-faith, polyglot army? Why were they all depicted as white, and what lessons about the war might my schoolfriends and I have learnt had they not been? (Olusoga, 2019).

Indeed, one is tempted to speculate that those on the Right honestly believe the war ended when Churchill was dropped by Q branch in an experimental Aston Martin Rocketcar into Berlin to prevent the Nazi’s from detonating their secret Hun Atomic Bomb. After which he personally duelled with Adolf Hitler in hand-to-hand combat. With Excalibur. Which is also a lightsaber. God save the King/Queen/Queen Mother/Good Queen Bess/the Empress of India/QE2! (The monarch. Not the boat). Interestingly, there is a distinct overlap between Churchill as a fictional construct and James Bond as a fictional character. Simon Winder notes in *The Man Who Saved Britain* that the Bond books and character:

...proceeded to find their vast niche as part of a general right-wing reaction to the humiliations and failures of British life. I want to recreate some of the stifling British obsession with the Second World War, which still cannot be shaken even today, but which once

permeated all aspects of life and was dominant through my own childhood. (Winder, 2011).

Churchill the Lone Saviour of Civilisation from the Nazi Hordes is as much a fictional construct as James Bond, Batman, or any other pop culture hero. Fiction and reality have entwined, with Churchill the Myth becoming a multi-faceted kaleidoscopic construction used to draw lines between 'us' and 'them' – even though 'us' and 'them' is something of a fluid concept, dependent upon context. But the result of this kaleidoscopic Churchill, coupled with all other Establishment Myths, is a society in which Little Englanders know their place. And these people genuinely believe their place – in which they have nothing – is somehow a better, higher place than that occupied by the "other", i.e. immigrants, non-whites, lefties, the woke, the LGBTQ community etc. And once the Little Englanders accept this illusion of belonging, they forsake such trivial matters as equality of healthcare, education, wealth, purpose, and opportunity, for their sociologically imposed belief trumps mere reality.

The mental contortions that must accompany this, as those with nothing fold themselves inward origami-style so they can consider themselves superior to the person next to them who also has nothing, is quite mindboggling, and says something depressing about the average Little Englander's lack of intelligence – as well as their willingness to eat the shit of deference shovelled at them by the Establishment.

Chapter Ten

A red-letter day for Yvonne (who is oblivious to the hideous cliché, being inexperienced in editing) as she has her first direct interaction with a real live author, a breed she has long-since deified as wondrous creators inhabiting a higher realm of art and abstract thought. As such, her illusions are about to be sorely tested...

Yvonne was sitting quietly at her desk in the late afternoon, alone as the rest of the staff were in a meeting across the hallway, when the outer door slammed open and a man strode into the office, his face resting in its accustomed expression of social superiority. It was the expression that confused Yvonne, for it meant she didn't immediately recognise the man she had seen on innumerable television shows ruthlessly plugging the "Terrance Rogerson, affable chap of the old school" brand.

'I'm here to see Michael Vansittart,' announced Rogerson, his tone making it clear he expected to be shown straight to the publisher's office. His gaze, which up until that point had been flicking around the room in the hope of seeing a more important (and less ethnic) person he could deal with, finally came to rest on Yvonne's face.

'Have you an appointment?' asked Yvonne, nervously, for the man's posh accent and air of command was sending socio-encoded signals to the personal deference program imprinted onto Yvonne's character by her environmental upbringing.

'I emailed Michael I was coming in,' replied Rogerson, glossing over the timeframe of the email which only extended back some forty minutes, while emphasising he was on first name terms with the head man. He wouldn't normally have talked to a coloured pleb unless there was a television camera around, but at that precise moment, he had no choice.

'So, you have an appointment?' asked Yvonne, timidly.

'I emailed him!' repeated Rogerson, his patrician voice moving up the social scale as he put the Black girl in her place, for this was the way his

world worked. Though he suspected she probably liked his tone; the firm white hand of the experienced older man...⁹²

⁹² It may have been noticed by the reader that Vansittart, Hutchinson-Cockburn, and Rogerson all view Yvonne as a girl, while Felicity views her as a woman. This may seem an unremarkable fact, but when unpacked, some rather unpleasant assumptions start to spill out – and all revolve around the dehumanisation of Yvonne as a person. Starting with the men, one reason for their automatic infantilization of Yvonne is power and sexism:

The subtle hint when men ‘girlify’ women in high power situations is to put across a very simple message: that they do not belong here and nor is their power/status equal to that of their male peers. Through the use of condescending nicknames such as ‘young lady’, we see men try and imitate the power dynamic that exists between parent and a child; it places the woman under his power, flipping the dynamic to his favour. (Sood, 2021).

Another obvious point to make – as far as the men are concerned – is that of the male gaze, which was:

... first popularized in relation to the depiction of female characters in film as inactive, often overtly sexualized objects of male desire. However, the influence of the male gaze is not limited to how women and girls are featured in the movies. Rather, it extends to the experience of being seen in this way, both for the female figures on screen, the viewers, and by extension, to all girls and women at large. (Vanbuskirk, 2024).

A quick glance at Chapter Eighteen will reveal how Hutchinson-Cockburn regards himself as the Alpha Male of the office, while in a similar manner, Vansittart considers himself the older, sophisticated man, yet both are ultimately the same as they categorise Yvonne, and thus diminish her, by viewing her as something sexual and, ultimately, disposable:

Thinking logically, when young girls are constantly sexualised and women are infantilized, this portrayal of women will naturally create a false perception of how youth and submissiveness are traits to look for in a sex partner; it invites men to start viewing young girls to be sexually desirable and sexually available. (Sood, 2021).

This is seen clearly in Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn’s attitudes, which reduces Yvonne to the status of a girl – but a sexualised girl who, in their view, is receptive toward (even craving of) their male attention. Chapter Nineteen will also reveal Hutchinson-Cockburn’s similar attitudes to working-class women, thus demonstrating that, in certain ways, there is very little difference in the Establishment’s view on disposable women of any background and ethnicity, for in this schema all non-Establishment women are sexual, expendable, and less than fully human:

The viewing of another person as an instrument to be used for sexual goals is known as objectification...

...

More broadly, the process of denying human qualities of mind and morality is related to many types of prejudices, including racial discrimination [22, 23], reduced empathy for medical patients

[24], and negative stereotypes towards people within lower social classes [25]. More specifically for women, evidence shows sexualized women are viewed as lacking in both mental and moral capacity, and as a result, they are seen as less competent [10, 26], less human [26] and perceived to suffer less in sexual assault [11]. (Kellie & Blake, 2019) Emphasis mine.

As well as the infantilising sex/power angle, however, we must also be aware of the racial/historical angle. The attitudes held by Vansittart, Rogerson, and Hutchinson-Cockburn (and those like them in the real world) toward Black women has been traced back to Empire, colonialism, and slavery:

Black women being portrayed as lusty and sexually available [the Jezebel] is probably the oldest of the stereotypes. Just like the Mammy and the Sapphire, this myth also holds its origin in the plantations and in the slavery era. And, just like the other stereotypes, the danger of this myth still lives today. (mala.mulata, 2020).

And these attitudes are still strong today, and they reveal the issues inherent within English society; the racism and sexism inculcated into the population from day one:

Sex is, in some ways, a very tangible expression of the deeper currents of prejudice in this country. As a brutally self-conscious mixed-race teenage girl in suburban London, one of my earliest experiences of having a black identity was the way boys behaved towards me. Teenagers from the neighbouring boys' school – one of the most elite private schools in the country – were among the most merciless. They made jokes about rumours they'd heard, that black girls "give good head", and have "more pussy". It was a lot for a 14-year-old girl, just waking up to her sexuality, as well as her increasingly confusing racial identity, to bear. (Hirsch, 2018).

And it's not just the sexual/racist/historical attitudes that require analysis here – it's the social also, and once again, these are views which have long been articulated within Establishment society:

Southern slaveholder societies in the US operated under a Victorian social and moral code. This meant that it was a society in which gender roles determine social participation and defined moral rules. According to this code, women were expected to be chaste, pure, innocent, weak, and thus in need of protection. If this principle was to be applied to all women, then Black women should also be assisted and protected like their White counterparts, and not exploited as they actually were in reality. (Ibid).

That Yvonne, or any woman, should have any say in how they are viewed is never even considered by Vansittart or Hutchinson-Cockburn, for they cannot fit this idea into their world view; Vansittart is aware of the 'male gaze' only as a piece of theoretical (i.e. faux) lefty rubbish from the cinema, while Hutchinson-Cockburn has never even heard of it all. To them, girls are fair game, to be lusted after equally but differently, with white girls (of good breeding) needing the sexualised cage of masculine/patriarchal protection, marriage, and motherhood, (male heirs preferred), while Black and working class girls/women are managed by regarding them as little more than animal, and thus

something to be enjoyed as spectacle or fuck-toy before being contained once again in their cultural cages, out of sight and mind of the wealthy.

Rogerson, meanwhile, while also viewing Yvonne as a girl, does so as he is rather more blatantly racist in his attitudes:

Women in the workplace are often confronted with sexist language. For black women, gender and racial discrimination can collide in a single experience—like being called “girl.” During slavery and into the Jim Crow era black adult men were referred to as “boy” and women as “girl”—a constant reminder that black people were deemed infantile and not deserving of respect or proper titles even well into adulthood. (WLRN Public Media, 2017).

The only real difference between Rogerson in comparison with Hutchinson-Cockburn and Vansittart is that the latter two know they have to hide their views to such an extent they even hide those views from themselves, and hence Hutchinson-Cockburn thinks he isn't racist despite telling racist jokes (see chapter Twenty-Six) while Vansittart would splutter in outrage at any such accusation, for how can he be racist when he employs a Black person in his office?

One of the biggest mistakes companies can make in trying to address systemic racial discrimination is to reflexively add one or two black people to a board/leadership team and think the problem is fixed. (Brownlee, 2020).

Rogerson, in contrast, follows Boris Johnson's views on sex, race, ethnicity etc to a surprising degree:

The mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has been accused of sexism after joking that the increase in the number of women attending university in Malaysia was down to their desire to find a husband.

...

Last year Johnson denied being sexist following allegations that he was disrespectful to female politicians. The mayor was confronted with a dossier of public exchanges made during his four-year term, to highlight concerns over his "disrespectful, patronising way at meetings" towards female assembly members that "you do not display when dealing with male assembly members", according to Jennette Arnold, Labour chair of the assembly. (Topping, 2013).

And so, the white wealthy world goes round, with nothing ever changing, for Vansittart, Rogerson, and Hutchinson-Cockburn are incapable of reflection, independent thought, or any genuine character development, for all three automatically swerve away from articulating their racism. But then, as noted by researchers:

... people tend to underestimate their own levels of race- and gender-based bias, or the extent to which their behaviour is affected by another person's race or gender. (West & Eaton, 2019).

Having looked at the male gaze, we should now look at what could be termed the 'female glare', as seen in Felicity's continued objectification of Yvonne, albeit as a woman rather than as a girl. Superficially this may seem an unremarkable thing; Yvonne is about

‘Kindly tell your employer that Terrance Rogerson of the *Daily Crier*, and author of *And There She Rides a Revenant*, is here to see him on a matter of utmost importance.’

‘He’s in a meeting,’ said Yvonne, feeling her stomach drop even further; she was in the presence of an author; and a posh author at that.

‘Then go and get him from the meeting,’ swayed Rogerson, for the lunch at the Chummo Club had been well lubricated.

‘Um, well, I’m not sure,’ said Yvonne, desperately worried that interrupting the meeting would see her dismissed, though she also felt (with no conscious thought, for cultural encrypting had programmed its subconscious deference into her) that she had to defend Vansittart as he was both her boss and her social superior.

‘You think this is an acceptable way to treat the editor of the *Daily Crier*?’ demanded Rogerson in outrage, sending a whiff of brandy into the air.

‘Um,’ said Yvonne; she had heard of the *Daily Crier*, but she only knew of it as something that was not for the likes of her, thus demonstrating how

eighteen or so, a full legal adult, so why worry about how Felicity views her? The answer lies within the racial issue of Adultification, defined as:

A persistent and ongoing act of dehumanisation, which explicitly impacts Black children, and influences how they are safeguarded and protected. This form of bias spans pre-birth and remains on a continuum to adulthood. Where at this juncture it becomes absorbed within the normative negative racialised experiences many Black adults encounter throughout their life course. Adultification may differ dependent on an individual's intersecting identity, such as their gender, sexuality, and dis/abilities. However, race and racism remain the central tenant in which this bias operates. (Davis, 2022).

This may seem to British tabloids like some airy-fairy lefty-wokey academic nonsense, but it maps chillingly onto the real world; Black children are routinely seen and treated as adults by authority, as seen in 2020, when a Black fifteen year old, referred to in reports as Child Q, was strip-searched with no appropriate adult presence by Metropolitan police after she was accused of drug possession.

When faced with a young Black teenager, Felicity (and the police) can only view her in one way; as a potential racialised adult threat. Not as a girl, or a teenager, or someone who just happens to be there, but as a *threat*. But this leads to an issue; young girls are not easily classed as being threatening, and hence they must be encoded as a woman, for a woman is an adult and an adult can be viewed as a menace – and as being old enough to cope, thus shifting any moral blame or guilt away from the perpetrators.

And hence throughout the novel Felicity views/describes Yvonne as a woman. For that is how she has been trained by her cultural norms.

effectively the worm of servility was munching through the apple of her existence. 'If you wouldn't mind waiting, I'm sure he'll be out soon.'

'You need to sort your priorities out,' snapped Rogerson, making it clear he was referring to both the business in general and Yvonne in particular. 'I've worked hard to get where I am, and I had to fight for everything!'⁹³

'Ah, Terrance, I thought I heard your voice,' said Vansittart, drawn from the meeting, for like truly did attract like. 'How are you?'

'Very upset,' replied Rogerson, his tone and manner modulating to something approaching equality, for he was now talking to a social⁹⁴ and racial equal, something noticed by Yvonne though she didn't realise the significance until that evening, after she had calmed down and her brain had kicked back into gear. 'I have sent numerous emails to your office which have not been answered.'

'I do apologise; we've had a lot of staff turnover and illness,' replied Vansittart.⁹⁵ 'What can I do for you?'

⁹³ In fact, Rogerson had worked reasonably diligently at university, but only by regurgitating his tutors' ideas into his essays and final exams to gain their approval. Rogerson, however, was totally oblivious to this fact, thinking his ability to get a pass on almost every paper was a sign of his intelligence and ability, rather than a simple stimulus-response of writing up approved answers in an approved manner to find approval with approving authority.

⁹⁴ Rogerson and Vansittart had, after all, been at Eton together, albeit in different years. Not that this made any difference to the old school tie.

⁹⁵ This standard excuse fell without any conscious thought from Vansittart's lying lips. In truth, he had seen all of Rogerson's emails complaining about his lack of sales, but he had employed his usual policy of ignoring them in the hope the author would eventually give up contacting him.

This, incidentally, is based on real life; when my old publisher, Accent Press, was sold to a larger concern, (Headline Publishing Group), the few Accent authors Headline were interested in were contacted immediately by the new hierarchy. The rest were treated appallingly. Emails and phone calls asking what was going on, and did we have a future with the company etc, were ignored, with glib excuses being offered after several weeks of this contempt.

You may as well just do it yourself on Amazon or Lulu. You get treated with the same level of contempt by Amazon, (Lulu is an unknown quantity, at least for this author), but at least you know in advance that the corporation doesn't give a damn about you. And as with a traditional publisher, you get no advertising or marketing unless you do it for yourself, and so your novel that you poured yourself into will just sit there, unnoticed, unloved, and unread.

Just like in traditional publishing.

Welcome to the club.

‘My sales of *And There She Rides a Revenant*,’ replied Rogerson, glowing in contentment; he was the injured party, meaning he had the moral high ground, which strengthened his bargaining position. ‘They are totally unacceptable!’

‘Oh? I thought them quite encouraging,’ said Vansittart, flipping through his phone app to find the latest sales figures.

‘Encouraging?’ snorted Rogerson. ‘My last royalty statement showed only one hundred books sold in the last quarter!’⁹⁶

‘Not a bad sales record by any means,’ said Vansittart.

‘*Not bad?* I’d expect a work of such profound insight to be pulling in three times that amount. At least! And what about literary prizes? Surely you’ve been submitting *And There She Rides a Revenant* for the various book awards?’

‘Of course we actively promote our authors,’ said Vansittart, who in truth hadn’t submitted *And There She Rides a Revenant* for any prize, for while he knew the novel had a good chance of success, (given that most book committees were made up of his and Rogerson’s peers),⁹⁷ it cost a lot of money to enter literary contests.⁹⁸

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When I first started She Writes Press, I used to ask the authors what kinds of sales they expected from their first book—generally a debut novel or memoir. I heard one number come up pretty often: 10,000 copies. That seemed to be a benchmark authors deemed to be possible, perhaps attainable. But the truth is it’s a very hard number to hit. A few of our authors have hit 10,000 copies sold, but that’s with paperback and e-book sales combined, and it usually involves some sort of ebook campaign. (Warner, 2015).

While the above can be excused as naivety on the part of authors new to the industry, in the case of Rogerson, it demonstrates how despite being born with everything, he still wants more. See also Churchill, W, and his political ambitions.

97

There is... a kind of orthodoxy at work here [with the Booker Prize]. Any panel after all which includes the wife of a Chancellor in 2015, or the wife of a former Prime Minister in 1976, is unlikely to break too many moulds. One feels the apparatus of it all churn on, providing perhaps the illusion of change, whilst actually remaining in perpetual stasis. (Barnes, 2015).

98

...the International Dylan Thomas Prize costs publishers... £2,500 to get a book shortlisted...

‘The book clearly needs greater distribution!’ snorted Rogerson.

‘It is out in the bookshops,’ shrugged Vansittart.⁹⁹

‘So you admit your marketing team could do better?’ exclaimed Rogerson in triumph, feeling he had trapped Vansittart with cunning verbal dexterity, though he flashed his trademark charming smile to show they were old friends together. Which indeed they were, as long as Vansittart and his company remained useful to him.

‘The marketing team can only do so much,’ said Vansittart, fully aware the “marketing team” consisted of whoever was free to post a title or two on social media. ‘But authors must now do their fair share, as laid out in the contract.’¹⁰⁰

‘Harumph, yes, well,’ muttered Rogerson, moving away from the dangerous territory of legal certainty. ‘There should still be more sales.’

‘I’m afraid *And There She Rides a Revenant* is in a very crowded space at the moment,’ soothed Vansittart, though he didn’t specify how many other books existed which featured a demonic woman with an anagrammatic name of Rogerson’s first wife seducing and betraying a man of genius

The publishers of the Costa Book Awards winners have to contribute £4,000 towards the general promotion of the winning books... (Kapila, 2016).

⁹⁹

A book has far less than a 1% chance of being stocked in an average bookstore.

...

For every available bookstore shelf space, there are 100 to 1,000 or more titles competing for that shelf space. (Piersanti, 2020).

Note that Rogerson’s novel is being stocked in high street bookshops thanks to his celebrity status and contacts, and then refer back to the earlier footnote on the wealthy having everything and yet still wanting more...

¹⁰⁰

Most book marketing today is done by authors, not by publishers. Publishers have managed to stay afloat in this worsening marketplace only by shifting more and more marketing responsibility to authors—to cut costs and prop up sales. In recognition of this reality, most book proposals from experienced authors now have an extensive (usually many pages) section on the authors’ marketing platform and what the authors will do to publicize and market the books. (Piersanti, 2020).

before symbolically living off his corpse for years. ‘You need to build up a platform, as more books means a greater audience and more sales.’¹⁰¹

‘But the quality of *And There She Rides a Revenant*,’ insisted Rogerson.

‘Indeed, but you need a platform,’ reiterated Vansittart. ‘Have you considered moving into other areas? YA fiction might be making another comeback next year.’

‘Children’s fiction?’ snorted Rogerson. ‘I do not intend to waste my gifts – such as they are,’ he added with a quick burst of humility,¹⁰² ‘on writing for those who could not appreciate it. Wait until I am senile, and then I will be at the right level for that!’

‘Or books which have relevance to women and women’s issues? Very popular, at the moment,’ added Vansittart.

Rogerson snorted again; he would never put a female writer on his own level, for all they dealt with was banality and domesticity. He was a writer with something to say and a voice that needed to be heard, not a woman with too much time on her hands as a result of being kept by her hard-working husband.¹⁰³

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Many book categories have become entirely saturated, with a surplus of books on every topic. It is increasingly difficult to make any book stand out. Each title is competing with millions of other titles available for sale, while other media are claiming more and more of people’s time. In a crowded marketplace, brand name authors and books stand out... (Piersanti, 2020).

¹⁰² The humility was entirely bogus, being nothing more than part of Rogerson’s careful public façade, for he knows the code of espousing values in public he would never endorse in private. His reaction, by the way, is drawn from real life, as are several aspects of his personality:

“People ask me if I ever thought of writing a children’s book,” [Martin] Amis said, in a sideways excursion from a chat about John Self, the antihero of his 1984 novel *Money*. “I say, ‘If I had a serious brain injury I might well write a children’s book’, but otherwise the idea of being conscious of who you’re directing the story to is anathema to me, because, in my view, fiction is freedom and any restraints on that are intolerable.”
“I would never write about someone that forced me to write at a lower register than what I can write,” he added. (Page, 2011).

See also the very next footnote.

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‘And you could use your platform more,’ suggested Vansittart. ‘Make use of the *Daily Crier*, your contacts, attend all the literary luncheons and get the industry newsletters. And are you sending copies out to your personal contacts in the press, as we are?’¹⁰⁴

‘Of course,’ snarled Rogerson, petulantly.

‘Then keep it up, keep it up,’ soothed Vansittart. ‘Now, you must excuse me as I have an important meeting to attend.’

‘Very well; but I shall expect to see improvements with *And There She Rides a Revenant* forthwith,’ said Rogerson. ‘And sort the movie rights also! I can just see Veronica Laurent in the main role.’ Rogerson’s eyes clouded as he thought of his actress of choice in her nude roles. ‘If we wait much longer, she’ll be past it,’ he added, for Laurent was already in her late twenties. ‘Oh, and what’s happening with the Churchill biography?’ he added in a forced casual manner.

‘Early days,’ replied Vansittart cautiously, recognising the hungry look in Rogerson’s eye.

‘Submissions coming in, I should think?’ probed Rogerson.

‘A few,’ countered Vansittart.

"I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not. I think [it is] unequal to me. " The author, [VS Naipaul] who was born in Trinidad, said this was because of women's "sentimentality, the narrow view of the world". "And inevitably for a woman, she is not a complete master of a house, so that comes over in her writing too, " he said. He added: "My publisher, who was so good as a taster and editor, when she became a writer, lo and behold, it was all this feminine tosh. I don't mean this in any unkind way." (Fallon, 2011).

104

How Do You Decide What To Read And What To Ignore?

Charlotte: Books that publishers are passionately championing are often on my radar before a copy lands on my desk... But what's even more exciting is finding out which books individuals in the industry are championing and this can come from from [sic] industry showcases, from meetings with publicists, from fellow reviewers, from discussions at book launches or lunches, or from social media.

...

Lucy: Discussion with the books editor; word of mouth; authors I love; big name literary authors. I generally avoid novels that I know don't interest me. (Mackintosh, 2019).

So, not much help here for the new author who isn't already part of the system...

‘Anything good?’ queried Rogerson, impressed with his own forensic investigative technique.

‘Some possibilities,’ shrugged Vansittart, edging toward his office.

‘But nothing suitable?’ pressed Rogerson.

‘We’ve had some very good ideas from writers of a non-traditional background,’ said Yvonne, bravely dropping a hint in front of her boss.

‘Non-traditional?’ echoed Rogerson in horror. He had no idea what the dusky maiden meant, but he was sure it was going to be utterly unpalatable.

‘Yes; writers from marginalised groups who usually don’t get a chance,’ began Yvonne, before being interrupted.

‘Good god!’ exclaimed Rogerson as he wheeled backward, partly from drink and partly from the idea of someone so fundamentally *dubious* getting anywhere near the hallowed ground of Sir Winston himself. ‘It sounds like the cranks are crawling out of the woodwork!’ He bellowed in laughter at his own wit, inviting Vansittart to share the humour aimed at the non-Eton, non-Oxbridge world in general, and the young Black woman in particular, while also making a mental note to use the phrase ‘hallowed ground of Sir Winston’ as soon as possible.

‘Indeed, but we keep an open mind here at Clavier and Coldwell,’ said Vansittart, smoothly, for he knew the value of tolerance.¹⁰⁵

‘Oh, indeed, indeed,’ nodded Rogerson,. ‘Well, I’d better be getting along. Think about what I said, Michael, and I’m sure we’ll be meeting soon.’

Rogerson shook hands with Vansittart and left the building, ignoring

¹⁰⁵ Vansittart (and his peers) do indeed know the value of tolerance:

...tolerance is not well regarded by everyone, and some researchers have argued that it is necessary to go beyond “mere” tolerance (see Laegaard, 2013; Macedo, 2000; Schirmer, Weidenstedt, & Reich, 2012). These critics argued that tolerance functions as a subtle social mechanism contributing to domination and inequality (Insel, 2019; Marcuse, 1965; Wemyss, 2006) and also to the depoliticization of diversity by reducing structural disadvantages to cultural group frictions (Brown, 2006). Furthermore, it can be argued that toleration is inescapably patronizing and therefore an inadequate substitute for the appreciation and respect that minority members need and deserve (Parekh, 2000; Taylor, 1994). In the words of the Turkish-Dutch writer Özcan Akyol, “We were being tolerated . . . which is of course a terrible word. If you are being tolerated it is being said ‘you are different, but we will put up with you... (Verkuyten M, 2020).

Yvonne completely as she was probably a fringe voter, given her colour and mad lefty politics. *To think!* he pondered; *the looney left lurking in Michael's office!*
That's multiculturalism for you!

Chapter Ten (continued)

In which Rogerson, musing on the political possibilities the Churchill biography could open up for him, his sacrosanct right to write the Churchill biography, multiculturalism as a failed experiment imposed by lefty dogma, and the frankly distressing issue of people not knowing their place, begins to roll a few phrases around in his mind...

...and realised he was on the verge of another prodigious article on the threat to their Great British History from the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda, the threat to Great British Values from the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda, and the threat to Great British Business from the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda mob.¹⁰⁶ Always go British; that was Rogerson's very public motto.

Rogerson pulled his Yamamoto Voice Recorder from his pocket and began speaking into it, aware of the stares he was getting from the public but enjoying the attention, for his self-image saw himself striding down the pavement toward his Destiny while around him the common people knew they were in the presence of someone truly special, and they would love him for it.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ This chapter sees the prole author back up on the main page, where he can mock Rogerson and all those like him. Though once again the footnotes continue, like this one, pointing out that Rogerson's rage at the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda is in truth nothing more than him stirring hatred for his own ends – and that of the Establishment:

New research for the Fabian Society reveals that in Britain the so-called 'culture wars' are driven by politicians, media outlets and social media platforms rather than reflecting actual attitude divides amongst the public. The report authors call on politicians on left and right to call out this divisive behaviour and stop Britain becoming as fractured as the USA. (Burnell, 2021).

The above research, however, is most likely at fault in thinking that the politicians don't want a fractured country; a fractured country is an easily ruled country.

¹⁰⁷ He did, however, increase his speed as he walked, for fear of being approached by the common man, synonymous in his mind with criminal lower-class types. It had long been Rogerson's unwritten, unspoken, but perfectly articulated belief to never be in the same place as the lower orders unless there was a photo opportunity to be had.

‘Er, right, Grenville, new article for the magazine, to go in tomorrow’s edition, pride of place, page eight,’ orated Rogerson, laying down the law and his article to his young unpaid intern. ‘Headline: *How the lefties are infiltrating our most cherished arts exclamation. Er, make that art institutions. Er, or maybe our sacred areas. Exclamation!* Er, just tidy that up, will you, Grenville? Right, first paragraph.

‘*We all know Churchill is a hero full stop we know it comma the world knows it full stop even Germany knows it comma though the sausage-sucking denizens may not publicly admit it* er, you’d better run that past the lawyers, just be safe,’ added Rogerson. He wasn’t sure if an entire country could sue, but he wouldn’t put it past them to try. Probably using the European Court of Human Rights. And what a travesty that idea was!

‘Second paragraph. *In honour of this comma a new and exciting announcement was er announced* tidy that up as well, Grenville, *by one of our oldest and best publishers comma Vansittart’s Publishing who called for a new biography of our greatest man* oh, er, comma in there, of course.

‘Fourth paragraph. *Ordinarily comma this would be a reason to rejoice full stop*’ That was better; he was beginning to run smoothly now. ‘*After all comma what man achieved more than Winston Churchill question mark*¹⁰⁸ *born to humble stock comma despite his aristocratic lineage comma for Churchill was humble in essence, and thus he was simultaneously aristocratic and salt-of-the-earth, for Churchill was so large, so amazing, so unlike any and all that had come before, that even contradiction was possible in his great character exclamation mark!*

Rogerson grinned, for he considered himself a man of contradictions also...

‘Right, Grenville, new paragraph. *Churchill would shape the nation and the world but even here* er by which I mean here in publishing, Grenville, not here in Churchill’s life, *even here comma the lefty moaners will not stay*

¹⁰⁸ In this, Rogerson is oblivious to a point made earlier in this narrative – that Churchill was *allowed* to be Churchill by his privileged birth. Had he been born in a slum to working-class parents without wealth and contacts, he would never have got anywhere in life, even if his character had been exactly the same, i.e. ego-centric, brave, depressive, sentimental, callous, manipulative, bigoted, corrupt etc.

away comma and they insist on intruding on the hallowed ground of Churchillian... er... of Churchillian grandeur full stop.

‘Next paragraph. *Incredible as it may seem comma the lefty presence is making itself felt at all levels comma spreading its intolerance of greatness into all our sacred areas for the left can’t stand the idea that one man can be better than another comma and in the future they will demand we will all be alike with no difference between us exclamation point.*’ Ha! This was the stuff, and it was amazing how easily the words flowed from his lips. The fact he’d used an almost identical phrase three times already that week did not register as he continued his oration.

‘New paragraph. *For dear friends what did I find when checking out the background story of this new call for a life of the Greatest Ever Brit I found lefty sedition er, exclamation mark there, Grenville, of course. And some commas.*’ That Yvonne could hold any sort of valid opinion was an alien concept to Rogerson. She was a Black woman from a lower-class background and held a different opinion; as such, she was clearly morally wrong, factually wrong, and economically wrong.¹⁰⁹

‘Story continues: *For in the sanctified land of publishing so long a symbol of our heritage and tradition I found the moaning voices of the socialist demanding that Churchill books be written to show Churchill facts er, no, scrub that last bit, Grenville, I mean, er, Churchill books be rewritten to show socialist facts comma facts that appear in no official history exclamation.*’ By God, he was on a roll now.

‘New paragraph. *Instead the left now demands that only certain types of fact be allowed in Churchillian biographies exclamation only facts showing how*

¹⁰⁹ Rogerson is clearly au fait with many of the arguments/disagreements simmering within society in general, (hence his awareness of the criticisms aimed at Churchill, which he so easily trots out in this chapter), and he has no hesitation in stoking these flames if they help him further his career. And why wouldn’t he? After all, if stoking the flames does result in society burning, he knows damn well he will be protected, as will his peers:

Policing is concerned with the protection of order, but order has two faces: general – the universally beneficial achievement and safe-guarding of social co-ordination and co-operation; and particular – the reproduction of the inequalities of power and privilege that characterizes all complex societies that have existed so far... (Reiner, 2016).

horrid Churchill was oh, er, better put quote marks around that last fact, I think, to show we're aware these are not facts at all, continue, but these are not facts at all they are fictions exclamation Churchill was the greatest Brit of all time comma but listening to the left you'd never know this exclamation according to them he was a racist and a warlord well I mean oh, er, exclamation there, by the way, after warlord.

'Continue I mean he was of a different era semi colon of course he was different exclamation and maybe his views are a little old-fashioned now comma but when push came to shove it was comma Churchill comma and Churchill comma alone comma who stood up comma for everyone Black comma white blue and green, er, put commas in there, will you? Um, Brit and Indian Scot and Eskimo and round eyes or slitty eyes ah, actually, delete that last bit, just in case the chinks get offended continue he stood up for us all and his supposed faults became virtues as he fought for you for me for everyone exclamation point did Churchill do all this through the greatest catastrophe we have ever seen the second world war started by the jackboot Jerry Germans just so the left can rewrite history in this way I think not oh and punctuate that, Grenville, there's a good lad.'

Rogerson nodded, agreeing with himself on everything he said. However, he knew he had to pay some lip service – and here he thought of the Black girl and her mouth, snickering at his wit while admiring his own refusal to bow down to lefty PC strictures on perfectly legitimate humour – to the notion that Churchill had some flaws, and he flipped the recording button once more as he marshalled his thoughts, ready to deal with the matter fully and conclusively.

'Of course no great man is free of flaws and Churchill himself had er some.'

Rogerson had no idea of Churchill's supposed flaws, but no doubt he would turn some up. After all, all great men had flaws; that was what paradoxically made them great. He found this thought so profound, he jotted it down on a piece of paper pulled from his jacket pocket, ready for later recycling, while reflecting on how some claimed Rogerson himself had flaws with their tiresome accusations of racism, infidelity, and corruption being regularly bandied about by those who were simply envious of him. But Rogerson was now coming to realise that far from being flaws, these

personal attributes simply emphasized the massive, uncanny parallels between himself and Churchill. Smirking uncontrollably at the undoubted similarities, Rogerson hit the record button and continued his self-absorbed oratory.

'Of course Churchill was a man of his time not to be compared with men of our time for he was born when the great British Empire still ruled the waves and it's a pity we ever lost that and besides comma who could stand up and say their life contains no shameful episodes none of us that's who oh, er, exclamation mark again, there, Grenville. And better delete the comment about the empire. Or, no, keep it in, for we must dare speak truth and shame the devil! Oh, and add a bit from any biography to defend the Indian famine, will you? There are several in the office.'

Rogerson's thoughts shifted to the shelves heaving with reassuring Churchillian biographies, most within arm's reach but all too far away to be bothered with. At least by him. Not when he had staff on hand to do the work. 'Oh, and put a conclusion on it, there's a good lad.'

Rogerson smirked afresh as his destiny unfolded before him, just as it had unfolded for Churchill, that other Great Man of Destiny! Feeling he had more than justified his salary for the day, if not the week, Rogerson glanced at his watch and decided he was quite justified in seeking out some convivial company at the Chummo Club. Drinkies before tea, then some drinkies after tea, then home for dinner.

Nodding in satisfaction, the Man of Destiny hailed a taxi on expenses, trying to remember if he was booked in for dinner with his ex-wife, his almost ex-wife, his mistress, or his fiancée.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ A key question of this book is whether the legion of Establishment journalists, historians, biographers, politicians etc are knowingly replicating the status quo with each generation, or whether this duplication is being done by a bunch of vacuous inheritees and arse-lickers who lack the wit, insight, empathy, self-awareness, and intelligence to see how they themselves are nothing more than ever-turning cogs in the Establishment machine.

Churchill was a prime example of a man wanting his privilege (embedded in the past, the empire, and in the class structure) to continue forevermore, but again, how self-aware was he in this? Was it (to him) simply the way the world worked because he was a selfish, blinkered, small-minded bastard, or was there something altogether darker going on in that he knew perfectly well the misery he was perpetuating, thus making him a selfish, callous, evil-minded bastard?

Rogerson – the product of an elitist upbringing within a right-wing society, which he now serves as a right-wing media pundit and future right-wing Prime Minister – is my fictional attempt to explore this question. And in the safety of this academic footnote I can at least bring in some evidence to answer the question before letting the readers decide for themselves on the aforementioned question; are our journalists, historians, biographers, politicians etc deliberately (and endlessly) replicating the status quo, or are they doing so through gormless stupidity?

The scathing assessment below suggests gormless stupidity, and comes from a journalist speaking of his own kind:

Yesterday, the latest edition of *The Ruffian*, a newsletter written by former ad man, current journalist, and self-proclaimed expert in winning arguments, Ian Leslie, was pinging around Twitter...

...

A lot of the journalists and columnists who showered praise on Leslie's piece read it and saw themselves in the sentence...

Journalists, like good novelists, should be curious about everything and empathetic about everyone. They should seek to tell a different story, not the story everybody else is telling.

... when, in fact, they write for papers that indulge in groupthink on a daily basis and which buy into a set of assumptions about wealth, status, and the role of the establishment in Britain that are never truly questioned in the media. (Wright, 2021).

Clearly, Wright feels that most journalists have the self-awareness of a drunk pub bore laughing hysterically at his own jokes, and are about as bright as a dead glow worm buried under several layers of compost. This attitude does seem to be borne out when we consider how several journalists publicly mourned the passing of the "great" Sun newspaper reporter, John Kay, lauding his journalistic successes while glossing over the fact he murdered his wife, Harue, in 1977:

All of this shows us that Murdoch's tabloid journalists have feelings we can recognise and applaud: they feel loyalty, value kindness, can forgive the past, and empathise with a broken old man and feel anger on his behalf.

But it also begs an obvious question: what becomes of these feelings when those journalists deal with people from outside their own circle? Because, as we know well, they are capable of appalling cruelty. (Cathcart, 2021).

Another prime example on the utter cluelessness of the average British journalist comes in the behaviour of Ian Murray, the then Executive Director of the Society of Editors – and bear in mind I am being kind in assuming cluelessness (verging on moronic stupidity) as the alternative is Murray knows exactly what he, and the rest of the press, are doing to people and to society and *then they do it anyway* to serve their billionaire masters and/or because they ideologically agree with their own printed attitudes:

[SoE executive director Ian Murray claimed] the UK media "has a proud record of calling out racism" and "has never shied away from holding a spotlight up to those in positions of power, celebrity or influence.

"If sometimes the questions asked are awkward and embarrassing, then so be it, but the press is most certainly not racist. "

The statement generated a backlash among journalists and editors across the British press, especially among those belonging to ethnic minority backgrounds.

On Tuesday, 167 journalists of colour across the British media industry signed an open letter to say they “deplore and reject” the SoE’s statement. (Chao-Fong, 2021).

And in case the reader is wondering why I have quoted from a secondary source for the SoE denial of racism, it is because the SoE denial of racism was removed following the backlash. Ian Murray resigned his post but refused to accept there was anything seriously wrong with UK journalism, and even managed to give a hint he was nobly falling on his sword:

...“While I do not agree that the Society’s statement was in any way intended to defend racism, I accept it could have been much clearer in its condemnation of bigotry and has clearly caused upset.
“As executive director I lead the Society and as such must take the blame and so I have decided it is best for the board and membership that I step aside so that the organisation can start to rebuild its reputation.”
He added that the original statement was “not intended to gloss over the fact the media industry in the UK does have work to do on inclusivity and diversity”. (Linford, 2021).

When considering the inclusivity and diversity of the UK media, we can turn to the 2022 *Diversity in Journalism* report, which shows how poorly represented non-white journalists actually are in the industry:

ethnicity: there is a decrease in the proportion coming from white ethnic groups, from 94 per cent in 2018, to 92 per cent in 2020 and 87 per cent in 2021, and a corresponding increase in those coming from other ethnic groups (from six per cent in 2018, eight per cent in 2020 and 13 per cent in 2021). This is bringing employment in journalism in line with employment across all UK-sectors, although as journalism remains concentrated in London and metropolitan areas, which have higher proportions of ethnic groups, it could be argued that further progress is needed; (Spilsbury, 2022)

In other words, as of 2021, 9 out of every 10 journalists are white – though the Daily Mail found a workaround to this particular issue:

The revelation that the Daily Mail are attaching Black names and faces to racist articles which have been ghost-written by other journalists – who, based on the make up of most UK newsrooms, are overwhelmingly likely to be white – is (or should be) a major scandal in the media industry. (Holloway, 2023).

Are things better (statistically speaking) when class – and hence privilege – is brought into consideration? No:

social class: there is an increase in the proportion coming from the highest social classes (from 75 per cent in 2020 to 80 per cent in 2021), which takes it beyond the level seen in 2016. This suggests there is no real sign of an increase in the proportion of journalists coming from middle and lower social groups. (Spilsbury, 2022).

And just as depressingly, the raw data presented by the above report shows that of the total number of editors at work in the UK, 90% are white, 84% come from the UK, 80% have no illness or disability issues, and the vast majority come from a

wealthy, professional background, which suggests these people are those with trust funds and/or rich parents who can therefore afford to enter the already-privileged arena of journalism without having to worry about money, rent, travel costs etc, because it's all taken care of by daddy's wallet.

And these trustafarians control access to the media, and thus they control who, what, and how any given story is presented to the public. And the vast majority of those stories are going to be those which already harmonise with their own attitudes, because they all belong to the Establishment, now and forevermore:

Eton College has apologised and “sanctioned” a number of pupils after allegations that a group of girls visiting from a nearby state school were subjected to misogynistic language, racial slurs and jeering.

...

The school, which charges more than £40,000 a year for boarders, counts Boris Johnson, Prince William, Prince Harry and David Cameron among its alumni. (Badshah, 2022).

In other words, those who will be obtaining positions of power in the coming years are those who are even now fully supportive of misogyny, racism, class hatred, and xenophobia, and they will have no desire, and absolutely no reason, to examine and eradicate their own prejudices and systems of power.

The result of this unholy inbreeding can be seen in the corruption already running through the press and political class alike, as noted by Peter Jukes, founder of the *Byline Times*:

The... [Leveson inquiry]... revealed the proximity of Britain's press barons to the political elite, and the unaccountable power they had exerted on Prime Ministers, through a combination of cajolment and coercion, offers of gainful employment and threats of privacy intrusion.

During that inquiry, two up-and-coming Conservative leaders emerged as mouthpieces for the cartel, which effectively ran much of our media: Michael Gove – with his affinity and friendship with Rupert Murdoch; and Boris Johnson (who initially dismissed phone-hacking as “left-wing codswallop”) who was paid handsomely as a columnist for the Telegraph by the Barclay brothers, who also owned The Spectator, which he used to edit.

Flash forward a decade, the media moguls' gambles seem to have paid off and their pals are in power.

The first half of the Leveson Inquiry was always designed to be followed by a second part (investigating the relationship between journalists and the police) once the numerous trials of journalists accused of phone-hacking and bribing public officials were over. Only then could the criminality of the newspapers be investigated without threatening to prejudice the trials.

But consistent lobbying and pressure from the newspapers managed to get the second part of the Leveson Inquiry half delayed and eventually cancelled. A second Leveson would have been a bloodbath, with potential criminal sanctions for perjury during a public inquiry. Not only would past criminality have been shown to be much worse than expected, but various senior figures had also made statements that even Lord Leveson himself considered to be lies.

Cancelling Leveson Two was not just a priority because of embarrassment or bad publicity: it was, for many in the media, a get-out-of-jail-free card. (Jukes, 2021).

George Monbiot also sees a warped system in which the wealthy exploit their environment, though interestingly he seems to view this as a mixture of self-delusion coupled with evil intent, rather than as an *either/or* dichotomy:

The claims that the ultra-rich 1% make for themselves – that they are possessed of unique intelligence or creativity or drive – are examples of the self-attribution fallacy. This means crediting yourself with outcomes for which you weren't responsible. Many of those who are rich today got there because they were able to capture certain jobs. This capture owes less to talent and intelligence than to a combination of the ruthless exploitation of others and accidents of birth, as such jobs are taken disproportionately by people born in certain places and into certain classes. (Monbiot, 2011).

It's worth digressing here for a moment to take a short (and by no means complete) look at political sleaze, just to demonstrate how endemic corruption is in UK politics. Indeed, unprincipled behaviour seems to come as easily to our elected officials as breathing and talking, but again the question is raised; is this behaviour *known* to be corrupt by our political masters, or do they simply view it as being the perks of the job, theirs by divine right?

- [Prime Minister] Boris Johnson appoints university friend to sleaze watchdog (Daly, 2021).
- [Health Secretary] Matt Hancock accused of 'cronyism' after it emerges he has shares in family firm used by the NHS (Craig, 2021).
- Boris Johnson appoints Tory donor as £160,000-a-year BBC chairman (Learmonth, 2021).
- Hancock's former neighbour won Covid test kit work after WhatsApp message (Lawrence, 2020).
- [Former Prime Minister David] ... Cameron has been accused of trying to exploit private contacts with former government colleagues, for his own benefit. (BBC, 2021).
- [Former Prime Minister Tony] Blair's government has not escaped accusations of sleaze during its 10 years in office. As Blair prepares to stepdown, prosecutors are considering whether to charge close allies of the prime minister in a party funding scandal. (Reuters, 2007).
- In 1981, Mrs Thatcher needed a boost from the press. By supporting Rupert Murdoch's bid for the Times and Sunday Times, she made sure she got it. Harold Evans, who led an unsuccessful staff takeover bid, reveals a historic carve-up (Evans, 2015).
- [The Profumo Affair] ... was perhaps the biggest scandal in British political history, leading to jail sentences, suicide and the fall of a government. (Harris, 2016).
- [Churchill] may have been the greatest ever Briton, but his financial dealings would never have survived the scrutiny of today's sleaze-obsessed media, says Andrew Roberts
...in March 1938, a week before his [Churchill's] £18,000 debts to his stockbrokers Vickers da Costa were about to force him to sell his country house, Chartwell, for £20,000, an Anglo-South African businessman called Sir Henry Strakosch, the chairman of Union Corporation Ltd, had taken on his debts and guaranteed all his investments against further losses for the next three years.
...
For a fee of £5,000 - worth £125,000 today and equivalent to the annual salary of a Cabinet minister - Churchill was hired by Royal

Dutch Shell and Burmah Oil to sound out Baldwin about a merger between them and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, in which the British government owned a majority of the voting shares... (Roberts, 2002).

- The Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925 is an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, that makes the sale of peerages or any other honours illegal. The act was passed by the Parliament in the wake of Lloyd-George's 1922 cash-for-honours scandal. (Wikipedia, 2021). [And yes, I know we're not supposed to use Wikipedia for referencing, but this is a good point so I'm using it. Bite me].

If politicians really are so disturbingly separated from morality that they think this sort of behaviour is normal, (as well as acceptable), then maybe our most scathing criticism should be reserved for the press, who are wholly aware of the inequalities of society but who choose to do nothing about it, thus keeping the status quo in place:

...although my parents were doing certain things with which I disagreed, I loved them, was grateful for the circumstances into which I was born, appreciated what I had, and had no desire to revolt against any of it. I didn't want to help overthrow a system that I knew I belonged to, although I certainly understood that there were problems that should be addressed. (Graham, 2001).

This attitude is stamped throughout our glorious "free press" – a press owned, controlled, and operated by the billionaire elite, and which can publish or hide stories as they see fit:

On Saturday, the Times reported claims that Boris Johnson had tried to hire his now wife as his chief of staff when he was foreign secretary.

But almost as soon as the article hit the printers, it was withdrawn, without explanation or clarification.

...

Journalists at the Times were baffled by the decision to withdraw Saturday's story, with multiple sources suggesting there had been a high-level intervention to remove it.

...

MailOnline [i.e. the Daily Mail] rewrote the Times' story about the proposed government job for Carrie Johnson in the early hours of Saturday morning but has since also deleted its article without explanation or an editor's note. News aggregation sites have also deleted their copies of the MailOnline article. (Mason & Waterson, 2022).

Unfortunately, this seems to be the perfectly normal, even within an organisation such as the BBC that isn't technically owned by the Establishment – though, of course, the BBC is *run* by the Establishment:

Laura Kuenssberg's tenure as the BBC's political editor, beginning in July 2015 and ending in the coming weeks, was a catastrophe.

On her watch, lies were not just permitted, they were amplified and given credibility by Britain's state broadcaster. At least partly as a result of this, the UK Government now routinely lies with impunity. The country's international standing has been irreparably harmed, and trust in the political system has been trashed.

...

She was chosen for her continuous news strengths, not for her analytical skills. The BBC under Tony Hall was a timorous beast, beset

and bullied by enemies in Government who posed a very real threat to its continued existence. The last thing BBC managers wanted was a political editor who would get them into trouble with ministers. They desperately wanted calm seas and a prosperous voyage – and they saw kowtowing to the Government as the best way to do that. (Howse, 2022)

This is echoed by a former BBC journalist:

Journalist Emily Maitlis has hit out at the BBC - her former employer - claiming its board has been infiltrated by a Conservative Party agent and former Downing Street spin doctor whom she claims is now an "arbiter of BBC impartiality". Delivering the MacTaggart Memorial Lecture at the Edinburgh TV Festival, the ex-Newsnight presenter referred to "Tory cronyism at the heart of the BBC", as she spoke about her own perceived impartiality while working for the broadcaster. (Minelle, 2022).

And the above seems to be confirmed by this self-own of Laura Kuenssberg, who insisted that "I've never been told what to say – or not what to say" (Hutchison, 2022) which if nothing else shows that Kuenssberg, and others like her, don't even need to be told how to distort/ignore the news because they are already on board the Establishment Express. But how does this tie in with history and, more specifically, biography? Hopefully, chapter five has given an indication (via Helen's commentary) on the cynicism required when approaching Establishment narratives, and here I will simply record an interesting contrast between two books exploring the same theme and even bearing the same title; *Churchill and the Jews*, in which two separate authors, Martin Gilbert and Michael Cohen, explore Churchill's attitudes and feelings towards Jewish people and Jewish concerns, yet come to differing conclusions on the matter. Gilbert takes the view that Churchill was not:

an uncritical supporter of Zionism, [though] he was one of its most persistent friends and advocates. In a world where Jews were often the objects of scorn, dislike, distrust and hostility, Churchill held them in high esteem, and wanted them to have their rightful place in the world. (Gilbert, 2008).

In contrast, however, Michael Cohen states:

Churchill concerned himself with Jewish problems primarily when he perceived them as being interwoven either with his own personal political fortunes, or with Britain's imperial interests. Churchill shared the popular view of the Jews' wealth and influence, both at the domestic and at the international level. (Cohen, 1985).

Delving into one specific occasion; both books explore Churchill's fight against the Conservative Government's 1904 Aliens Bill, a piece of legislation ostensibly concerned with foreign immigration, but which was aimed primarily at Russian Jews looking to settle in the UK. It is striking to see how Gilbert portrays Churchill's part in defeating the bill as heroic and decent, while Cohen is rather more cynical in his views, as seen in these two extracts:

So determined were Churchill and his three [unnamed by Gilbert] fellow-Liberal opponents of the Bill... to challenge its every word that, by the 7th day of the committee's deliberations, only three lines of a single clause had been discussed. A further ten clauses and 233 lines

remained to be examined. Anxious to avoid the continuation of such thorough scrutiny, the government abandoned the Bill. Churchill had supported the Jews, and prevailed. (Gilbert, 2008).

Whereas Cohen notes:

When Churchill was accused of deliberate sabotage, he retorted that the government itself had never been in earnest, that the withdrawal of the measure was due not so much to his own obstruction but to the governments' desire to appease its own 'wealthy Jewish supporters'. The remark provoked an uproar, and cries of 'Monstrous, absolutely monstrous', from a Jewish M.P., Sir Harry Samuel. (Cohen, 1985).

Why and how can two accounts of the same historical event be displayed so differently? Is it all down to unconscious bias? Or deliberate distortion to further a particular agenda? Cohen states outright that Churchill needed to pay heed to the significant number of Jewish voters in his new Liberal constituency, and he also notes how Churchill:

...did not take part in the debates in the House during the first two readings of the Aliens Bill, which took place before he crossed the floor, though he was present." (Cohen, 1985).

In contrast, while Gilbert also mentions how Churchill's constituency contained a considerable Jewish population, this fact – surely significant in explaining partially (if not wholly) Churchill's actions – is placed at the very front of Gilbert's chapter on the Aliens Vote, after which the emphasis focuses purely on Churchill's actions rather than his motivations.

This raises the suspicion that this careful selection and presentation is deliberate, for while the inconvenient fact is presented to the public, it is relegated to an early position within the text where it is unable to impose its full significance upon the reader. But then, what historian these days is going to be foolish enough to say anything truly critical of Churchill? As noted by John Charmley in the paperback edition of his *Churchill: The End of Glory*:

When a former Government Minister, Alan Clark, wrote a piece for The Times questioning whether Britain might have made peace with Hitler in 1940 or 1941 and, in the course of it, mentioned my forthcoming book, calling it 'the most important revisionist text to be published since the war', the heavens seemed to fall. Alan Clark found himself being called a 'rich goon' by a fellow Conservative MP, and he and I found ourselves under assault from every conceivable direction. (Charmley, 1995).

One can only assume the average historian probably feels it is better to shut up rather than to put up after witnessing this level of outrage against asking simple questions. Richard Lamb, for example, whose *Churchill as War Leader – Right or Wrong?* supposedly attempts to do what it says on the cover, plays it safe by gushing over Churchill as the man who alone (presumably with no help from the Allies) "saved Western civilization from destruction at the hands of the Nazis" (Lamb, 1991) while also stating "all's fair in war" (ibid) over Churchill's policy of tricking America into provoking Japan into attacking Pearl Harbour, thus dragging both countries into the conflict (see footnote #162). But then, Lamb also insists that Churchill as war leader "had nothing of which to be ashamed" (ibid) before admitting his confusion as to why Churchill subsequently suppressed or altered so much of the official record... (See also footnote #126 for more servings of Lamb).

And so, in conclusion, I say to the readers of this volume; question everything, and do not heedlessly trust the government, the media, or privileged academics. Read an article? Question it. Read a history book? Question it. Listening to a journalist, or politician, or pundit? Question them. Ask yourself; who are these people? What is their background? Why do *they* have a voice, and not others? Who are they speaking for? Who do they associate with? What are they promoting? Are they punching up when they present an argument or discourse, or are they punching down? Do they want change, or stasis? To make things easier for the reader, it can be revealed that the entirely fictional Terrance Rogerson is a borderline sociopath only interested in two things; his own advancement, and keeping his small, selfish, elitist world of inherited privilege and gross inequality protected from outside scrutiny. Then again, he could just be an absolute fuckwit regurgitating Establishment dogma in the belief he is a true original...

Chapter Eleven

A chapter making use of a flashback within a flashback, which may not be appreciated by literary purists. Featuring a sojourn to India, where the call for a new biography on Churchill triggers the memories of one man closely bound to the living history of his country. Be warned; these memories of the dead and dying of the Indian famine of 1943 may be distressing to those with empathy, so caution is advised.

The reader may also wish to question if the author has succeeded in creating a believable illusion of a foreign land and people, or has he done nothing more than populate this chapter with examples of the Exotic Other? That is, “The view that those who are different from oneself possess an inherent dignity and beauty, perhaps because of their more undeveloped, natural state of being.” (Johnson, 2006). Even worse, is this section imagining something better left unsaid, as real-life horror is rendered into fictional prose?

Although Clavier and Coldwell’s submission call was put out on their website, Vansittart had no real conception of it being seen, or responded to, by anyone outside the United Kingdom. (Truth to tell, he probably couldn’t conceive of anyone outside the Home Counties having the ability to respond to the Churchillian challenge). Notwithstanding this insularity, the call was indeed seen worldwide, including by Mr Umang Joshi, of Hauz Khas, Delhi, India, lately retired from the Civil Service.

Umang was, at that moment, shuffling slowly down his family garden. It had once been Nani Prisha’s pride, this oasis in the city, at a time when English conventions on what constituted a garden were very much to the fore. Weeds were never tolerated, trees and shrubs were tended, and small boys who dared play on the grass in shoes or sandals would feel a quick, sharp thump around the ears.

Then, after the illness, it was his mother who tended the long plot, stealing away from the cooking or housework for the equally hard work in the garden, timing her absences carefully from the house to coincide with the limited shade offered by the taller trees and bushes against the scorching

heat, working on the flowers in the morning, a little light edging thereafter, and tending the fruit trees in the late afternoon. In Umang's young eyes, this was nothing less than a choreographed dance between his mother and the sun, two partners moving gracefully around each other in perpetual movement.

Umang smiled faintly at the memories, far and distant in his life yet still remarkably vivid in his mind. He poured a little water over the wilting jasmine shrubs, just as his mother had done, and her mother before, as had his wife for so many years before she too had been taken from them. And although he now had daughters who performed their servitude to the garden, he liked to potter about himself, walking the sandstone path, gazing at the small fountain in the middle, and breathing in the sweet scents of the remaining flowers and parched lawn.

For although it was not spoken about openly, at least with Umang himself, the garden was dying as the increasingly arid summers blazed down, burning away any hint of moisture and destroying the earth beneath. The sandstone walk had been steadily enlarged over the years to disguise this fact, and now the garden was almost two thirds covered with hot brick, the living earth receding with each passing generation. And yet, despite these changes, each part of the garden still contained many lingering memories for Umang, and here he felt a true sense of peace.

The ping of his mobile phone coincided with the screaming of the latest train thundering along the embankment some ten feet or so from the bottom of the garden, bound for New Delhi Station. Metallic weeds sprouted from the railway line, crawling inexorably over the blurring boundary between the public railway and the private land adjacent to it.

Umang rummaged in his hip bag, covered in the latest cartoon characters enthralling his grandchildren, pulled out his phone and activated it via his thumb print, frowning at the slow reaction as the device was now at least two years old; it would soon be time for another. The cause of the ping was a text from his old friend, Ramesh Lucknawi, once a figure of authority in the Indian Information Service, resplendent in his smart suits of exquisite cut and texture, a man of dignity and substance.

Yo! You seen this, bro?? asked the message, followed by several grinning

emojis. Umang smiled; old Ramesh was exercising an impish sense of humour in his dotage, of which his favourite joke was echoing the speech patterns of his youngest grandchildren.

Umang tapped the attached link and was taken to the Clavier and Coldwell call for Churchillian submissions. His eyes misted over as second-hand memories of the war years enveloped him, for his Nani – his grandmother on his mother’s side – had witnessed this era at first hand, and had told him about it, and it was these conversations that now tumbled down the years, pouring into his mind.

Nani Prisha had never forgotten the Indians marching off to war as part of the British Empire, ordered to fight for a land they had never seen and a people they had never been allowed to meet on equal terms. And neither had she forgotten those left behind to die, as famine swept the land and Churchill refused to release food to the starving. She and her son-in-law, Reyansh, Umang’s own father, had argued long and hard on several occasions about the British, the Empire, and Churchill.

Umang could still recall Nani’s bitterness, spoken in the garden when Umang himself was but a child. ‘They took everything,’ the old woman had said, gesturing vigorously with a trowel in the direction of a passing train – for Nani, the trains were synonymous with the British. ‘They said it was progress; they said it was good for the people, for the economy, to get goods moving quickly from one place to another, but whose goods were they?

Who made the money from them? The British, that’s who!’¹¹¹

‘The trains helped everyone,’ replied Reyansh, the exchange clear and lucid in Umang’s memory.¹¹² ‘The trains helped to create modern India.’

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The railways were intended principally to transport extracted resources – coal, iron ore, cotton and so on – to ports for the British to ship home to use in their factories. The movement of people was incidental, except when it served colonial interests; and the third-class compartments, with their wooden benches and total absence of amenities, into which Indians were herded, attracted horrified comment even at the time. (Tharoor, 2017).

¹¹² This demonstrates the dangers of relying on memory alone – it was a later conversation Umang was remembering, one which had long drifted from its original setting and attached itself to his recollection of a hot Saturday afternoon when he was six, though in

‘They were designed solely for British investors!’ shot back Prisha, slicing through a root with a vigour which suggested she regretted it wasn’t her son-in-law’s neck underneath her trowel. ‘They made a fortune by exploiting us!’¹¹³

‘But that was long ago,’ said Reyansh, looking at the back of the train as it disappeared into the distance. Reyansh was the consummate civil servant, for he believed whatever the ruling elite believed. Should those beliefs change tomorrow for social or political reasons, he would smoothly change with them, barely registering the transition. ‘That was under Victoria, not now. And look at what they left behind; unity, education, and an excellent political system!’¹¹⁴

‘Obviously, you’re going to believe that!’ snorted Prisha. ‘You’re a government man; the system benefits you.’¹¹⁵ This obedience to the

reality it took place on a Monday evening when Umang was ten. And in any case, the conversation was not as he remembered:

The misinformation effect refers to the tendency for post-event information to interfere with the memory of the original event. Researchers have shown that the introduction of even relatively subtle information following an event can have a dramatic effect on how people remember. (Cherry, 2020).

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The railways were first conceived of by the East India Company, like everything else in that firm’s calculations, for its own benefit... British shareholders made absurd amounts of money by investing in the railways, where the government guaranteed returns double those of government stocks, paid entirely from Indian, and not British, taxes. It was a splendid racket for Britons, at the expense of the Indian taxpayer. (Tharoor, 2017).

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Far from crediting Britain for India’s unity and enduring parliamentary democracy, the facts point clearly to policies that undermined it – the dismantling of existing political institutions, the fomenting of communal division and systematic political discrimination with a view to maintaining British domination. (Tharoor, 2017).

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Churchill was the knowing perpetrator of the horror of the 1943 Bengal famine, (Clive’s East India Company created the first in 1770, in which 10 million died) but he was also one particularly vile individual actor in an ongoing global system of surplus extraction and accumulation which still ensures that the working people of Eastern India are one disaster away from starvation... The fact that Indian billionaire capitalists have been incorporated into the highest

political system was the chief reason why Prisha despised her son-in-law.

‘The government today is different!’

‘There is no difference!’ exclaimed the old woman, and now Umang’s memory was firmer, and almost accurate. ‘When we were ruled by our own kind, in the time of the Mughal reign, the land workers only had to pay fifteen percent in taxes to the rulers, which gave us plenty of protection when famine came. But under the British, we were paying fifty percent taxes – and we had no security when famine hit us all. We had nothing in reserve, while the British racked up ever greater profit.’¹¹⁶

‘It was no different under Mughal rule,’ sneered Reyansh, whose dislike of his mother-in-law was prompted largely by the elderly woman’s strong hold over young Umang. ‘I remember my grandfather saying they were little more than parasites who took what they wanted while living in luxury.’

‘Things were better,’ snapped Prisha, brushing aside the faults of the old rulers. ‘The death toll under the British was catastrophic and they didn’t give a damn about us.’¹¹⁷ And they made us grow food to be exported, rather than grain we could eat ourselves, so when the famines came, we suffered;

echelons of this system does not make it any less racialised. (Wilson, 2020).

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Partial failure of crops was quite a regular occurrence in the Indian peasant’s life. That is why the surplus stock, which remained after paying the tributes, was so important to their livelihood. But with the increased taxation, this surplus deteriorated rapidly. When partial failure of crops came in 1768, this safety net was no longer in place. (Chakraborty, 2014).

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Prior to this, whenever the possibility of a famine had emerged, the Indian rulers would waive their taxes and see compensatory measures, such as irrigation, instituted to provide as much relief as possible to the stricken farmers. The colonial rulers continued to ignore any warnings that came their way regarding the famine, although starvation had set in from early 1770. Then the deaths started in 1771. That year, the Company raised the land tax to 60 percent in order to recompense themselves for the lost lives of so many peasants. Fewer peasants resulted in fewer crops, which in turn meant less revenue. Hence the ones who had not yet succumbed to the famine had to pay even greater taxes so as to ensure that the British treasury did not suffer any losses during this travesty. (Chakraborty, 2014).

oh, how we suffered, while they grew rich and fat!’¹¹⁸

‘But things had changed by the time Churchill was in charge, surely?’ asked the young Umang, for his father venerated Churchill as a gentleman and a hero, and this attitude was already insinuating itself into Umang’s young soul.

‘They got worse,’ seethed Prisha. ‘He diverted resources away from us to look after his own kind. He condemned thousands to death by neglect. I still remember them, the dead and dying, lying in the streets, nothing but skeletons covered in thin flesh, sacrificed to British profit and Churchill’s hatred!’¹¹⁹

Prisha angrily blinked back the tears as her early memories carried her unwillingly back to her village in 1943, the sun beating down, the ground baked hard as stone, great cracks opening in the water-deprived earth as though the land itself was begging for sustenance while dust, dirt and sand lay over the dead and dying alike.

The dead lay where they had fallen, in doorways, in streets, in fields, by rivers, wherever the last spark of hope had disappeared as they finally

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After taking over from the Mughal rulers, the British had issued widespread orders for cash crops to be cultivated. These were intended to be exported. Thus, farmers who were used to growing paddy and vegetables were now being forced to cultivate indigo, poppy and other such items that yielded a high market value for them but could be of no relief to a population starved of food. There was no backup of edible crops in case of a famine. The natural causes that had contributed to the drought were commonplace. It was the single-minded motive for profit that wrought such devastating consequences. No relief measure was provided for those affected. Rather, as mentioned above, taxation was increased to make up for any shortfall in revenue. (Chakraborty, 2014).

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Winston Churchill, the hallowed British War prime minister who saved Europe from a monster like Hitler was disturbingly callous about the roaring famine that was swallowing Bengal’s population. He casually diverted the supplies of medical aid and food that was being dispatched to the starving victims to the already well supplied soldiers of Europe. When entreated upon, he said, “Famine or no famine, Indians will breed like rabbits.” The Delhi Government sent a telegram to him painting a picture of the horrible devastation and the number of people who had died. His only response was, “Then why hasn’t Gandhi died yet?” (Chakraborty, 2014).

succumbed to the inevitable. Those still alive didn't have the strength to do anything for the dead – no funerals, no ceremonies, no rites – for they too were near their final collapse, their hope in their leaders, the future, of even just seeing tomorrow, eroded by the famine covering the land. Only the dogs and vultures tended to the corpses, pecking and ripping at what was left of the flesh, locked in their own desperate fight for survival.

Prisha blinked again and the scene changed; now she was in the city, where she and her mother had travelled in a last desperate attempt to find sanctuary, but the city only held further suffering for the rice was gone, taken, politicised, and all that remained was the keening of the dying who knew their time had come, inflicted on them by nature and the evil that privileged men do.

'That was result of the famine!' exclaimed Reyansh, deftly echoing the view which was politically convenient to the government at that time. 'It was nothing to do with Churchill!'

'That was just a cover,' retorted Prisha. 'The worst of it was over by the middle of the war, so what happened to all our food, eh? Where did it go? To the British, that's where!'¹²⁰

'The Japanese were taking it also,' replied Reyansh, referring to the fall of Burma.

'Not all of it,' replied Prisha, digging with savage intensity and spilling soil onto Reyansh's highly polished shoes. 'There was still enough for everyone. Or there should have been!'¹²¹

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...the 1943 famine in Bengal, which killed up to 3 million people, was different, according to the researchers. Though the eastern Indian region was affected by drought for much of the 1940s, conditions were worst in 1941, years before the most extreme stage of the famine, when newspapers began to publish images of the dying on the streets of Kolkata, then named Calcutta, against the wishes of the colonial British administration. (Safi, 2019).

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"This was a unique famine, caused by policy failure instead of any monsoon failure," said Vimal Mishra, the lead researcher and an associate professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. Food supplies to Bengal were reduced in the years preceding 1943 by natural disasters, outbreaks of infections in crops and the fall of

‘But how come I’ve never heard of any of this?’ asked the young Umang, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes.

‘Because those in power keep people ignorant,’ replied his grandmother.

‘But more than that; people keep *themselves* ignorant.’

Umang was drawn from his reverie by the rushing of another train passing by the garden, carrying with it a hot wind and the foul stench of blistering metal and burning fuel. He shook his head at the memories, dabbing at the unexpected tears gathering in his eyes. His poor grandmother. His grandmother who had hated the British for what they had done to India. And more than that; his grandmother had written down her thoughts and memories in a series of diaries, as had her mother and grandmother before her, for the whole family believed in the importance of history.

And surely that was what counted? Real accounts from those who had witnessed history at first hand, facilitated by the copious official documents Umang knew he could call upon after his long career in the Civil Service? A genuine ground-level view on an entire country?

Pulling out the latest iPad from his hip bag, Umang opened a text file and began tapping away, composing fluently as he recalled his grandmother’s tales of happiness and horror, of triumphs and defeats, each memory evoking a long forgotten feeling or a lost sensation, such as the faint small

Burma – now Myanmar – which was a major source of rice imports, into Japanese hands.

But the Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen argued in 1981 that there should still have been enough supplies to feed the region, and that the mass deaths came about as a combination of wartime inflation, speculative buying and panic hoarding, which together pushed the price of food out of the reach of poor Bengalis. More recent studies, including those by the journalist Madhushree Mukerjee, have argued the famine was exacerbated by the decisions of Winston Churchill’s wartime cabinet in London. Mukerjee has presented evidence the cabinet was warned repeatedly that the exhaustive use of Indian resources for the war effort could result in famine, but it opted to continue exporting rice from India to elsewhere in the empire.

Rice stocks continued to leave India even as London was denying urgent requests from India’s viceroy for more than 1m tonnes of emergency wheat supplies in 1942-43...

Mukerjee and others also point to Britain’s “denial policy” in the region, in which huge supplies of rice and thousands of boats were confiscated from coastal areas of Bengal in order to deny resources to the Japanese army in case of a future invasion. (Safi, 2019).

of Jasmine which he always associated with both his Nani and mother, or the smell of ink and paper clinging to his father's suit.

Chapter Twelve

In which we see a publisher at work, (necessitating several more counter-culture footnotes), gain a brief insight into Helen's broken dreams, and witness Yvonne's first direct attempt to launch the ship of her ambitions. Which will shortly founder on the choppy sea of elitism before striking the iceberg of cultural reality and sinking into the cruel sea of lost hopes.¹²²

'Michael,' called out Yvonne the following morning as Vansittart appeared promptly in the office at twenty-three minutes past eleven. 'You've had a call from that man who was here the other day – Terrance Rogerson? He says can you call him back about the matter in hand. By which I assume he means the Churchill biography.'

'Christ on a crutch!' exclaimed Helen. 'Terrance Rogerson wants to do the biography?'

'Is there any reason he shouldn't?' demanded Hutchinson-Cockburn, who knew Rogerson socially; his father and Rogerson had been at Eton together, albeit several years apart. But it still counted.

'Have you read *And There She Rides a Revenant*?' asked Helen. 'Biggest pile of elitist misogynist shite I've seen in a long time. And I had to do most of the work on it as he was too lazy to do the rewrites himself.' She glared at Vansittart, for she had complained bitterly at the time on the quality of both the work and the author, but she had been overruled by the Old Boy Network. 'Rogerson is the sort of man wouldn't piss on someone if they were on fire, unless they offered him something in return.'

'I'm sure he'd do a splendid job,' objected Hutchinson-Cockburn, for the unwarranted confidence he held in his own abilities also projected onto others within his social circle.

'It would be a travesty that serves one purpose,' countered Helen. 'And that purpose will be Terrance Rogerson's career.'

¹²² Please note that not all metaphors are worth pursuing. That one certainly wasn't.

‘Yes, well, no decision has been made yet,’ said Vansittart, somewhat huffily, for he did not appreciate hearing his friends being criticised.¹²³

‘Shouldn’t a good biography be about the whole man?’ asked Yvonne, seeing an opportunity to turn her (hitherto ignored) gentle hints about doing the work herself into an open declaration. ‘Don’t we deserve the truth, as a society?’

‘Well, yes, obviously, clearly,’ spluttered Vansittart.¹²⁴

‘Won’t happen,’ said Helen. ‘Too many establishment hacks around,’

‘But surely the world of biography is better?’ pleaded Yvonne. ‘I mean, don’t you need intelligence and depth and intellectual rigour?’

‘Not really,’ replied Helen. ‘I mean, you do get the occasional bio like that, but not often.’

‘But why not?’

‘Writers are mostly already part of the establishment.’¹²⁵ And that means they think like the establishment, act like the establishment, and they do the establishment’s bidding. Probably without even being aware of it.’¹²⁶

¹²³ That Helen was right in her observation was not something that bothered Vansittart, for he could (privately) rationalise her comments away as envy or female hysteria.

¹²⁴ The last thing Vansittart wanted was the truth; it would be ruinous to book sales. This, however, was a shameful thought buried deep within his bookseller’s psyche, safely walled off from his social persona which was only aware of one reality – that of Churchill’s greatness. All other views about Britain’s war time leader could then be safely dismissed as either wrong or, if corroborated with inconvenient facts, an irrelevance.

¹²⁵

Publishing, I’m ashamed to admit, is a notoriously elitist arena. Nepotism is rife in the employment process and writing itself is the domain of the well educated and comfortably off. This has always been the case in the world of literature. Being in a position to write necessitates, as Virginia Woolf succinctly put it ‘money’ and ‘a room of one’s own’. (Eastwood, 2007).

¹²⁶ Here we can turn to pop culture to get a good understanding on how official history works:

...the official histories of Marvel and DC... may include a brief and fleeting mention of Bill Finger’s marginalization or of Jack Kirby’s acrimonious split with Marvel, but they’ll be side points in a narrative otherwise defined entirely by complete deference to the official company line. And the companies carefully control this history because they control who has access to the archives and who gets interviews. It’s not, to be clear, overt corruption... It’s far more implicit, much like the structures of corporate governance that

‘But that’s totally unfair!’

‘That’s the way of the world. You think I wanted to be the editor who’s stuck wet nursing a bunch of posh self-entitled writers? Real life gets in the way. Like needing to pay for food and housing. Whereas those from privileged backgrounds can do what they want as they have the money and contacts before they even start. So the chances of finding an establishment biography that isn’t just a generic panegyric is remote, to say the least.’

‘Um,’ mumbled Yvonne, deciding Helen’s comments were unduly negative, for Yvonne desperately needed to believe her ambition of becoming of a millionaire author could happen. And she did have a pipeline into the industry, given she was working for a publishing company...¹²⁷

‘Michael,’ smiled Yvonne, giving her boss her most appealing look. ‘Why don’t *we* do the biography?’ She gestured around the office, though the shrewd swing of her hand ensured the main focus was on that part of the office containing herself. ‘We could write it ourselves,’ she added, by which she meant she could write it herself, with help as and when needed, but definitely with her name and picture on the cover, and the royalties in her bank account.

‘Do it ourselves?’ gasped Vansittart in a shocked tone, for he was a *publisher*, not a *writer*, though Vansittart knew he *could* be a writer, should he so choose, for he undoubtedly had a way with words and maybe one day,

allowed Rupert Murdoch to evade culpability for anything that happened at News International (or for that matter at Downing Street). Nobody needed to be told what to do. Everybody knew exactly how to behave. Nobody has to tell the official historian to make the officials look good. If they don’t know to do it on their own they don’t stay official historians for long. (Sandifer, 2013)

And this attitude is seemingly weaved throughout Churchillian studies as, for example, his deliberate attempts to provoke Japan into entering the war “is hardly known about and finds no place either in Churchill’s memoirs or in his official biography” (Lamb, 1991). But then, this historical and factual corruption started at the very source as Churchill “falsified history [in his memoirs] not only over the pusillanimity of Halifax and Chamberlain in 1940, but over other important episodes” (ibid) and he also pressured “official historians in the Cabinet Offices to conceal chunks in the archives” (ibid). Truly, the Establishment knows how to serve up a sausage while claiming you’re getting the whole hog...

¹²⁷ This is sadly only true in the physical sense; in the social sense, Yvonne was the invisible woman when it came to being considered by those in charge.

as a gentle retirement, he would take that option up. But not today, where his income came from paying¹²⁸ other people to write on his behalf. ‘We’re *publishers*.’

‘But just think of the publicity; the publishing staff doing the biography of our Greatest Leader, rather than a traditional writer.’

‘Well, yes, but no, yes, I mean,’ stuttered Vansittart, still taken aback by the assault on the sacred demarcation within Clavier and Coldwell’s hierarchy. Such was his shock, his evolutionary ‘fight or flight’ response kicked in and he began edging toward the office door. And to think; he’d only popped in to grab a contract for reference purposes.¹²⁹

‘We have the skill and knowledge in here,’ insisted Yvonne, by which she meant she herself represented the business skills, with the historical knowledge being silently projected onto Helen.

‘Oh, yes, undoubtedly, I mean, I choose my team most carefully, the best in London I always say,’ blathered Vansittart, creeping ever closer to the door.

‘So we *could* do it?’ insisted Yvonne.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Rather poorly.

¹²⁹ Vansittart had an appointment with an agent who had supposedly discovered the next A.T.L.T.K. Hansen, whose *Darkwing Dragon of My Soul* had proved an unexpected hit in the summer, (much to the consternation of the press, until they were able to label – and thus sneeringly dismiss – the novel as “retro-Scandinavian-post-punk-alt-historical-fantasy”), thus prompting a wholesale scramble by wholesale publishers to discover their own retro-Scandinavian-post-punk-alt-historical-fantasy authors.

¹³⁰ Yvonne could see Vansittart was against the idea, but she subconsciously reinterpreted the scene until she developed a false representation of reality in which Vansittart was merely *hesitant* about the idea, meaning she just needed to work on him gently, discreetly, and diplomatically, thus ensuring she could begin her literary odyssey. And she also decided to get one of her shorter skirts out of the wardrobe to wear the following day. But only for herself and no other reason, because she suddenly realised she hadn’t worn anything to make her feel like an attractive woman for a while:

The tendency to focus on women’s looks and bodies instead of their character traits or abilities — even in situations where looks should not matter — is quite widespread. Men, as well as women, tend to establish the worth of individual women primarily by the way their body looks, research shows. We do not do this when we evaluate men. Women are aware this is the case and also derive their own sense of value from the way they look. This affects their self-confidence, task focus, and performance, even on tasks totally unrelated to their looks. (Ellemers, 2018).

‘Er, well, maybe, but in the meantime we have other duties to attend to,’ replied Vansittart, desperately searching for stability and familiarity as the unexpected appearance of independent thought threatened to destabilise his office and existence. ‘There are invoices to answer, paperwork to prepare, boxes to be moved, and I want us to make a start on preparing for the Chelsea Book Fair next year – it’s only eleven months away, so chop-chop everyone, and let’s get on with our paid work.’¹³¹

¹³¹ Making the poor work hard all day is another deep-rooted way of preventing the workers from developing their own agency which could otherwise lead to all sorts of dangerous ideas, such as creating an egalitarian society. In dumping an excessive amount of extra work on his staff, Vansittart was unconsciously calling on generations of universal capitalist policy to help him in his time of need:

There has only been one period in which the fruits of labor [sic] were shared relatively equally: the post-second world war capital-labor compromise. Strong worker movements fought for robust welfare states under unique economic and political circumstances. But this arrangement could not hold. In response to François Mitterrand’s move to massively expand labor rights and nationalize a quarter of French industry, business interests launched a capital strike which spurred recession and became a portent of things to come. The threat of real working-class power was too great, and the system self-corrected. (Svart, 2019).

Chapter Fourteen

Continuing from Chapter Twelve, in which we see the disadvantaged worker trying to put her plan into action...

‘Does he really want us to start writing a biography?’ asked Sarah as Vansittart scuttled away to his office.

‘Yes,’ said Yvonne, firmly, for she needed just a little help in chasing her literary dream. ‘Er; how do you begin, exactly?’

‘I think you need to answer that yourself,’ said Helen, who knew it would be best to let Yvonne find her own inevitable disappointments.

‘Understanding your medium, and why you’re working in it, is an essential part of any creative endeavour.’

‘So I – we – need to do some research?’ asked Yvonne.

‘It would probably help,’ nodded Helen, though not in an unkind tone, for she recognised and understood Yvonne’s intent; she had once been like her.

‘OK, let’s see what I can find online,’ said Yvonne, her fingers flying over her keyboard, oblivious to the disdainful yet furtively interested expression from Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Ah, let’s see what this site says; “Five rules on how not to write a biography”, by Jon Collins.¹³² Rule One.’

‘Er, hold on, who’s Jon Collins?’ interrupted Helen. ‘Who’s he written on?’

‘This says he did his first biography on Marillion.’

‘Who?’ asked Helen, thus proving that British rock music had passed her by.

‘I think he’s a singer,’ said Yvonne, whose musical upbringing had mostly involved her local church’s gospel choir. ‘OK, rule number one “Don’t do it for the money”.’

‘Damn true,’ said Helen. ‘Publishing makes money for the publishers, mostly. And not always then. Very rarely does a writer share in it.’

‘Collins says he made about seven thousand pounds for his biography of Marillion,’ read Yvonne, astonished at the meagre amount. The media had

¹³² I thought I’d put the reference down here. Just because. (Collins, 2018). Also, as Yvonne is reading out loud here, and knows nothing of academic convention, she may not be quoting either accurately or completely.

successfully sold her the lie of wealthy writers living off their best-selling tomes, and this first insight into the reality of authorial earnings was a severe blow to her daydreams of unimaginable wealth and fairy tale castles.

‘You couldn’t live on it, could you?’

‘Another reason why publishing favours those who are already wealthy,’ shrugged Helen. ‘Or have access to wealth.’

‘Rule two,’ said Yvonne, her confidence badly dented, though her subconscious was pointing out with the resilience of youth that there were still some authors sipping at the champagne of success. “‘It’s not about you’”.

‘Ha! Try telling any author that. Bunch of egomaniac weasels, always inserting themselves into the narrative.’¹³³

‘Rule three: “It’s not about absolute truth”’.

‘Straight from the horse’s mouth. I mean, a biography *should* be about the truth, but it’s usually nothing more than an interpretation. Sometimes a loose interpretation, to put it mildly.’

‘He says “people are always keen to put their spin on history, missing out details or even pulling them in, conflating multiple events, incorporating explanations and justifications and so on. The biographer’s job becomes that of creating a coherent narrative, triangulating, extrapolating and gap-filling.”’

‘That’s biography for you. And historians.’

‘Bloody hell; listen to number five! “Ultimately, it’s not (just) about the facts... Facts are interesting and important, but they should be subordinate to narrative.”’

¹³³ Stung by Helen’s contempt, I proffer this highfalutin justification of my presence in the novel:

If the story-teller is *in* the story himself, the author is dramatized; his assertions gain in weight, for they are backed by the presence of the narrator in the pictured scene. It is advantage scored; the author has shifted his responsibility, and now it falls where the reader can see and measure it; the arbitrary quality which may at any time be detected in the author’s voice is disguised in the voice of his spokesman. Nothing is now imported into the story from without; it is self-contained, it has no associations with anyone beyond its circle. (Lubbock, 1968).

Mind you, on thinking it through further, I fear Helen may be closer the truth after all...

‘Again, sounds about standard,’ said Helen, who knew the subject well from years of being drained of all creative hope as an editorial drudge. ‘And I don’t think many popular historians would see anything wrong with that. And neither do publishers. They all need to sell their books, so the truth usually takes a running jump.’

‘I suppose that means Manchester is good at biography, given the way he conjures a narrative of Churchill that makes you want to read more,’ observed Yvonne, though rather quietly, for fear she would be sued for even hinting at the suggestion that Manchester had written a one-sided grovelling account.

‘Any other advice to be found anywhere?’ asked Helen.

Yvonne’s fingers blurred over the keyboard. ‘OK,’ she said after a few moments. ‘This website says *6 Tips on How to Write a Biography*.’¹³⁴

‘Who’s it by?’ asked Helen. ‘Just in case I recognise them. Which is unlikely, given the number of people who are now publishing online.’

‘It just says: “Written by the MasterClass staff”.’

‘I bet that caused some bad feeling about name recognition,’ said Helen, who knew nothing about the MasterClass staff but did know something about authorial ego. ‘And what are the 6 steps?’

“**Get permission**” intoned Yvonne, uncertain how to articulate bold type, hence she spoke the words in a slightly louder tone in the hope everyone in the office would understand the weighted typeface. Which they didn’t. And neither did they notice how skilfully Yvonne maintained the bold styling around the direct quote while simultaneously using a standard font on her own spoken remarks.

“Once you’ve chosen the subject of the biography, seek permission to write about their life.” Hey, hang on a minute,’ objected Yvonne, interrupting herself. ‘I’ve seen loads of unauthorised biographies on the shelves, so that doesn’t scan. Oh, hang on, it then says: “While in some cases it may not be necessary (like if the subject is a public figure or

¹³⁴ (Masterclass, 2020).

deceased), getting permission will make the research portion of your writing process much easier.

“**Do your research.** Regardless of how much you know about your subject, an extensive amount of research is necessary to paint a thorough picture of this person. If they’re a historical figure, include information about the time period they lived in and how it affected the way they lived their life.”

‘I agree,’ interrupted Hutchinson-Cockburn, feeling excluded by the two women who were having a conversation without him and his expertise. ‘You can’t ignore the era.’

Yvonne repressed a sigh before continuing. “**Primary sources** are firsthand accounts of your subject’s life and tend to be the most reliable sources. These can include journal entries, emails, interviews, or memoirs.”

Helen barked with laughter. ‘Bollocks! Even back in his own time, Churchill’s contemporaries realised he was deliberately speaking and writing for the public record, just so he’d look good for history.’¹³⁵

“A primary source can also be any other information the subject has provided, such as a personal website, Twitter bio, social media account or professional bio.”

‘See my first objection, above,’ said Helen. ‘But also bear in mind Churchill hoarded notes and memoranda so he could present himself as he wanted to be seen.’¹³⁶ Primary resources are sometimes no more valid than any other.’

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For example, in September 1939 Neville Chamberlain, writing to his sister... remarked that ‘he [Churchill] continually writes me letters many pages long...of course I realise that these letters are for the purpose of quotation in the Book which he will write thereafter...’ (Ponting, 1994).

This chapter, incidentally, is Ponting heavy, but he does make some excellent points which overlap very neatly here.

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...[the Churchill archive...] contains one of the most voluminous sets of private papers available for a modern life. It was deliberately created by Churchill... not just to enable him to write his own books, but also to influence the way in which future historians would write about his life. Caution needs to be exercised in using this material. Many of these

“**Secondary sources**, like magazines or documentaries, can also be used if the information is proven accurate.””

“If the information is proven accurate”? I wonder how many writers bother to verify that?”¹³⁷ asked Helen. ‘After all, how many Churchillian biographies are based mostly on Churchill’s own interpretation and presentation of himself?’¹³⁸

documents were written with more than half an eye on history and were designed from the beginning to place Churchill’s interpretation of events on record... Frequently Churchill refused to put down certain things on paper because he thought they might damage his reputation. (Ponting, 1994).

¹³⁷ Gordon Corrigan did take the time to consult the war diary of the 2nd Battalion Grenadier Guards to compare this record against Churchill’s own cheery recollections of winning over the entire regiment and being the de facto leader:

In fact, the battalion war diary makes only one mention of Churchill... [and] he is not mentioned again, even when leaving, and he certainly did not stand in for the commanding officer. (Corrigan, 2006).

¹³⁸ A key issue, given this novel is concerned with how history is prepared, sliced, diced, packaged, delivered, reheated, served to and then consumed by the public in a perpetual orgy of self-replicating Establishment veneration. As such, a lengthy quote now follows, including a quote within the quote, as Churchill (minor) biographer Clive Ponting references Churchill (senior) biographer R.F. Foster:

Churchill’s official biography draws heavily on these [Churchill’s archived] papers... Any biography built mainly on a single set of papers will necessarily bias the interpretation of the life... As R.F. Foster has written in his brilliant re-interpretation of the life of Lord Randolph Churchill, English political biography has tended to become:

the personal monument, founded on one collection of papers which have been laundered to whiteness (or at least a uniform shade of grey) ... There is a soothing quality about British historical biography which calms by dint of repetition. A prominent politician is assured of recurrent applications of biographical varnish, borrowing the texture of previous layers to build up a warm and glowing patina: reiteration of anecdotes, judicious but limited reappraisals of character, a general air of comfortable reassurance. (Ponting, 1994).

And this is a view supported by Gordon Corrigan, with specific reference to Churchill varnishing himself before anyone else had the chance to examine his grain:

Churchill’s History of the Second World War... was the first major serious history of the war... By getting in first he ensured that his interpretation of what happened... became the accepted version... (Corrigan, 2006).

And to make the point again:

“**Form your thesis,**” continued Yvonne, feeling a little forlorn from Helen’s observations. “Your first paragraph or chapter should inform the reader what they will learn about this person from this biography.”

‘I’ll give ‘em that one,’ said Helen. ‘But speak up,’ she added as she headed for the door, a cigarette already on the voyage from packet to mouth.

“**Make a timeline.** A biography usually structures the main points of a person’s life in chronological order. Knowing the order of key events before you start writing can save you the hassle of having to reorganize your whole story later.”

“**Use flashbacks.** While writing the text of your biography, you may want to intercut between an experience from your subject’s adult life and one from their high school days. Using flashbacks allows the author to introduce relevant past information to the reader without bogging them down with paragraphs of background exposition.”

‘Yup; exposition is a pain, and it takes skill to avoid an info dump,’ conceded Helen, lighting a follow-on cigarette from the smouldering dregs of her first.

“**Include your thoughts.** A biography isn’t just a transaction of facts. A biographer can share their own feelings and opinions on their subject’s life.”

‘Ha! Some of them do nothing else.’¹³⁹

In Britain, inside accounts of the war would be carefully controlled... documents were restricted and memoirs vetted... The situation was very different in America, however... It was from America that the most serious attacks on Churchill’s reputation would come.

...

By the spring of 1946, therefore, Churchill could be under no illusions about what might happen if he left his reputation to ‘history’, without being one of the historians. (Reynolds, 2005).

In short, this chapter exemplifies the entire point of this novel; Establishment biographers and historians write (consciously or otherwise) what they are *conditioned* to write, and to treat them (or their work) with Biblical Reverence is foolhardy in the extreme. (See Chapter Thirteen for further details).

¹³⁹ “[Churchill wrote] a collection of short portraits of his contemporaries that say almost as much about Churchill as about the subjects of the essays;” (Ponting, 1994).

“If the subject did something noteworthy, the author may include why they feel that moment was significant, how it was affected by the time period, and what it meant for society as a whole. This will support why this person deserves to be written about and keep the audience reading from the first sentence to the last.”

‘And Churchill certainly did something noteworthy,’ hooted Hutchinson-Cockburn ‘He stopped the Nazis!’

‘I’d forgotten you were there, Rupert,’ replied Helen, returning to the office. ‘The silence was so unusual. And misleading. And Churchill’s role in “stopping the Nazis” is contentious at best.’¹⁴⁰

‘Anyway; how’s that for a start?’ asked Yvonne, closing her Internet tabs.¹⁴¹

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... if Churchill was the man who won the war, as election posters in 1945 said he was, then he was also the man who... by his flights of fancy, his unwillingness to trust professionals and his unshakable belief that he knew better than anyone... was very nearly responsible for losing it. (Corrigan, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Having looked at what a biography is and how it should be written, (according to one source, anyway), some readers may now be wondering why *Constructing Churchill* has been written as fiction (and more specifically, metafiction) rather than as a straightforward biography or academic study. After all, metafiction has been attacked “as a form of the self-indulgence and decadence characteristic of the exhaustion of any artistic form or genre.” (Waugh, 1984), so why bother with it at all? The case for fiction is thankfully straightforward, as noted by Yvonne Battle-Felton in her critical analysis accompanying her creative writing PhD:

Literature offers writers the opportunity and platform to create complex characters within historical contexts and diverse narratives. With narrative tools such as free indirect speech, point of view, narrative distance, as well as with access to historical landscapes, documents and memories, writers are able to create narratives from multiple perspectives. This rich, diverse narrative affords readers access to the ‘other’. This access builds relationships, creates empathy, allows readers to question versions of truth and empowers them to do the work of reconstructing their own memory of the past and repositioning themselves in the future. Narrative does the work of creating necessary discourse for resolution. (Battle-Felton, 2017).

But here the alert reader may insist upon an answer to the previous question; why metafiction? To answer this, a working definition of the term is required. Thankfully, Patricia Waugh nailed the issue back in 1984:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order

to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 1984).

This ties in perfectly with *Constructing Churchill*, which from the very beginning was concerned with how history/biography is formed, created, and presented – an issue of considerable complexity, if we take it as given that most people don't even consider this question as they automatically accept any form of supposed learning as being authoritative and trustworthy:

Textbooks... keep students in the dark about the nature of history... Because textbooks employ... a godlike tone, it never occurs to most students to question them." (Loewen, 1996).

Metafiction is, however, keenly aware of the vexing issue of how information is presented:

How is it possible to 'describe' anything? The metafictionist is highly conscious of a basic dilemma: if he or she sets out to 'represent' the world, he or she realises fairly soon that the world, as such, cannot be 'represented'. In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to 'represent' the discourses of that world. Yet, if one attempts to analyse a set of linguistic relationships using those same relationships as the instruments of analysis, language soon becomes a 'prisonhouse' from which the possibility of escape is remote. Metafiction sets out to explore this dilemma. (Waugh, 1984).

Writing on *Constructing Churchill* finally began after about two months of academic research, jotting down ideas, and struggling to work out who the characters were going to be, where they would be, and what they would be; I knew what I wanted to say about the way our society is structured, but I had no idea how to go about it, and I had little or no idea how the unknown characters would interact with each other, given they would be drawn from vastly different backgrounds.

Eventually, however, the obvious and practical idea finally occurred; set the action within a small independent publisher, thus allowing different perspectives to be brought in and explored as various would-be-authors approach the publisher with their submissions:

Fiction allows readers access to multi-dimensional characters with flaws, a range of emotions, wants and needs, values and stories that challenge our perceptions. It invites readers to get to know characters in a created world that may resemble or challenge life as we know it. Through fiction, we grapple with questions in society and confront themes like family, identity, racism, stereotypes, naming, home, belonging, and acceptance. Through fiction, anything is possible. Employing narrative techniques allows readers different perspectives and glimpses into characters' psychologies. Tools like narrative choices, details, description, conflict, resolution, setting and genre work to create a story with the power to challenge conceptions of how we view one another, the past and our relation to it. (Battle-Felton, 2017).

The idea of several competing major characters had to be refined, however, as even focusing on just a few characters would result in a *tranche de vie* novel which would

probably have needed a million words or so to adequately cover just one aspect of the whole, and hence Yvonne Jones became both the main character and (problematic) audience identification figure.

Approaching this tangled skein of literary threads as a meta narrative rather than as a “straight” novel, (or even as a non-creative historical/sociological study), allowed me considerable flexibility in tackling the subject matter, for a creative writing project can break rules, ask questions, and raise issues that biographers and historians may not be able to tackle, or even be able to acknowledge:

The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and ‘objective’ world is no longer tenable. Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own ‘meanings’. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. ‘Meta’ terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world of the fiction and the world outside the fiction. (Waugh, 1984).

And perhaps even more pertinently; you have to behave yourself when writing a proper piece of academic work, presenting both yourself and the thesis as quiet, sober, reflective, and above all *respectable*. Whereas with fiction, and especially metafiction, I can be as subversive, rude, and as childish as I want to be. Especially in the footnotes.

Chapter Fifteen

In which we have a quick discussion on the concept of traditional biography and how it relates to the Great Man of History trope...

‘OK, let’s compare with what traditionally published material has to say on the subject,’ said Helen, selecting a slim volume from a shelf opposite her desk before skimming it over to Yvonne.

‘*Writing Biography and Autobiography* by Brian D. Osborne,’¹⁴² said Yvonne, assuming her “reading out loud from a book” voice.¹⁴³

‘OK,’ said Yvonne, opening the book. ‘On page five, he says; “Some, though not all, biography has definite elements of fiction in it – invented conversations, the exposition of a character’s thought processes... these can be harmless. Indeed... an imaginative leap... can be enormously helpful – even, some would say, essential – in filling-in undocumented periods...”’

‘Or you could just present the evidence you have and then make clear the rest is sheer speculation,’ muttered Helen. ‘You know; keeping it honest for the reader.’

‘He goes on; “as you work on the life of a subject, you will develop the sort of understanding of their character which allows you to make such imaginative leaps with reasonable assurance.”’

‘Bull crap,’ said Helen. ‘Churchill influenced – or warped – perceptions of him by writing down *his* history, *his* way, with *his* slant, and almost every writer thereafter just followed his lead like dutiful little sheep. Which means that practically all our understanding of Churchill has come from Churchill himself.’

‘I think it tries to justify it by saying “Story-telling skills are needed; the reader has to be drawn into your narrative,” offered Yvonne, uncertainly.

¹⁴² (Osborne, 2004).

¹⁴³ Oddly, Yvonne’s “reading out loud from a book” voice was far more artificial than her “reading out loud from a webpage” voice, possibly because she was far more used to the latter while the former still smacked of school lessons. And in contrast to Hutchinson-Cockburn’s self-confident oratory – “Boys don’t learn shamelessness at Eton, it is where they perfect it” (Shariatmadari, 2021) – Yvonne’s demeanour when reading from a book falls into the “Oh God, someone’s looking at me!” school of self-mortification.

‘There’s *story-telling* and then there’s *regurgitating bollocks*,’ replied Helen.

‘Skipping ahead,’ said Yvonne hastily, ‘It goes on to ask; “Why, then, do new biographies of extremely famous and well-documented characters keep getting written, published and read?”’

‘Because some sod, somewhere, is making cash from it,’ muttered Helen, feverishly searching her pockets and handbag for her cigarette stash. She was beginning to fret as she could only find three packets when she ought to have five.

“One obvious answer is that such books sell... The more usual explanation is that the author has found a new approach or a new interpretation, or has re-told what is a familiar enough story in a new and exciting way.”

‘And behold; the Churchillian Industry,’¹⁴⁴ sighed Helen in relief as her fingers closed around the missing cigarette packets. The thought of trying to

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Churchill is, besides being a national myth, a minor cottage industry, and the source of endless nostalgic tat. Books celebrating his wicked wit, mugs adorned with his mug, tea towels quoting the great man, endless court historians — and when it comes to Churchill, there is almost no other kind of historian — recapitulating his glories. Is there a movie about him now, with Gary Oldman? Throw it into the pile with the last movie with Brian Cox, and the one before that with Brendan Gleeson, and the one before that with Albert Finney, and the one before that with Michael Gambon. The industry is tantamount to a Works Progress Administration for our actorly “national treasures,” and a mini-boom may now be underway as certain sentiments circulating around Brexit have fueled a cultural return to Empire. (Seymour, 2018).

The Churchillian Myth/Industry is, in truth, little different to any other English cultural Myth/Industry, (Shakespeare, Austen, Dickens etc), in which the Myth fuels the Industry and the Industry is an integral part of the Myth:

As critics have often recognised, the two most famous Brontë novels have become... what might be called modern myths... Yet what, for me, makes the Brontës so extraordinary is that... the sisters themselves, plus their entire family, have become mythic figures in their own right. (Miller, 2002).

And this means it is the Vansittarts and Hutchinson-Cockburns of the world who are responsible for making the real Churchill as elusive as the real Shakespeare, the real Jane Austen, or the real Brontës in their respective industries. They’re all part of the status quo, keeping little England chugging along on the same smug track, spreading the message that to be accepted you must agree with, and think like, the rest of society. They all live in a comfortable, clichéd world, where inconvenient facts are as about as welcome as a dose of venereal disease in a nunnery.

last the day on only three packs had been sending panicked signals into the ancient part of the human brain usually concerned with outrunning apex predators on the prehistoric African scrubland.

‘I’d say behold new writers doing new things,’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, still smarting from Helen’s putdown while also being upset at the Black girl being the centre of attention. Especially when one considered her awful speaking voice which had zero projection, zero dramatic emphasis, and zero class.

‘This bit will please Rupert,’ observed Yvonne. ““Through time, life’s moral and ethical dimensions change, and the biographer – while not being required to abandon twenty first century morality, ethics or religion – has to appreciate that in the past, perfect decent people could support views or advocate policies which to most people today seem outrageous or evil.””

‘There, you see?’ demanded Hutchinson-Cockburn triumphantly, for his values had been supported while Helen’s lefty madness had been rebutted, leaving him secure once more his world of thoughtless privilege.

‘So you agree Churchill was evil?’ asked Helen with a faux innocent smile.

‘The point I’m making, as you know full well, is that you can’t judge him by today’s standards. The book just said so!’

‘Then let’s judge him by his contemporaries, shall we?’ said Helen. ‘One of them said there wasn’t much difference between Churchill and Hitler in terms of Churchill’s hatred of Indians.’¹⁴⁵

‘It was a different era,’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn through the tightest of tight lips.

‘You’ve gone quiet,’ said Helen of Yvonne, who was frowning over the book.

‘Because she’s seen the truth!’ declaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn, hoping to bury the awkward views of Churchill’s contemporaries under sheer volume.

¹⁴⁵

Leopold Amery, Churchill's own Secretary of State for India... vented in his private diaries, writing “on the subject of India, Winston is not quite sane” and that he didn't “see much difference between [Churchill's] [sic] outlook and Hitler's.” (Tharoor, 2015).

‘Because of what I’ve just read,’ replied Yvonne, her voice threatening to break. “‘Slavery... was for centuries a perfectly normal part of life and commerce. People who considered themselves, and were considered by their contemporaries, to be good, decent and virtuous profited from it... few of us today would dispute that slavery was wrong, and indeed there were always people morally opposed to it, but because an 18th century person profited from the slave trade is in itself no reason to for the 21st century biographer to attribute immorality or hypocrisy to their subject.’”

‘Again, truth from the book!’ declaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn, who seemed to be turning the short guide to writing biography into a religious text, complete with cherry-picking of useful verses and wilful obliviousness of all the rest.

‘The book just said there were always some who were against slavery,’ snapped Yvonne, ‘so surely Osborne’s just contradicted himself within a few lines? Slavery, and the racism that went with it, were not held to be universal truths. People were there pointing out the evil of both, and that was before Churchill was even born.’

‘But *most* people held the view!’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn with considerable exasperation.

‘Who held the view, exactly?’ demanded Yvonne, her tone rising in fury.

‘Most people held the view!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘So you think the slaves themselves held the view that slavery was “normal” and “justified”, do you? Or do you not count them as being “people”?’

‘All right, most *other* people held the view!’ snarled Hutchinson-Cockburn, neatly separating those he unconsciously considered to be “people” from those he did not.

‘Apart from the half million or so who signed a petition against slavery, and all those who boycotted sugar in a demonstration of consumer power,’ fumed Yvonne, who had done a school project for Black History Month on that very subject.¹⁴⁶

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In the 1780s, British and American Quakers launched an extensive and unprecedented propaganda campaign against slavery and slave-labor [sic] products. Their goal of creating a broad nondenominational antislavery movement culminated in a boycott

‘It’s the way things were,’ sulked Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘And it was the English who stopped slavery, but we never hear anything about that, do we?’

‘Only after considerable pressure was applied over the years by the Quakers and William Wilberforce,’ spat Yvonne. ‘And who actually got paid compensation after abolition? The bloody slave owners, that’s who!’¹⁴⁷

‘It was how most people saw the world back then,’ muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Then shouldn’t your precious Churchill, as the supposed Greatest Man Ever, have seen past the traditional colonial views of his time and realised what the real truth was?’ demanded Yvonne, sarcasm dripping from her words. ‘Doesn’t the fact that he didn’t see past the conventions of his time make him Bog Standard Man? After all, he seemed to be as trapped in the colonial mindset as much as you are!’

of slave-grown sugar in 1791 supported by nearly a half-million Britons. (Holcolmb, 2022).

¹⁴⁷

As slavery ended throughout the British Empire in the 19th century, parliament approved the payment of 20 million pounds—about 300 million pounds in today’s money—not to formerly enslaved Africans, but to slave owners as compensation. The United Kingdom took out a loan to pay reparations to slave owners in 1833 and only paid off the debt in 2015. (Stabley, 2022).

Chapter Sixteen

In which we see how our fictional constructs within Clavier and Coldwell react to the darker side of Churchill. For that reason, the snark needs to return to the main page to get a few light jabs in...

‘Is there any work going on here?’ demanded Vansittart, re-entering the office with a contract in his hand and disapproval on his face as his precious capital was wasted on non-business conversations. His finely tuned corporate antenna had picked up the lack of work going on in the front office, as well as the worrying outbreak of intelligent probing against establishment norms. It’s also possible he’d picked up a telepathic distress call from Hutchinson-Cockburn, who had absolutely no answer to Yvonne’s questions.

‘Well, we’ve just blown the justification for defending Churchill’s ongoing racism as “being of the times”, grinned Helen. ‘People should have known better then, but most still sided with hatred and bigotry. Just like today, really.’

‘I’m sure he wasn’t *perfect*,’ said Vansittart, feeling himself to be a great beacon of liberal modernity for his sensitivity and ability to see the other person’s point of view, ‘but then, who is perfect? No one, that’s who!’

‘Yes, but I’ve never starved millions of Bengalis to death, so I think Churchill may be lacking rather more than the rest of us in the “not being perfect” stakes,’ replied Helen.

‘I’m sure he had nothing to do with starving people,’ replied Sarah,¹⁴⁸ her Daily Mail sensibilities ruffled by the attack on their Greatest Ever Leader. ‘And there was an actual famine in India at the time,’ muttered Vansittart, giving Helen a dirty look as her attention was safely focussed on Sarah.

¹⁴⁸ Bet you forgot about Sarah, didn’t you? And Felicity. But then:

Minor characters don’t usually get enough development to make them interesting. They tend to be unremarkable, stale extras that exist for the sole purpose of aiding or hindering the main characters. They add nothing to the overall setting and often behave more like plot devices than actual characters. (Jules, 2022).

‘A natural disaster he exacerbated by diverting resources away from those who needed it,’ replied Helen, searching her bag for any loose cigarettes. She had a feeling she’d be needing a few extra before the end of the discussion.

‘We needed that grain during the war shortage,’ said Vansittart, staring at the far wall in noble martyrdom.

‘So did the Indians, but hey, they only grew it in their own land, so what rights did they have to their own produce?’

‘Churchill never gave up!’ yapped Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Unlike the French!’ he added, glossing over 200,000 dead French fighters.

‘I’m not sure how “He never gave up” excuses the famine, but maybe I’m funny that way,’ replied Helen. ‘Maybe starving millions is a healthy coping mechanism for a massive bigot who hated foreigners and the working class?’

‘He was a hero; everyone knows it,’ muttered Vansittart, for while he was Helen’s employer, he was also intimidated by her higher intelligence and alarming gender, thus partly explaining why he underpaid her.

‘Really? My grandfather thought of him as a warmonger and self-serving egotist. Grandad fought in the First World War and refused to idolatrise Churchill through the Second. He had him down as a charlatan from the beginning. My parents spoke about it often, but because they were working class, their testimony was never recorded. Unlike the posh Establishment boys who get to write about how great Churchill was in book after book on the subject.’

‘He stood alone against the Nazis!’ barked Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘He thought just like a Nazi,’ said Helen, rummaging in her bag again for her lighter. ‘He hated people who were different, especially when they were darker, and he wanted a permanent British Empire, rather like Hitler and the Thousand Year Reich.’

‘It was war!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, answering a point that hadn’t been raised as this was easier than dealing with Helen’s comment.

‘And what about after the war, and the establishment of concentration camps in Kenya in the early 1950s?’ replied Helen. ‘Around one hundred and fifty thousand men, women and children were herded into the camps

where rape, torture and mutilation were part of the policy of suppression.¹⁴⁹ And all done on Churchill's watch as he was back in power by then. And he personally favoured taking the best of the Kenyan lands for white colonial settlers, not the native Kenyans.'¹⁵⁰

'I'm sure it was only done for the best of reasons,' huffed Hutchinson-Cockburn.

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The full extent of British brutality during the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya 50 years ago has begun to emerge through government reports documenting "systematic" torture, starvation and even the burning alive of detainees.

Four elderly Kenyans who claim they were variously whipped, beaten, sexually abused and castrated while detained under colonial rule in the 1950s have brought their claims for compensation to the high court.

The survivors of the emergency regime of detention camps were "screened" – or violently interrogated – in order to extract confessions. One claimant, the court was told, witnessed the clubbing to death of 11 prison inmates. The British governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, was said to have been present at beatings. (Bowcott, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Churchill was at least consistent in his hatred. In 1921:

[He] was adamant that Kenya was, as he told Montagu, Secretary of State for India, 'a white man's country' and he held firmly to the view: 'The Indians in East Africa are mainly of a very low class of coolies, and the idea that they should be put on an equality with the Europeans is revolting to every white man throughout British Africa.'²⁹ Montagu could only reply that Churchill's views were those of a 'European settler of a most fanatical type.'³⁰ (Ponting, 1994).

And just to reiterate the above; *Montagu's response was in 1921*. Which again knocks a hole in the 'Judge Churchill by the standards of the day' arguments made to defend him. But then, this perennial discourse is a favourite of those in the media, as seen in 2022 when Establishment clone Lady Susan Hussey, long-time companion to Queen Elizabeth II, repeatedly demanded to know (at a Buckingham Palace reception) where the UK born Ngozi Fulani was *really* from, thus prompting the right-wing media to trot out their well-worn arguments:

Her sin, if there was one, was being old. Most pensioners are unfamiliar with the wonders of woke etiquette and its pitfalls. There are new strict rules governing what used to be called 'making conversation'. In asking Ms Fulani where she 'really' came from, Susan Hussey was merely repeating what people like her and my late father used to say. (Wyatt, 2022).

The more things change, the more they stay the same...

‘Really? How is mass torture of an indigenous people done for the best of reasons?’

‘We were having a civilising influence!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn.¹⁵¹

‘By raping and torturing thousands? Please don’t tell me that was the civilizing influence of the empire; I’ve heard that bollocks before.’¹⁵²

‘Security!’ blurted Hutchinson-Cockburn after several seconds of frantic thought. ‘For the good of society!’

‘Whose society? The natives, or the invading overseers?’

‘Both, obviously,’ muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn, secure in the scientific knowledge that those from primitive or bad backgrounds could never achieve anything without assistance from people higher up the social and evolutionary scale. After all, genetics counted for something, and explained pretty much everything in terms of who was on top and who was at the bottom.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹

...English voters overwhelmingly think that the empire was a good thing (Ramsay, 2020).

¹⁵²

“In Britain we present the colonial project as being about teaching the natives table manners and double entry bookkeeping... In order to justify the land grabbing colonial projects, you had to create an ideology. We the Europeans, or the Americans, had come to rescue the rest of the world from its depravity and backwardness. But in order to do that you have to be able to demonstrate that the rest of the world is depraved and backward. From this arose the racism that is still with us today. It was a necessary component of the colonial project.” (Monbiot, 2020).

Interestingly enough, Monbiot’s comment also seems to work when applied to the Establishment’s views on the poor and the working class, thus showing the intersectional nature of elitist hatred for those outside their clique, as seen in the next footnote.

¹⁵³

A Number 10 spokesman was repeatedly asked at a Westminster media briefing whether the PM [Boris Johnson] wished to distance himself from a string of controversial remarks made by Andrew Sabisky, who was recruited by senior advisor Dominic Cummings. Presented with a series of Sabisky’s comments and asked whether the PM backed them or would condemn them, the spokesman responded only: “The prime minister’s views are well publicised and well documented.”

Despite frequent requests, the Downing Street spokesman was unable to point to a single example of the prime minister expressing a view on eugenics or the intelligence of black people,

‘Care to elaborate on that point, with historical references?’ asked Yvonne, once again feeling she was learning more history from one hour of Helen’s knowledge than she ever had managed in an entire year at school.

‘It was the times and you should move on from it!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, standing up to signify the conversation was over, the last word was his, and his word was law, before disappearing with a newspaper to the bathroom. ‘Churchill was a hero; end of!’¹⁵⁴

merely saying that reporters would find that his opinions were “well-documented” on the public record.

He declined to say whether Mr Johnson’s views on the issue were reflected in a magazine article in which the PM referred to black people as “picaninnies” with “watermelon smiles”. (Woodcock, 2020).

And also on this eugenicist topic:

Boris Johnson’s senior aide Dominic Cummings has been dragged further into the row over No 10’s decision to hire an adviser with eugenicist views after it emerged that he suggested in his own writings that the NHS should cover the cost of selecting babies to have higher IQs.

...

Experts criticised Cummings’s theories about genetics, saying they were unworkable, unethical and amounted to eugenics, two days after Andrew Sabisky resigned as a No 10 contractor over his past claims that black Americans on average had lower IQs than white people. (Mason & Sample, 2020).

Don’t we have some lovely people in charge of us?

¹⁵⁴ This section does hopefully raise an interesting question; why do we (as a species) create and venerate heroes?

The term originated with the ancient Greeks, though to them a hero was someone who performed a feat far beyond the ability of most other people, thus becoming an example of what everyone else could aspire to – even if the feat wasn’t morally laudable. Jump forward several centuries and we are still defining ourselves by our heroes, explaining why we – both individually and as a society – project so much onto them. Which is fine if the hero is indeed genuinely heroic, (in the modern sense, not the ancient Greek way), but this hero-worship can have negative effects on our personal and collective identity if it turns out our hero is less than perfect:

A human being’s very sense of self is intimately tied up with his or her identity group’s status and beliefs. Unsurprisingly, then, people respond automatically and defensively to information that threatens their ideological worldview. We respond with rationalization and selective assessment of evidence – that is, we engage in “confirmation bias,” giving credit to expert testimony we like and find reasons to reject the rest.

Political scientists Charles Taber and Milton Lodge experimentally confirmed the existence of this automatic response. They found that partisan subjects, when presented with photos of politicians,

produce an affective “like/dislike” response that precedes any sort of conscious, factual assessment as to who is pictured. (Bardon, 2020).

And this may explain why our cultural/national/mythological heroes remain heroes even when stories of their insalubrious actions start bleeding out into the public sphere, as we can’t bear to admit we could possibly be wrong in our beliefs:

...heroification, [is] a degenerative process (much like calcification) that makes people over into heroes. Through this process, our educational media turns flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest. (Loewen, 1996).

This may well stem from the well-known psychological issue of cognitive bias, in which an individual suffering from faulty perceptions of the world creates an illusion of reality at odds with the real thing, for the human brain, percolating in bias and self-deception, can be easily fooled (deliberately or otherwise) when receiving (mis)information:

Anchoring bias: This is the tendency to rely too heavily on the very first piece of information you learn...

Attentional bias: This is the tendency to pay attention to some things while simultaneously ignoring others...

...

Confirmation bias: This is favoring information that conforms to your existing beliefs and discounting evidence that does not conform...

False consensus effect: This is the tendency to overestimate how much other people agree with you...

Functional fixedness: This is the tendency to see objects as only working in a particular way...

Halo effect: Your overall impression of a person influences how you feel and think about their character... (Cherry, 2020).

Yvonne does raise an interesting question here; why *do* we need heroes? The term originated with the ancient Greeks, though to them a hero was someone who performed a feat far beyond the ability of most other people, thus becoming an example of what everyone else could aspire to – even if the feat wasn’t morally laudable. Jump forward several centuries and we are still defining ourselves by our heroes, explaining why we – both individually and as a society – project so much onto them. Which is fine if the hero is indeed genuinely heroic, (in the modern sense, not the ancient Greek way), but this hero-worship can have negative effects on our personal and collective identity if it turns out our hero is less than perfect:

A human being’s very sense of self is intimately tied up with his or her identity group’s status and beliefs. Unsurprisingly, then, people respond automatically and defensively to information that threatens their ideological worldview. We respond with rationalization and selective assessment of evidence – that is, we engage in “confirmation bias,” giving credit to expert testimony we like and find reasons to reject the rest.

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The above points demonstrate how easy it is for anyone to absorb one belief, such as Churchill as Hero Beyond All Reproach, and to reiterate it for evermore simply because their worldview is imprinted early via school and authority figures, after which the belief is bolstered by mainstream culture and a compliant media. This inevitably leads to attentional and confirmation bias, wherein the individual refuses to accept any opposing view or data, and hence they must reject any facts demonstrating Churchill was a warmonger, a racist, an elitist etc.

This is often seen on social media, in the repeated patterns that greets just about every attempt to criticise Churchill for anything. The dialogue can often be condensed into two component parts; firstly the criticism of Churchill, swiftly followed by part two, the defence of Churchill, with the same sort of phrases appearing with machine-like regularity; "We'd all be speaking German if it weren't for him!" or "You can't judge him by our time!" being standard template responses.

And bear in mind it's usually the media (and thus the Establishment) setting the tone of the so-called 'debate'; it is they who frame the material, control the narrative, and who herd their sheep to a predetermined outcome.

And the sheep seem so very happy to be herded...

Chapter Seventeen

A rare glimpse into Yvonne's homelife – rare because trying to create an authentic picture of anyone's domestic situation is difficult enough, and the issue is even more problematic when dealing with lived experiences which are completely different to your (my) own. Hence this descriptor to remind the reader that Yvonne and her family are constructs of the imagination rather than of reality, and all serve as authorial interjections rather than as real people – and hence they will ask leading questions purely to set up the didactic answers.

Also, the chapter demonstrates the difficulty of getting on in life if you don't have financial and familial support – thus emphasising the main point of the novel. And yes, I realise this goes against the high literary observation that “...one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential,” (Lodge, 1995), but some texts really are about just one thing.

And this book is a prime example of that.

‘What on earth is all this?’ asked Yvonne’s father, Derek, as Yvonne got home that evening and immediately laid out a few books Helen had loaned her on the dining room table.

‘Just some research,’ replied Yvonne, sorting out the notebook and pen she had purchased. She already had several notebooks and pens of different types and colours in her possession, as she knew from the Internet these were the essential props of any budding writer, but she believed the new plain pen and notebook set signified how she was now getting down to the real work of authorship, rather than simply dreaming about getting down to the real work of authorship.

‘Research? For what?’ asked Yvonne’s grandmother, Mary, entering with a tablecloth. Despite her increasing frailty, Mary was still an active member of her local church, and she was also a frequent visitor in the Jones household, resulting in innumerable outbreaks of bickering between herself and her son-in-law.

‘It’s sort of a project,’ began Yvonne.

‘You can tell me after helping to set the table,’ interrupted Mary, flapping the tablecloth with practised ease so the end billowed out over the books, obscuring them from view.¹⁵⁵

Yvonne, at least recognising a lost domestic battle when she saw one, quickly helped set the table before sitting back down with her chosen volume, aware of her father’s sceptical gaze.

‘That’s better,’ nodded Mary, smoothing the tablecloth before giving her granddaughter a quick kiss on the forehead.

‘What are you reading?’ asked Yvonne’s mother, Lily, as she hurried in with several plates.

‘Books about history, and also Winston Churchill,’ repeated Yvonne before being interrupted by her father.

‘Ah Churchill! Without him, we’d all be speaking German,’ announced Derek, clearly thinking he was making a profoundly original observation.

‘Churchill would have hated us because of our skin colour,’ muttered Yvonne, her mind on Helen’s comments.

‘Rubbish!’ snorted Derek, though he offered no argument against Yvonne’s statement.

‘One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter,’ said Lily, trying to broker a dining table peace with the panacea of cliché.

‘There’s too much cynicism about these days,’ muttered Derek.

‘There’s not enough godliness about, more like!’ exclaimed Mary. ‘People should ask; “What would Jesus do?” That would set them on the right path.’

‘Or maybe we just need to have a better idea on who our heroes are, and remember they’re all human and have human failings,’ said Lily, again playing the peacemaker.

‘If only,’ replied Yvonne. ‘You try criticising anything about Churchill and see where it gets you.’ She blushed as her father glared at her, realising he

¹⁵⁵And thus giving a pointed example on how, for those outside the elite, everyday chores hamper any chance of sustained creativity, because reality frequently gets in the way. However, there is a far darker edge to this, as noted on *Stylists’* mental health page:

...life is unaffordable. The future is uncertain in a ‘we’re living in a climate crisis and there might not be a future’ way. Late-stage capitalism has taken choice off the table for so many that working-to-live is just a reality. (Laws, 2022).

felt he was the target of her comment, though she'd really been thinking of Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn.

'Churchill was a hero,' grumbled her father, laying down the law by tapping one stubby finger on the table, for he had imbibed society's assumptions rather too well over the years. 'That's what the focus should be on.'

'And ignore everything else?' asked Yvonne. 'Even if the rest of the person is clearly horrific?'

'We all need someone to look up to,' said Lily, noting her husband was lacking any coherent response.

'And that raises another interesting question,' said Yvonne, flipping through the pages of her notebook with her free hand. 'Who gets to decide who our heroes are?'

'How do you mean?' asked her mother.

'Who decided that Churchill should be presented as a hero? Who decided to sweep all his faults under the carpet? Faults like his racism and his hatred of the poor, and the fact that he was a warmonger. I mean, who decided what the narrative would and wouldn't include?'

'That would presumably be the other people just like him,' said Mary rather unexpectedly, for she rarely left the confines of theological statements. 'The rest of the establishment. They're the ones who control everything, so they're the ones who have the power to control Churchill's narrative.'

'Exactly, Nan!'

'Cobblers,' muttered Derek before flushing under his saintly mother-in-law's reproving glare. 'And you haven't said *why* you're reading those books.'

'It's just something for work,' mumbled Yvonne, correctly guessing the reaction to this statement.

'Paid work?' demanded her father, eagerly. 'Have you finally been taken on?' His tone suggested Yvonne had somehow been deficient in not immediately being employed within the company.

'No, this is extra.'

'Extra paid?'

'No.'

‘Why are you doing *more* unpaid work?’ demanded Lily. ‘You need to think about where you’re heading in life!’

‘You need to think about the future, my girl,’ agreed Derek.

‘This *is* for my future,’ replied Yvonne.

‘I don’t see how doing something for free is helping,’ sniffed Lily.

‘This could get me noticed by Michael, and maybe get me a paid post with the company.’ Yvonne kept quiet on her hopes of working on the biography; she doubted either parent would view such an activity as being worth anyone’s time, unless it came with a salary.

‘Get you noticed?’ echoed her mother. ‘Working hard in the office gets you noticed!’

‘I am working hard,’ muttered Yvonne, thinking of the eternal cleaning, scrubbing, and vacuuming waiting for her at the office. And that was before dealing with the never-ending tedium of her administrative duties which seemed to envelop the rest of the day.

‘You don’t just get things handed to you,’ nodded Derek. ‘You have to *work* for them!’¹⁵⁶

‘Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn gets everything handed to him,’ muttered Yvonne, blinking away tears at her parents’ tone.

‘We’re not talking about him,’ said Lily, firmly closing the lid on any attempt to open the box of social inequality, as per her social training, which saw any such Pandorian action as being nothing more than excuses and social envy.

‘Exactly!’ snorted Derek. ‘This is the real world!’¹⁵⁷ You’re eighteen now; it’s time you acted like it! What are all these books going to do for you?’

¹⁵⁶ The author is tempted to ask why those who work long and hard in accountancy, retail, motor engineering, mining, assembly lines, cleaning, teaching etc are not all inevitably living in mansions, sipping on their success. After all; “If wealth was the inevitable result of hard work and enterprise, every woman in Africa would be a millionaire.” (Monbiot, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Thus demonstrating how effectively both Derek and Lily had been indoctrinated with the belief that wealth is the yardstick of success – and societal acceptance. This represents an astonishing accomplishment by society, which has warped an otherwise amiable couple into holding the ideology of the elite, (judging poverty as being synonymous with immorality, believing that hard work will be rewarded etc), while giving them absolutely nothing in return except for a false sense of superiority over other people.

‘They’re improving my critical thought processes,’ muttered Yvonne.

‘Pah!’ snorted Derek.

‘We’re not keeping you forever,’ said Lily. ‘Have you made your five-year work plan yet?’

‘No,’ mumbled Yvonne, who was beginning to suspect any such document would be a greater work of fantasy than *The Lord of the Rings*.

‘And how do you expect to get anywhere without planning your life and applying yourself?’ demanded Derek.

‘And don’t think you’ll be able to laze around on benefits, like some do!’ added Lily before her daughter could even speak.¹⁵⁸

‘Damn right,’ nodded Derek. ‘We worked hard without claiming any benefits or handouts!’

‘No handouts?’ exclaimed Mary. ‘Who gave you the loan to start your first nursery? All my life savings! And Richard’s, God rest him,’ she added in recognition of the money left behind by her husband after forty years working on the London buses, supplemented by innumerable cash-in-hand musical gigs in many a pub backroom.

In doing so, Derek and Lily have been condemned to the pursuit of an existence interpreted purely through the prism of capitalist dogma. It’s like Stockholm Syndrome but for an entire society, with the captors being the wealthy elite, their weapons being indoctrination via education, the mainstream media etc, and the hostages being the general citizenry.

¹⁵⁸ By this, Lily is referring to the so-called feckless poor, aka the benefit cheats/benefit scroungers/lower orders/the working classes etc; all easy stereotypes inculcated within her by the government and the media:

One of the most resilient poverty-related concepts has been that of the deserving and undeserving poor, dominating the social debate in certain periods while giving way to more compassionate concepts at other times. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008, the morally charged concept of the undeserving poor has been enjoying its renaissance, both among the political establishment and the newspaper commentariat. It is argued that the frames applied in the depiction of the poor in the British media, often copying the government rhetoric, represent a throwback to the Victorian era, in which poverty was understood as an individual failing worthy of denouncement rather than a structural problem caused by larger economic and social forces. (Tihelková, 2015).

As such, it’s worth pointing out again how the true working-class isn’t represented in this novel as they can’t get close to an opportunity even in a *fictional* world, never mind the real one.

‘That was business, and you got it all back!’ snapped Derek, waving the inconvenient facts away, as well as the lack of paid interest on the loan.

‘After you were turned down by several banks, as I recall,’ smirked Mary.

‘And you were still living with me, rent free, in the early days.’

‘And we kept on working until we succeeded!’ retorted Derek. ‘Lily and I did it all alone.’

‘Oh, *you* succeeded all alone, did you?’ replied Mary. ‘And who was looking after Yvonne when she was born? Who took care of her when Lily went back to work at the nursery? And who did all that for nothing?’

‘That was family,’ muttered Derek, a double standard that reduced Yvonne to an incoherent stammer of utter frustration.

‘And was “family” the reason I was making your breakfast before you left, and dinner when you got back, and doing all your laundry, and doing any other jobs for you while you were out at work? And you sit there and say you did it *alone*?’

‘Being self-employed is hard work and requires sacrifices!’ snapped Derek.

‘That’s what Yvonne needs to learn. She needs to learn the value of money!’

‘Sweet Lord, I hate it when men talk about “the value of money”. They always sound so smug about it.’

‘Yvonne has to learn self-reliance, like I did!’

‘Did your self-reliance come before or after I gave you thousands of pounds? Should I have sat on my money and not given you any? Would that have taught you the value of money?’

‘Yvonne has to learn life owes you nothing!’ shouted Derek as he leapt up and stalked from the room, pausing to deliver a final line from the safety of the door. ‘We all work the same hours and have the same chances, and the sooner she learns that, the better!’¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Once again, I urge the reader to revisit Footnote #32 for a rebuttal on this. (Or perhaps I should *enjoin* them, for the sake of literary merit?) See also Chapter Thirteen.

Chapter Eighteen

A contemplation of the assumptions of the publishing world, in which we see how Vansittart's claims for diversity and inclusion are little more than performative, for Clavier and Coldwell publish only a very few "non-traditional" writers – and only then on the assumption that these writers will adhere to certain subject matters.

Note also how a smidgeon of extra snark is filtering onto the main page again...

Hutchinson-Cockburn watched in suspicion as the Black girl gathered several sheets into a large file marked *Churchill Biography Submissions*. He'd been ogling her for the past few days owing to her recently upgraded fashion sense, for she was now favouring skirts or dresses accentuating her figure, and he instinctively knew she was dressing to please him. After all, he was an Alpha Male, so it was inevitable. But duty before pleasure, and given he strongly suspected the papers had something to do with submissions for the Churchill biography, he followed both folder and figure as they headed into Vansittart's office.

'Are those the Churchill biography submissions?' asked Vansittart, his gaze flicking from the folder labelled *Churchill Biography Submissions* to Yvonne's short skirt. The contents of the folder warmed him in the wallet as he thought about the potential profits, while the skirt warmed him elsewhere, for he instinctively knew Yvonne was dressing to please him. After all, he was an attractive, sophisticated older man – older, but certainly not old – so it was inevitable. Not that he'd ever act on it, of course. Not with his wife calling and texting regularly throughout the day.

'I've separated out the more interesting ones,' replied Yvonne, removing some of the printed sheets. She was momentarily distracted by Hutchinson-Cockburn walking in behind her and leaning against the far wall, hence she missed Vansittart's reaction to the word "interesting". "Interesting" was not what he, as a publisher or as a man, was looking for. Rather, he wanted

familiarity, for the familiar was comfortable, stable, and reassuring.¹⁶⁰

‘This one comes from a Doctor Ferdinand Ndam, of Cameroon, who has the idea of exploring Churchill’s colonial ideology. Doctor Ndam can offer a unique insight into this as he has access to many records from both the German occupation of the area after the “scramble for Africa,” as well as the carving up of the country under the French and British after World War One.’ Yvonne spoke with the illusion of confidence, hoping she wasn’t pressed for too many details; she wasn’t too knowledgeable about the “scramble for Africa” because foreign history, like British history, geography, art, and indeed most of the humanities, had been deemed by her school to be of less capital importance than economics and business studies.¹⁶¹

‘Too wide a remit,’ replied Vansittart, his cultural and financial instincts warning him against any examination of colonialism. ‘It wouldn’t be popular with the UK public. And remember this is a biography about one man, and his role in destiny, so a specific tone is required.’

‘All right,’ responded Yvonne, shuffling the printed sheets. ‘How about this? Churchill and India? A Mr Umang Joshi has family diaries going back all the way to the early eighteen hundreds...’

‘Again, it’s not really going to be commercial enough,’ interrupted Vansittart, alarmed at Churchill’s “old fashioned” attitudes toward India being given airtime. As a publisher and as a man of culture, he knew discretion was the better part of valour – which was the closest he could ever come to admitting, even to himself, that not everything about Churchill was commendable. ‘We need something unique to this country.’

‘How about this?’ continued Yvonne, glad to have dropped the Indian approach because, when all was said and done, it was Indian. ‘A postgraduate student wants to convert his PhD on how Churchill has been

¹⁶⁰

The core audience for publishers is white and middle-class. The whole industry is essentially set up to cater for this one audience. (Saha & van Lente, 2020).

¹⁶¹ Yvonne is by no means stupid, but she is culturally stupefied. Hence her increasing awareness under Helen’s cynicism.

constructed by the Establishment as one of the Greatest Myths of the Modern Age, and so he – the student that, is – would be considering questions about the morality of Churchill’s actions, given he was ready, willing, and able to destroy countless lives across the world to preserve his way of life.’¹⁶²

‘That sounds like an excuse for socialistic Churchill bashing,’ interrupted Hutchinson-Cockburn, reminding everyone of his presence.

‘Exactly, Rupert,’ agreed Vansittart, wearing the expression of a man reluctantly sniffing a dead fish. ‘What are we at Clavier and Coldwell Publishing? The looney left? I think not!’

‘Then how about this idea from Jayne Griffiths?’ countered Yvonne. ‘She says she wants to approach Churchill from a working-class perspective rather than the standard perspective of the wealthy establishment. She’s already done a lot of research at Wolverhampton University...’

‘Absolutely not,’ snorted Vansittart. Wolverhampton? Where even was that? It sounded like it was somewhere in the north. And as for the notion of the working-classes being able to write...¹⁶³

‘But this would be a fresh view, surely? And she’s already written three

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The abortive Atlantic conference with Roosevelt in the summer of 1941 convinced him [Churchill] that the president would be unable to carry American opinion with him and declare war on Germany unless Japan attacked America in the Far East. He then pressurized America to provoke Japan into attacking. The despatches of the British ambassador in Tokyo, Craigie, and those of the United States ambassador, Grew, leave no doubt that in 1941 Japan could have been kept out of the war if the oil blockade had been eased. Churchill opposed this, and persuaded the Americans to take a hard line. Churchill's gamble succeeded. In December 1941 the Japanese attacked the Americans at Pearl harbour as well as British and Dutch possessions. If the Japanese had attacked only the British and the Dutch and left the Americans alone it is doubtful whether Roosevelt could have persuaded Congress to declare war on Japan. (Lamb, 1991).

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Kit de Waal, who edited a new anthology of working-class voices called *Common People...* which features contributions from writers including former children’s laureate Malorie Blackman as well as lesser-known names... was told by someone: “If these writers were any good, they would already be published.” (Flood, 2019).

very successful histories on the working class through the twentieth century,’ pointed out Yvonne, waving Miss Griffiths’ covering documents which ticked off all the criteria specified by Clavier and Coldwell’s submission call. ‘She comes with an inbuilt fanbase and market. And academic credibility!’¹⁶⁴

Vansittart weakened for a shameful moment at the mention of an existing market to tap into for commercial return, but his innate good sense – and good taste – reasserted itself almost immediately.¹⁶⁵ ‘No, I know our readership; the solid, silent majority who make up this country. They know what to expect from Clavier and Coldwell Publishing, and we must never break our contract with them!’

Vansittart glanced at the printout and saw another issue missed by the young and inexperienced Yvonne; Jayne Griffiths’ age was down as thirty-six. Which meant she either had children, which would distract her from the work, or else she would soon be having children – assuming she was one of those career women who put off marriage and childhood until it was almost too late – which again meant she would be distracted from the work, which was an unacceptable business risk for Clavier and Coldwell.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ The reader may notice Yvonne has suddenly taken something of a quantum leap in terms of her knowledge, (though not, unfortunately, her racism). This, alas, is the artificiality of the novel, as personal development – which would normally take place over some considerable time – has to be concentrated into around 80,000 words. But then; “The scientist aims at truth, and succeeds if he finds it. The artist aims at truth, and succeeds if he raises the emotions.” (Forster, 1984).

¹⁶⁵

For my book *The Authority Gap*, which looks at why women are still taken less seriously than men, I commissioned Nielsen Book Research to find out exactly who was reading what. I wanted to know whether female authors were not just deemed less authoritative than men, but whether they were being read by men in the first place. And the results confirmed my suspicion that men were disproportionately unlikely even to open a book by a woman. (Sieghart, 2021).

¹⁶⁶

A third of managers would rather employ a man in his 20s or 30s over a woman of the same age for fear of maternity leave, according to a new study. A survey of 500 managers by law firm Slater & Gordon showed that more than 40% admitted they are generally wary of hiring a woman of childbearing age, while a similar number would be wary of hiring a woman who has already had a child or hiring a mother for a senior role. (Press Association, 2014).

There was nothing personal about it, as Vansittart told himself; it was just good sense and economics. After all, it wasn't as if he *enjoyed* being the Arbiter and Gatekeeper of That Which Was Proper, but it was a *duty* nonetheless, and he would be *nothing* if he did not *serve* as his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had served before him – with *care*, *diligence*, and *professionalism*. He glanced at the clock, wondering if he could slip away for an early lunch.

'Then what are you looking for?' asked Yvonne, spreading the papers out on the desk. 'You did say this was going to be a new and innovative approach.'

'Yes, yes, but the work must also have sound scholarship behind it,' replied Vansittart.

'You mean a biography on the establishment by the establishment?' replied Yvonne, sounding rather like Helen.

'Market forces make these decisions.'

'So its market forces alone choosing mostly white men for publication?' asked Yvonne with considerable restraint.

'We publish Black voices,' protested Vansittart, picking up a handy catalogue as proof and quickly flipping through to the *Commitment to Diversity* page. 'Nina Rogerson's *The Estate*; a harrowing tale of growing up Black and disadvantaged in modern Britain. Elizabeth Giraudy's *The Slave Trade*. Martin Clarke's *The Slave Trade in Africa*. Richard Huntingdon-Reyes *How the British Stopped the Slave Trade*.'

'Richard Huntingdon-Reyes is white.'

'Yes, but it's all here; the representation,' said Vansittart, wondering if he should chide Yvonne for her racism against Huntingdon-Reyes. He decided to stay quiet in case she got upset, as her kind were wont to do. 'And all these volumes sit proudly on my own personal bookcase.' He gestured at the relevant shelving against the far wall, where the volumes in question did indeed sit, at the bottom, untouched. Apart from the Huntingdon-Reyes, of course.

'And do you notice anything about these examples?' asked Yvonne, her smile trembling as it threatened to turn into a snarl.

'Yes; they're all about Black people,' replied Vansittart, confused by

Yvonne's tone. 'They all show our diversity,' he continued, proudly. 'Diversity? Every non-white writer here is pigeon-holed into "acceptable" areas; the slavery narrative, the racism narrative, the growing up poor and disadvantaged narrative. Where are the Black writers on Churchill, or the Duke of Wellington, or in any other genre? Why are non-white authors forced down the road of writing only about racism or slavery? Why do they have to follow certain tropes in order to be accepted?'¹⁶⁷

'I suppose they have their own interests, in their own history, you know, in Black history, not white,' spluttered Vansittart.

'And Britain is the least racist country there is!' exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn, parroting a phrase he'd often seen on social media. And in the tabloids. And spoken by many right-wing pundits.

'And you think that is somehow laudable? Being slightly less bad than somewhere else makes you better?'¹⁶⁸

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In his book, *Race and the Cultural Industries*, Dr Anamik Saha, a lecturer at Goldsmiths, demonstrates how British Asian authors are restricted to a narrow gap in the market; they are offered the opportunity to write a specific set of racially framed narratives, which publishers claim are the only ones they can sell, rather than being given true creative freedom. (Waal, 2018).

And the other issue with Vansittart's actions here is that:

...the industry's commitment to diversity and inclusion often appears performative, with publishers making symbolic gestures to improve their public image rather than initiating substantial change. This can lead to tokenism, where a few select authors from underrepresented groups are elevated, but the overall structure and culture of the industry remain unchanged. (Brown, 2023).

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A study published in 2019... suggested that Britain is one of the least racist countries in Europe. (Avery, 2020).

However, as Lola-Rose Avery then points out:

The first time I ever went to Eastern Europe, I had names shouted at me every time I left my hotel room, so I am not sure that being the "least racist" country in Europe is exactly a glowing recommendation - the bar is not especially high. (Ibid).

‘Your mother has made a success of herself, hasn’t she?’ pointed out Vansittart, glossing over Yvonne’s father as an unknown quantity, for it had always been Mrs Jones who made the social running in the neighbourhood. ‘That shows the country can’t be that bad!’¹⁶⁹

‘She would disagree,’ replied Yvonne.¹⁷⁰

‘Things are changing,’ muttered Vansittart, feeling he was being attacked and found unjustly guilty just for being a genuinely nice guy.¹⁷¹

‘So, you agree we need more Black people doing this sort of biography? This sort of work? To show that British history is everyone’s history, and is not just the preserve of the wealthy elite?’

‘Well, yes, of course,’ mumbled Vansittart in financial, historical, and cultural horror at the idea of “Churchill by a Black Writer”. After all, if the world was ready for such a thing, it would already have happened. The fact it hadn’t happened was proof it couldn’t happen.

‘So wouldn’t it make sense to employ someone to do it?’ continued Yvonne, excited at pushing her ideas forward while simultaneously feeling societal shame in demonstrating ambition while being female.¹⁷²

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People, I am sure, would also look at me and say, “She is a black woman and she has done it. [Achieved a high position] That wouldn’t be possible if racism was still an issue in this country”. (Avery, 2020).

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But I have managed this despite racism... The truth is that I have experienced racism at every stage of my life. My earliest memories of this are from as young as three years old. (Avery, 2020).

That Yvonne’s mother would echo the above observations and yet still embrace Establishment dogma says something about the power of social conformity.

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Being quietly ‘not racist’ is not enough. White people, who are the beneficiaries of this system, must educate themselves as to how and to call it out with the same vehemence as black and minority ethnic people if it is to be dismantled. Silence is complicity. (Avery, 2020).

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The research shows that culturally, ambition is seen as a positive trait in men yet criticized in women. At Columbia Business School, Professor Frank Flynn presented half his class with a case study using the name “Heidi” on it and gave half the class the same case study with her name changed to “Howard.” The students rated

‘If the right person should apply,’ stuttered Vansittart, before remembering Yvonne had already mentioned doing the project inhouse. He hadn’t given the matter a first thought since, never mind a second, but now his horrified mind was coming to realise that Yvonne really did want to write the biography herself. ‘Er, are you ready to submit a fully-costed proposal on the submission call?’ he asked, retreating into official language while squirming in the face of naked female ambition.

‘I have been researching some ideas, yes, though I need some guidance on how best to present the facts’ replied Yvonne, determined to butter Vansittart up in order to pin him down.

‘Er, well, yes, in all things we must, I must consider, how in all things, we must all be considered,’ waffled Vansittart in dismay, trying to show he was fully supportive of any and all Black endeavour while not actually agreeing to support any Black endeavour if he could possibly help it. ‘Or Helen can help,’ he blurted in relief, realising there was no reason he had to deal with the issue when he had a paid underling who could do it instead. Along with all her other work.

‘So, I can start looking into it, can I?’ demanded Yvonne, pressing Vansittart for a firm decision. She was slightly ashamed she was using such an important sociological issue to manipulate events to her own advantage and so, rather like Vansittart assuring himself that his company was a beacon of modernity and tolerance, she hastily framed her behaviour as noble altruism on behalf of the entire Black community. Which at least enabled her to maintain her own self-image.¹⁷³

Howard and Heidi equally competent, but while they liked Howard, they didn’t like Heidi. The more assertive a student found Heidi to be, the more they rejected her. This reaction is because the authoritative and dominant behaviors associated with leadership are viewed negatively in women. (Castrillon, 2019).

It’s interesting to wonder, as my Phd Supervisor did at this point, how this scenario would have played out in the UK; would the insular English be against Heidi just for her Germanic name? After all, anti-German feeling still runs deep in this country, what with the *We’d-all-be-speaking-German-if-it-wasn’t-for-Churchill* attitudes out there; the very phrase reveals the racist superiority complex oozing from every English pore.

¹⁷³ Though Yvonne does at least have the genuine excuse that she is outside the elite, and as such, she has no choice but to take any advantage in her attempt to get on. Whereas Vansittart has no real reason for not aiding others, given his position. Unless being an

‘Oh, yes, indeed, jolly good, we’ll have to meet, I mean schedule a meet, but not for a few weeks, give me time – give you time to get something down,’ mumbled Vansittart, edging toward the door and lunch. ‘See you tomorrow,’ he called out, deciding he would get more done that afternoon by working from home, without any further interruptions.

Behind him, Yvonne recognised (once again) that Vansittart wasn’t interested in her taking on the project, but she (once again) reinterpreted the scene through her mind until she arrived at a fantasy version in which he was merely *hesitant* about the idea of her doing the project, meaning she just needed to work on him gently, discreetly, and diplomatically.¹⁷⁴

And on a completely unrelated note, Yvonne decided that tomorrow she would get one of her low-cut tops out of the wardrobe. Because it really was very warm in the office.

insular member of the Establishment with zero self-awareness or empathy is in itself an excuse?

¹⁷⁴ Thus we see how self-deception works alongside sociological subterfuge to keep Yvonne’s hopes alive for a little longer. Whether this is a good thing or not is one for the psychologists and sociologists.

Chapter Nineteen

Something of a symbolic chapter, and I should probably apologise in being so crass as to point out the symbolism within – but alerting the reader to the inherent artificiality of our cultural norms is basically what this novel is all about. As such, we have the significance of Yvonne expanding her perceptions by learning about the nature of historical appearance, while in contrast Hutchinson-Cockburn merely bolsters his position by quoting from traditional historical authority, thereby using the past to support the present, as well as demonstrating how authority replicates itself while simultaneously shunning anything different.

The following morning saw Yvonne staggering to work under a considerable weight of books. Having decided that knowledge of Churchill the man was not enough for a decent biography, she had done her best to equip herself (via an Internet search) with a selection of tomes on the nature and construction of history itself.

Unfortunately, Yvonne didn't have any money for non-essential items, and so she paid an early morning visit to the Kensington Manor library, wherein she hit upon another snag; the library didn't have the latest editions of any of the items on her list.

Yvonne inquired about ordering the updated versions, which the helpful librarian was very happy to do, but this carried a charge of £5.99 for each individual book, something Yvonne just could not afford given she was earning no money at all at Clavier and Coldwell. Indeed, the only cash she had in her purse came from her father's grudging pocket money which barely covered her travel costs,¹⁷⁵ and Yvonne had felt a hot flush of shame at her relative poverty. And if you think it utterly deplorable that anyone

¹⁷⁵ This, incidentally, also explained Yvonne's habit of making a sandwich at home and carrying it in for lunch each day, rather than popping out for a quick bite or, as in the case of Vansittart, a full meal of at least two courses, more usually three. With a bottle of wine. Sometimes two. And a full cheeseboard. And a choice of liqueurs. And coffee. And probably a brandy thereafter.

should feel ashamed about their financial situation after being born outside the wealthy elite, then you are neither a politician nor a journalist.

In contrast to Yvonne's plight, let us now turn to Hutchinson-Cockburn. He was uncharacteristically worried he was being outshone by a girl, (and by a Black girl, at that), so he decided to bone up on a little history; as such, some two hours after Yvonne had entered the library in search of her books, Hutchinson-Cockburn was browsing a major high street book retailer before continuing to work.

Inside, Hutchinson-Cockburn found it difficult to know what to choose, but he knew he could trust his innate good taste and breeding in making his selection. Grabbing the volumes nearest to hand, he made his way to the till to pay for his goods, openly ogling the filly behind the counter for she was both young and had large breasts, and Hutchinson-Cockburn felt it was an excellent mark of his character that he should pay attention to a shopgirl, for it demonstrated he had no snobbery or side about him whatsoever.

'Just these three, my darling,' he leered, wondering whether to ask the girl out as she was bound to be a right little slapper in the bedroom.¹⁷⁶

'That'll be one hundred and eight pounds, ninety-four pence,' replied the woman, giving him a cold stare.

Bloody lesbian, though Hutchinson-Cockburn as he riffled through his wallet. Bet she could put on a show for me, though, and then I'd her give a bit of dick, show her what's she's missing...Get her and the Blackamoor in from the office, we all know what they're like in bed, and wahey!

He abandoned his pornographic line of thought to focus on money. He'd accidentally taken out the bank card for his trust fund rather than his current account, and he was momentarily dithering between which card to use, though in truth there was little difference between them; the trust fund clocked up an ever-increasing balance from his innumerable inherited dividends, while the current account was kept healthy by the fortnightly allowance direct from his father.

¹⁷⁶ Hutchinson-Cockburn's thought processes could be summed up as; she works in a shop, therefore she is working class, therefore she is sexually promiscuous. It wasn't exactly a syllogism, but it was certainly close enough for his purposes.

Hutchinson-Cockburn finally decided to use the current account, though he would have to be frugal until his next payday; although the new shoes he'd bought yesterday had been a very modest one thousand, one hundred pounds, he'd also treated himself to a new jacket, watch, cap, and several nights out with his friends, meaning his current account was now dipping down alarmingly low – almost as low as five figures.

He would have to cut his cloth accordingly, and maintain an austere lifestyle until the next cash injection arrived; he'd only be able to enjoy three or four nights out at *Transters*, the exclusive nightclub of choice for the Bright Young Things, and he would have to cut back on dining out, limiting himself to no more than two or three days in the week at his favourite restaurant. And maybe postpone buying the rather splendid watch he'd seen in a jeweller's window until next month.

Truly, he suffered.

On arriving at the office, Hutchinson-Cockburn perched his bag of books ostentatiously on top of his desk for all to see and admire, in contrast to Yvonne who had carefully hidden her elderly library books out of sight as she was still feeling the shame of her poverty.

The office was quiet for a few hours as everyone got on with their work; Sarah was busily working on a contract which would give the company twenty percent of all authorial royalties, both home and abroad. Helen was proofing a romance novel, one of the few financially successful series helping keep the company floating upon the sea of incipient bankruptcy, though the leaks of a changing marketplace coupled to the choppy waters of bad business decisions were deflating the dinghy of solvency every nautical month. Felicity was ordering a fresh supply of pencils, while Hutchinson-Cockburn was glancing over a historical submission on the War of the Roses, though his real focus was on one of the history books he'd bought earlier, now secreted on his lap.

'Interesting,' boomed Hutchinson-Cockburn over the office space as he carelessly copied and pasted a standard rejection email to the War of the Roses submission, for the writer had attended state school and some unknown university outside Oxbridge.

‘What is?’ asked Sarah and Felicity, both of whom were rather fond of Hutchinson-Cockburn’s insouciant manner, delightful pedigree, and charming wealth.

‘This book on the War of the Roses,’ beamed Hutchinson-Cockburn as the female gaze focussed upon him, though he noted he was missing fifty percent of the female gaze as neither Helena nor Yvonne looked his way. He glanced at the history book on his lap and the chapter entitled “Two Approaches to Historical Study” by Arthur Marwick, nodding in approval at the wise word within. ‘It’s got me thinking about how you can’t change history, no matter what *some* may say.’

Yvonne glanced up from the library book hidden on her lap, by which she was continuing her education on how to think about history. ‘And you mean what, exactly?’

‘You cannot change the past,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Facts are facts!’

‘Come on, be specific, Rupert,’ sighed Helen, realising she was going to get very little paid work done for the next hour or so. Not that she minded giving capitalism the two fingers of indolent working practices.

‘It’s a “postmodernist cliché that the historian ‘narrativizes’ the ‘facts’”, intoned Hutchinson-Cockburn, his face turned to the office, his public speaking voice rising to the heavens, his eyes straying to the book on his lap and his mouth passing off someone else’s words as his own. ‘It is a fact that facts “are not discrete entities quietly awaiting the attention of the historian.”’

‘Then what are facts?’ asked Helen, sarcasm edging her words.

‘Well,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, glancing down again. ““The second world war is a fact... What historians actually look for in the mass of sources they analyse and compare... events, great and small, their dates and chronology; But also interconnections between them, and between them and other facts... establishing interconnections, explanation, analysis...”

‘History,’ he continued, booming out only those extracts supporting his view, ‘is “...material conditions, and changes in them; states of mind; the working of institutions; motivations, mentalities, values; the balance is between intention and accomplishment; and all the other important (and

difficult) matters historians are concerned with.” So you see, “a mechanistic conception of the facts is not helpful.””

‘Who said it was?’ asked Helen, sorting her way through the explosion of words. ‘The historian can’t help but interpret history according to their own biases.’

‘Rubbish!’ snorted Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘It’s a well-known fact that “as research proceeds, the historian begins to feel that some answers... are beginning to emerge... certain chains of explanation, are becoming insistent, that new problems are emerging and old ones becoming redefined.”’

‘Ah so you think a posh white historian, who knows nothing outside his posh white world, will suddenly become aware of the issues facing the dispossessed of society by reading up only on diaries and reports and other histories all written by other posh white people?’

‘Facts are facts!’ insisted Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Really?’ countered Yvonne, riffling through her own hidden pages to find an extract to support her developing view of history while breathing a silent “thank you” to the library for stocking an ancient copy of E.H. Carr’s *What Is History?* ““Every journalist knows today that the most effective way to influence opinion is by the selection and arrangement of the appropriate facts. It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them; it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context.”’

‘Balderdash,’ sighed Hutchinson-Cockburn, rolling his eyes upward before hastily rolling them back down to his lap. ““This brings us back to the circumstance which is always totally ignored by the metaphysical critics of history. When the particular historical investigation does reach it’s finally written up form... that report does not form a single self-standing account, which is automatically to be taken as an authoritative, all-encompassing statement, a secure piece of knowledge.”’

‘But people do view textbooks and historians as being definitive and reliable,’ objected Helen. ‘Why else do they talk about facts being facts without considering if they really *are* facts?’

‘Everyone knows a history book “is merely a *contribution* to knowledge, immediately open to scrutiny, analysis and criticism by fellow historians”,’ smirked Hutchinson-Cockburn, feeling the words on the page must have been placed there by kind fate, thus proving his opinion was in truth the only valid view.

‘So you admit history is a flawed process?’ asked Yvonne, discreetly sliding another book onto her knees¹⁷⁷ and quoting from it: “Nationalist history has often been valued by the politically dominant classes precisely because it excludes other, more subversive memories. Conversely, subordinate or ‘invisible’ groups, like women and blacks and sexual minorities, have recognised that their own political prospects depend on contesting the national consensus and acquiring a dignified - or usable - past of their own.”

‘Facts are facts,’ repeated Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘That’s funny,’ said Yvonne, glancing back down. ‘because “One of the most marked features of western society since the 1960s has been the success of excluded social groups in securing access to the instruments of cultural power.” In other words, the dispossessed of history had to fight to get their history recognised, because their facts had been ignored or suppressed.’

‘Pah!’ snorted Hutchinson-Cockburn, desperately flipping backward for an agreeable quote.¹⁷⁸ “If the feminist historian can... write history from her perspective... why should the black historian not do the same - even if such a history might ‘marginalise’ women?”

‘So you admit that historians do marginalise groups, then?’ asked Helen.

‘Why not extend that awareness to Establishment historians?’

“And why not the working-class historian, who might marginalize both women and blacks?” continued Hutchinson-Cockburn, raising his voice to

¹⁷⁷ By an amusing coincidence,* this was exactly the same book Hutchinson-Cockburn had on his lap, (Tosh’s *Historians on History*). Yvonne and Hutchinson-Cockburn were simply looking at different pages and different beliefs.

* Obviously, this isn’t any coincidence at all, but is instead an artistic choice by the author to make a point on how we create history.

¹⁷⁸ Gertrude Himmelfarb’s “Postmodernist history and the flight from fact”.

blank out Helen's point while his eyes strayed toward Yvonne's sex and skin tone.

'Haven't you heard of intersectionality?' asked Helen in exasperation of Hutchinson-Cockburn, who clearly hadn't.

'Traditional history has already marginalised the underdog,' said Yvonne, returning to E.H. Carr while making a mental note to look up intersectionality when she got the chance. 'You'd think there were no Black or working-class people in all of British history, the way some people go on. And bear in mind "the facts of history never come to us 'pure', since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form; they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder... the historian is obliged to choose: the use of language forbids him to be neutral.'"

"And why not the homosexual historian, who might marginalise heterosexuals?" boomed Hutchinson-Cockburn, wrapped up in the sentiments which, in effect, told him that his way of living – indeed, his way of existing – was the only correct one. Validated by the Voice of History in his lap, his own voice rose ever higher in triumph, drowning out all others and giving him victory by sheer posh volume and power:

"Multiculturalism has the obvious effect of politicising history. But it's more pernicious effect is to demean and to dehumanize the people who are the subjects of history.'"

'I think you'll find establishment historians have been doing that since the year dot,' said Helen, acidly.

Hutchinson-Cockburn ignored Helen afresh as his voice rose to a victorious crescendo. "To pluralize and particularize history to the point where people have no history in common is to deny the common humanity of all people, whatever their sex, race, class, religion." You see! We need to see the person, not the colour! Multiculturalism is the issue! It seeks "to trivialise history by so fragmenting it that it lacks all coherence and focus, or sense of continuity - indeed, all meaning." That is the truth of the lefty historian! ¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ My supervisor's response to this chapter: "I think you could point out the unrealistic nature of the scene in some more explicit way, too. It turns into something like a rap battle between Yvonne and H-C throwing quotes at each other in a bizarre stand-off that the author has rigged up to give himself the opportunity to showcase some of his research (or something like that!)" (Dicks, 2021).

‘And Churchill was the greatest Brit ever!’ added Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘And that’s an indisputable fact!’

‘Oh? And where do these “indisputable facts” come from?’ demanded Helen.

‘From history, obviously.’

‘And where does history come from? Does it just appear in history books by some divine hand? Or does it have to be written down by people?’

‘Tcha!’ snorted Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Historians are trained specialists.

They know what they’re doing.’

‘That’s debatable.’

‘And I suppose you think history is a conspiracy?’ sneered Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘It certainly smells of a conspiracy of unthinking elitist tradition,’ replied

Helen, ‘with every writer simply taking their cues from the writers who came before, with no original thought going on anywhere in the process.

And it’s those attitudes and beliefs which go into everything. Books. Plays.

Newspapers. Films. Nothing exists in a vacuum, where culture is concerned.’

In fact, the scene was originally supposed to spoof how students (of all ages and levels) work; by turning to the index to find anything relevant for their research, thus leaving enormous gaps in their knowledge like , and , and of course .

But if we want a rap battle, I suppose we can say:

“I’m the Rupert H to the C
I’m so posh I can use the Royal We
I’m a gangster straight outta Eton
So well bred I can’t be beaten
Mother so loose she wears only fox fur
Scandals in the family? They do sometimes occur
Standing up for my brothers out in the ghetto
To escape Hammersmith and Chelsea, we gotta let go
My class don’t benefit me, I keep it real
So down with the poor, I make do with veal
But come at our man, Winston our hero
I’ll take you down, You’re Rome to my Nero
Churchill was Great
Churchill was Lean
Churchill beat the Germans
By playing it clean
All you communists hiding in the buisson
This is the Church-Hill I will die on.”
Etc.

‘Except dust!’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, the smug expression on his face demonstrating he had scored a palpable hit, though the slight beading of sweat on his forehead hinted his subconscious was getting rather worried about his ability to keep up with Helen’s comments, never mind argue against them.

‘You mean those with power,’ said Yvonne, ‘political, educational, and cultural power, are able to describe and define everything, meaning they also control everything, because they get to tell us *how* to look at the world, which in effect tells us what the world is?’

‘Exactly,’ nodded Helen. ‘And that’s why an unregulated government of posh rich elitists, supported by the billionaire-owned press, is so dangerous to any democracy; we don’t get the news in a newspaper; we get the filtered interpretation of propaganda.’

‘Rubbish!’ snorted Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Facts are facts, and you can’t change them!’

‘Facts are not facts, as we have been trying to explain to you,’ sighed Helen.

‘Those with the power to be published, by which I mean the wealthy elite and their sycophants, are the people who get to describe how the world is; they control the very definition of what our reality is, and how it’s consumed. This is why Churchill the man has been effectively turned into Churchill the Myth.’

‘We’d be speaking German if not for him!’ exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Behold the stock phrase from the stock man,’ sniggered Helen. ‘That’s what Churchill’s supporters always say – and I bet the anti-German racism comes to them very easily. But do they ever look at what he did in office during the war? The decisions he made? The decisions other people – people in the government or industry and the military, people in other countries – made? No, they just trot out the same repeated phrases they’ve imbibed from others. Repeated phrases which deny any chance of establishing a more balanced, nuanced approach to history.’

‘Facts are facts!’ exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Facts are never just facts. When someone researches an area, everything passes through their own filters and perceptions. And their work, be it a

book or article or TV documentary, then passes through the reader's perceptions as they interpret it according to *their* preconceived biases. Biases usually formed by the status quo.'

'I'm not biased!'

'And yet you parrot the pro-Churchillian line without even considering that another point of view could be equally valid,' interrupted Yvonne, feeling she had learnt more from Helen in an hour than she had done in an entire year at school.

'Historians don't blindly replicate!' whined Hutchinson-Cockburn.

'Then why did Thomas Becket become known as Thomas à Becket?' asked Helen. 'Some bugger bunged a letter "A" and an acute accent into his name and it stuck. By replication. For generations. And you can read Mathew Sweet's *Inventing The Victorians* for a whole book on the subject of dodgy history being repeated as Holy Writ. And why do these mistakes persist? Because there is a small group of elitist rulers who carry the inherent power of learning down the generations through their social privilege, meaning it's *their* views which get repeated time over time, that's why.'

'Lefty rubbish!' seethed Hutchinson-Cockburn.

'Rupert is part of the system, and a beneficiary of it, meaning he can't see the value of critical thought,' observed Helen. 'Good critical practice tells us to be aware of our own biases – which is a lesson *some* people could do with learning. Here; try these.' So speaking, Helen skimmed Hayden White's *Metahistory* and Daniel Chandler's *Semiotics* over to Hutchinson-Cockburn, striking him in the assumptions. 'You might discover something new and challenging, and become a better person as a result.'¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ This is highly unlikely to happen. In real life, Hutchinson-Cockburn would be insulated from criticism by his privilege, for he is essentially preserved in layers of thick cultural amber. And this is one of the reasons why nothing will ever change in society. So, if you've enjoyed watching him getting his arse handed to him, please bear in mind this can only happen in a work of fiction.

However, for those who are interested in expanding their horizons, this might be a good place to look at the related areas of media framing, semiotics, ethnography and autoethnography. Media framing focusses on how the media in any form handles any given story, and is concerned with:

...selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition,

causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993).

To this end, the intelligent reader may ask if any given story (article, history book, biography etc) has been presented with a particular perspective or ideology in mind, or has it been more favourable to one person/group/idea than another:

Movements are generally much more dependent on media than the reverse, and this fundamental asymmetry implies the greater power of the media system in the transaction. (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

One clear example of media framing can be found in the documented lies told by the right-wing press in their presentation of the 'loony left'. The Mail on Sunday, for example, told of Haringey Council's supposed policy of banning black bin bags as they were held to be racist:

The Mail on Sunday employed a technique that was common to all such stories, relying for its substantive allegation on anonymous, unidentified, unverifiable sources: 'staff' in the parks department were said to have been given the instruction by 'a storeman' at Haringey's central depot. After protests, the paper ran a disingenuous paragraph the following week which began: 'Black dustbin liners at the centre of a council race storm are not to be banned after all.' Note the sleight of hand. Though admitting that the central point of its previous story was untrue, it reinforced the feeling that something had happened by falsely maintaining that there had been a storm. The use of 'after all' hinted that it might well have happened but for the publicity in the paper. (Greenslade, 2004).

As such, the media was (and is) able to frame a non-existent story as being both factually correct and ideologically disturbing, with the supposed 'looney left' inflicting groupthink upon the innocent, defenceless denizens of the world. And it's not just the media that manipulates us into a particular worldview; our very language manipulates and even controls our thoughts and ideas. This can be seen in the study of semiotics, aka the study of signs and meaning, an academic field which, like media framing, strongly supports the notion that the Establishment's use of language to control society is truly deliberate:

Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. Contemporary semioticians study signs not in isolation but as part of semiotic 'sign-systems' (such as a medium or genre). They study how meanings are made and how reality is represented. (Chandler, 2007).

For the French theoretician Roland Barthes, virtually all sociological construction was both calculated and political:

Statistically, myth is on the right. There, it is essential; well-fed, sleek, expansive, garrulous, it invents itself ceaselessly. It takes hold of everything, all aspects of the law, of morality, of aesthetics', of diplomacy, of household equipment, of literature, of entertainment... the bourgeoisie wants to keep reality without keeping the appearances; it is therefore the

very negativity of bourgeois appearance, infinite like every negativity, which solicits myth infinitely. The oppressed is nothing, he has only one language, that of his emancipation; the oppressor is everything, his language is rich, multiform, supple... the oppressed makes the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter at eternalizing. (Barthes, 1993).

In other words, the natural and obvious is anything but; everything is a construction. Words are not only descriptive; they also create meaning, and that meaning is political in that it has an agenda – both a role to play and a mission to perform. In nationalistic discourse, that mission is to present the supposed “truth” to the masses so they believe, support, and even fight for a conceptual world formed by those in power:

...myths “serve the ideological function of naturalization... Their function is to naturalise the cultural – in other words, to make dominant cultural and historical values, attitudes and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, timeless, obvious common sense – and thus objective and true reflections of ‘the way things are’ (Chandler, 2007).

Semiotics fits perfectly into the Churchillian narrative, (and the wider narrative of nationalism), in its exploration of denotation, i.e. “the definitional, literal, obvious or common-sense meaning of a sign” (Ibid) and the connotation of the sign, i.e. what the sign symbolically represents. The denotative Churchill is the name itself, or a picture of the man, (instantly recognisable to us today owing to the ongoing Churchillian industry). The connotative Churchill are the ideas, themes, aspirations, and values conjured by the use of these denotative signifiers; to hear the word ‘Churchillian’ is to conjure a set of Establishment-approved associations including bravery, tenacity, heroism, statesmanship, etc.

And hence the semiotic ‘them’ versus ‘us’ narrative division is manufactured by the media/Establishment in which reality - or at least a deliberately constructed facade of reality, created by the careful selection, presentation, and omission of certain facts - is pushed forward as the only proper way of viewing things, thus replicating the status quo in the minds of all those who live in it:

The medium of language comes to acquire the illusion of transparency; this feature of the medium tends to blind its users to the part it plays in constructing their experiential worlds. Realistic texts reflect a memetic purpose in representation. (Ibid).

Churchill is now a Myth. The words used to construct this mythic reality appear time and again in Churchillian discourse, regurgitated almost without fail; “he stood up to tyranny”, or “he stood alone against the Nazis”, or the evergreen “We’d all be speaking German if it weren’t for him” being the most common refrains. And with each replication of these words, the sign-system is renewed afresh thanks to binary thinking, an important aspect of sociological construction:

It was [Roman] Jakobsen who proposed that linguistic units are bound together by a system of binary opposition (Jakobsen 1976). Such oppositions are essential to the generation of meaning: the meaning of ‘dark’ is relative to the meaning of ‘light’; ‘form’ is inconceivable except in relation to ‘content’. It is an open question

whether our tendency to think in opposites is determined by the prominence of opposition in language or where the language merely reflects a universal human characteristic. The various conventionally linked terms with which we are familiar with in a culture might more appropriately be described as paired 'contrasts', since they are not always direct 'opposites' (although their use often involves polarization). (Ibid).

This tendency to structure the way we view the world is seen clearly with the media's framing of Churchill into a series of binary oppositions such as Churchill v Nazis, or Churchill v fascism, which can then be elaborated into the (slightly) more complex forms of Churchill/Freedom v Nazis/Oppression, or Churchill/democracy v fascism/oppression, and more generally, Churchill/tradition v anything else/left wing. (Churchill himself compared the left to the Gestapo in an infamous – and catastrophically misjudged – campaign speech during the 1945 general election). And thus is created the cultural landscape in which Churchill is always and forever presented as the good, and anything anti-Churchillian must, by definition, be bad – and if we map this trick onto wider society, we see terms such as 'lefty', 'liberal', 'socialist', 'communist' and 'Marxist' all being positioned (regardless of their actual meaning) as something negative:

There's a long history of anti-racism movements being labelled as subversive Communist campaigns by critics, either through a lack of understanding, or through an apparent aim to discredit the causes altogether.

On both sides of the Atlantic, this trope has been witnessed over decades, whether through the targeting of Dr Martin Luther King by FBI director J Edgar Hoover and the US government in the 1960s, to the persecution of Black British activists by the authorities in the 1970s. (White, 2021).

Semiotics demonstrates how our entire perception of the supposedly 'natural' world is in fact a concept manufactured by those with the power to describe that 'natural' world to us. And it seems some within the Establishment do this deliberately, though no doubt others unthinkingly employ the language and tropes used by those who came before them, blissfully unaware how they themselves are merely cogs in a bigger machine, for they honestly believe their views are self-evidently correct:

Objectivism... is a pervasive myth in western culture. It allies itself with scientific truth, rationality, accuracy, fairness and impartiality and is reflected in the discourse of science, law, government, journalism, morality, business, economics and scholarship... Other myths or mythical discourses include those of masculinity and femininity, freedom, individualism, Englishness, success and so on. (Chandler, 2007).

The result of this is two-fold. Firstly, we can see how the practical application of nationalist mythology can warp a country into a particular ideological belief, as noted by Nesrine Malik:

No matter what profound changes come about in England, one thing always seems to remain the same: the unshakable belief that it is simply a conservative country. This is an influential article of faith: the only way Labour can win power, it follows, is to treat voters as so naturally hostile to leftwing politics that they must be appealed to on Tory ground. Keir Starmer's Labour is lauded as wise and sensible for accepting these terms – wooing big

business, being averse to borrowing and spending, adopting a hard line on immigration and ruling out a wealth tax on the richest. In a “conservative country that occasionally votes Labour”, these are the rules.

But are they really? Is England essentially a conservative country, or has it been made conservative? “Politics does not reflect majorities,” Stuart Hall wrote in 1987, reflecting on the success of Thatcherism, “it constructs them.” The only perennial truth about England is that it is an unequal country, and the Conservative party has leveraged that inequality to its benefit: the English ruling class it represents has constructed its own majority. (Malik, 2024).

And secondly, this mythic nationalism results in a thoroughly disenfranchised population, drained of any and all hope, who subconsciously view capitalism as all encompassing, the beginning and the end, inescapable forevermore, and so the population doesn’t – can’t – even try to escape in word, thought, or deed:

...‘capitalist realism’: the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it. (Fisher, 2022).

The above discussion on media framing and semiotics is complimented by qualitative research, which (broadly speaking) is designed to allow us to see how others see the world. More specifically, this study has made great use of two components of qualitative research; ethnography and autoethnography. Ethnography is “the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities.” (Reeves, et al., 2008). As such, the ethnographical research in this study asks who is consuming the Churchill narrative, i.e. their social and educational position, politics, family, media consumption etc. Autoethnography, meanwhile, came about as:

scholars began illustrating how the “facts” and “truths” scientists “found” were inextricably tied to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists used to represent them. (Ellis, et al., 2011).

In other words, those with power, (political, educational, media etc) were able to describe, define, and thus control (to an extent) that which they were describing. As such, autoethnography is vital as it:

challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ibid).

Autoethnography calls for the researcher to be aware of their own potential biases or pre-existing assumptions, and encourages a critical perspective not only on the subject, but also on the methodologies used to study the subject, in the hope scholars can avoid repeating the assumptions and attitudes of those who came before, and who may have been responsible for setting the agenda in the first place.

Autoethnography, media framing and semiotics tells us to be aware of our own socio-economic prisons, and to be cautious of the cultural prejudices held by society’s dominant hierarchal voices who are able (thanks to their socio-economic privilege) to impose their

views on society. After all, someone who went to an elitist fee-paying school will have been indoctrinated with a different worldview compared to someone who went to a bog standard comprehensive. And that's just one obvious example; now imagine if that elitist set-up was replicated throughout all of society. And then imagine the consequences of that...

However, there are criticisms to be made of qualitative research methods, for unlike quantitative research, it doesn't deal with raw, physical data that can be counted, measured, or weighed, meaning it "can sometimes be seen as self-indulgent and unacademic (especially if the analysis is not developed)" (Wall, 2008), a critique which can also be applied to semiotics:

Sometimes semioticians present their analyses as if they were purely objective accounts rather than subjective interpretations. Few semioticians seem to feel much need to provide empirical evidence for particular interpretations, and much semiotic analysis is loosely impressionistic and highly unsystematic (or alternatively, generates elaborate taxonomies with little evident practical application). (Chandler, 2007).

Chapter Twenty

In which our characters go to lunch and Yvonne has another revelation concerning the differences in behaviour, attitudes, and expectations between the classes.

Seething over the woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda attacking the Greatest Man ever, Hutchinson-Cockburn turned to sociological conformity for support; namely, he glanced at his watch before invoking the incantation guaranteed to summon his kith and kin and restore order to his world. ‘I see it’s lunchtime.’

‘Time for a bite, Rupert?’ asked Vansittart, materialising by the door without any apparent movement from his office.

‘Lovely,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn with the deep pangs of one who hungers after a busy morning’s work – despite having barely been in the office for longer than an hour. And besides, he felt he was owed something after being harangued by the office harridans, and he fully intended to alert Vansittart to the festering socialism going on under his very nose.

‘See you all this afternoon,’ called out Vansittart as he and Hutchinson-Cockburn scurried out.

‘Good idea,’ said Helen. ‘Let’s grab a bite to eat and get a change of scene.’

‘I’m far too busy,’ replied Felicity, rattling her fingers over her keyboard to act as an example to the other staff who, in Felicity’s view, should stay over their breaks to continue their work rather than spending time on luxuries such as eating.¹⁸¹

‘I’ve brought my lunch in,’ said Sarah, heading for the staff fridge. ‘I’ve got more contracts to sort.’

‘You won’t get any real thanks for it,’ replied Helen before glancing over at Yvonne. ‘It’s just you and me, then. My treat.’

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Do YOU feel guilty about taking a lunch break? Survey finds 82% of employees skip the downtime because they feel completing work is more important (Liberatore, 2020).

Yvonne hesitated; she too had bought her own lunch, but the thought of the wilting bread and cheese easily lost out to being treated somewhere.

‘Lovely, thank you,’ she smiled as she grabbed her coat, scarf, and bag.

The two women paused outside the office as Helen lit a cigarette and inhaled with almost orgasmic delight. ‘That’s better.’

‘Isn’t that going to kill you off?’ asked Yvonne, giving a nervous smile to show she meant no offence.

‘As long as I die after the cat, that’s all I ask,’ replied Helen. ‘Where are we heading, by the way?’

‘Sandwich bar?’ suggested Yvonne, nodding over the road.

‘Too busy,’ replied Helen, destroying half of her cigarette with one puff.

‘Pub?’

‘That creep with the union jack t-shirt keeps trying to chat me up in there.’

‘Ah, I know; we’ll try *Klytaimnéstra*.’

‘Try what now?’

‘Clytemnestra, in our lingo. You know, the old Greek myth? Killed her husband in the bath? After he raped her, married her, got her pregnant several times, and then sacrificed their daughter to the gods in return for good sailing winds.’

‘I wouldn’t normally try somewhere like that,’ mumbled Yvonne, abandoning the confusion of Greek myth for the confusion of the authentic artisanal demitasse, authentic artisanal goat’s cheese milk, and authentic artisanal Padrino sandwiches advertised on the board outside the shop, no doubt all written up in authentic artisanal chalk. ‘What on earth is a Padrino?’

‘Let’s find out,’ said Helen, stubbing out her second cigarette and marching forward.

A woman who probably had ‘middle-class’ stamped through her like a stick of rock hurried forward with a menu and the sort of false smile Yvonne dreaded; it was the sort that said “I’m not racist – I’m talking to this coloured person normally” while staying out of range in case they got mugged. ‘Would you like anything to drink?’ she asked, her question only just on the right side of being a demand.

‘Two coffees, please,’ replied Helen, ‘and what is a Padrino?’

‘It’s a spicy fusion of sopressata, calabrese, mortadella and provolone, all entrenched between wood-fired bread,’ replied the woman, her lips twitching in contempt that the question had to be asked.

‘Cheese and ham toastie, thanks’ snorted Helen. ‘How about you, Yvonne?’

‘The same, thanks,’ mumbled Yvonne.

‘And what sort of coffee?’ sneered the owner, who hadn’t borrowed from her own and her husband’s family to create an authentic taste of international cuisine just so she could serve ham and cheese to the lower orders. ‘We do a very fine jamocha.’

‘White, with three sugars,’ responded Helen, firmly, as she and Yvonne settled down at their table.

‘It’s a bit...’ muttered Yvonne, looking around.

‘Poncy as fuck?’ asked Helen, cheerfully. ‘Certainly is. Makes me think of David Brooks.’

‘Who?’

‘American writer. He noted the poor are excluded from success not just by the usual factors of wealth inequality, but by social factors as well. The poor don’t know how to behave when in wealthy situations as they have no experience of it, and this creates further barriers between the classes.’¹⁸²

‘Not knowing which knife to use at the dinner table?’

‘Pretty much, though it goes much further; there are layers of cultural signifiers that people don’t understand if they’re not from the right class.’

‘Like grammar?’ said Yvonne, thinking of her own struggles at school.

‘Social grammar, if you like. It all boils down to like recognising like, so if you don’t know the codes, you’re automatically excluded and so you don’t get the opportunities being passed round. And those codes are everywhere; not just in the way you speak and what your accent sounds like, but in what

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Over the past generation, members of the college-educated class have become amazingly good at making sure their children retain their privileged status. They have also become devastatingly good at making sure the children of other classes have limited chances to join their ranks. (Brooks, 2017).

you watch, what you listen to, what you eat and drink, and how you spend your leisure time. The list goes on.’¹⁸³

‘Oh no,’ muttered Yvonne in dismay as the door opened to admit Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘How did we get here ahead of them?’

‘They probably stopped at the bank first,’ guessed Helen. ‘Let’s see how they navigate this place.’ They watched the two men saunter across the café and settle at a table before glancing casually over the menu, each clearly at home with the content of the contents. ‘See? It’s not just money,’ said Helen. ‘It really is the whole social system.’

‘Hmm,’ mumbled Yvonne, looking in hope for their order; the sooner they ate, the sooner they could get away from where they clearly did not belong. ‘I’ve never really noticed before.’

‘You wouldn’t, because you’re on the outside and so you don’t really get the chance to look inside, except for brief encounters such as this one.

We’re not part of the club.’¹⁸⁴ And as others have noted, it’s not just the trust funds and the access to people at the top who can give you jobs and advice; it’s the hidden cultural advantages as well.

‘How so?’ asked Yvonne, in the tones of one who suspected she didn’t want to know the answer.

‘The whole socialisation process basically prepares middle and upper-class kids for a lifetime of success rather than failure, because the wealthy come from a background in which networking is as common as breathing. Even as children, they’re meeting people who will be useful to them in later life; people in positions of authority in business, or banking, or the media or in

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...the educated class establishes class barriers not through material consumption and wealth display but by establishing practices that can be accessed only by those who possess rarefied information. (Brooks, 2017).

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Status rules are partly about collusion, about attracting educated people to your circle, tightening the bonds between you and erecting shields against everybody else. We in the educated class have created barriers to mobility that are more devastating for being invisible. The rest of America can’t name them, can’t understand them. They just know they’re there.” (Brooks, 2017).

politics, and that means they have someone to hold the door open so they can walk through.'

'Henry!' called out Vansittart in his "Hail fellow, well met!" voice, gesturing at a red-faced man in an expensive suit who was strolling through the shop. 'How are you? How's the family?'

'Not bad, Michael, not bad, thanks. Hello, Rupert, how are you?' asked Henry Sommerville-Davies, beaming complacently at his two socio-economic colleagues.

'You see what I mean?' asked Helen, gesturing at the social reunion. 'It all gets started early.'

'And does it start appearing early? The advantages?' asked Yvonne.

'God, yes. Imagine you come from a background in which writing is common; because of that, it becomes a familiar, easy thing to do. Now, compare that to a background where writing is something that's only done as and when needed, and you can see how you end up with a massive difference in the way children from different socio-economic backgrounds approach filling in an application form.

'A kid from a wealthy background,' continued Helen, 'will sit down with far more confidence and fluency than a working-class kid – so even though they may have the same sort of ability in real life situations, because the wealthy kids have developed a far better way of expressing themselves thanks to their environment, they're the ones who will fill in the application form in a way that will stand out.'

'But won't any competent admissions officer or employer realise that?'

'Highly unlikely, because they'll only see what's on the page, not what lies *behind* the page. They won't see that the working-class kid has succeeded despite their environment. Instead, they'll just see how well the wealthy kid has filled out the form. And they'll have included pages of stuff about their extracurricular activities in the Tennis Club and the debating society – all the things working class kids just can't access. After all, how much more impressive is it to have a long list of achievements on your CV rather than a blank page? And how many potential employers will ask themselves *why* the pages are blank?'

‘But what about talent?’ asked Yvonne as she realised the difference between Hutchinson-Cockburn’s wealthy education, which he had been given, and Helen’s worthy education, which she had acquired for herself. And this, Yvonne was beginning to suspect, was an intentional educational policy by those who held power. ‘I worked hard on all my school subjects. Was I wasting my time?’

Helen shrugged. ‘I’ve seen Michael turn down applications from people who didn’t go to Oxbridge as he genuinely believes they “chose” to go to a lower ranking university, which in his view demonstrates something about their character. Though that was before he twigged about using unpaid volunteers.’

‘But that’s totally ridiculous and unfair!’

‘Yup.’

‘But why do those outside the cultural elite follow and replicate the system? Why do those at the bottom of the social hierarchy just take all the shit that society pushes at them? *Why?*’

‘Being charitable; cultural conformity and brainwashing,’ replied Helen.

‘Some say it all starts at school.’¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Helen is here referring to Louis Althusser; you may wish to glance over his observations below on the inherent socialisation to be found in schooling before turning back to footnote #17 for a refresher on his theories:

What do children learn at school? They go varying distances in their studies, but at any rate they learn to read, to write and to add – i.e. a number of techniques, and a number of other things as well, including elements (which may be rudimentary or on the contrary thoroughgoing) of ‘scientific’ or ‘literary culture’, which are directly useful in the different jobs in production (one instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.). Thus they learn know-how.

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. They also learn to ‘speak proper French’, to ‘handle’ the workers correctly, i.e. actually (for the future capitalists and their servants) to ‘order them about’ properly, i.e. (ideally) to ‘speak to them’ in the right way, etc.

‘And if you’re not being charitable?’

‘People are as thick as shit,’ said Helen. ‘Mind you, I also think some humans are born bigoted; as long as they can blame outsiders for all their problems, they gain validation and a feeling of being superior to someone else. Which suits the Establishment perfectly, and which also explains why the media and the politicians spend so much time demonising minorities and those without power. If you give a bigot someone to hate, you give them a feeling of superiority. And that means the bigots then accept the shit being shovelled at them by those in power.’

‘Do you genuinely think it’s biological?’

‘Possibly. But what is certain is if you can harness – from school onward and society outward – all that hatred, that stupidity, that reverence, then you will be the ruler of all you survey.’

‘But that’s horrible!’

‘That’s humanity. There’s always someone ready to chain themselves down by believing in the status quo. And they’re always ready to chain their family and friends down as well. And any other people who they don’t even know.’

‘That’s horrible,’ repeated Yvonne, too shocked to say anything else by Helen’s cynicism.

‘That’s capitalism,’ observed Helen,¹⁸⁶ who knew she and Yvonne would never get anywhere near the real opportunities. They weren’t the right class.

To put this more scientifically, I shall say that the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’. (Althusser, 1970).

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...elite parents expose their children to different experiences and styles of interacting that are useful for getting ahead in society. Many of these are taken for granted in upper and upper-middle class circles... Basically, if we think of economic inequality as a sporting competition, elite parents give their kids a leg up, not only by being able to afford the equipment necessary to play but also by teaching them the rules of the game and giving them insider tips on how to win. (Farrell, 2017).

They knew Vansittart, but they weren't *of* Vansittart.¹⁸⁷ The best they could hope for was enough money to pay their bills and have a bit left over for their own interests. As long as those interests were relatively cheap and didn't impinge upon the social order. Hence Helen's joint obsession with cigarettes and cats.

'Look at the time!' exclaimed Yvonne as their food arrived, noting their half hour break was nearly up.

'Toss those sarnies in a bag, please, and we'll have them to go,' said Helen to the scowling owner, who was appalled to hear of her gastronomic creations referred to as "sarnies". Helen and Yvonne rushed out, leaving Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn – both of whom looked to be in no hurry to return to their respective duties – chatting with Henry before being joined by Camilla, then Joyce and Tristian, and finally by Allegra and Tarquin, all greeting each other as old friends, current networking contacts, and future opportunities as they ate, drank, and made merry on the expenses tab.

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Before they [public school children] are returned to society they are shown how to use secret languages and how to recognise the expressions, manners and countenances of their tribe... through their network of friends and family they control the government, the army, the police and the City. (Verkaik, 2019).

This is scarcely a new issue; even the arch snob EF Benson noted the difference in his 1917 novel *An Autumn Sowing*, in which the youngest son of a self-made man is sent off to university because:

...John was to be a gentleman. Though there was no one less of a snob than Keeling, he knew the difference between what John had already begun to be and himself perfectly well. Already John walked, talked, entered a room, sat down, got up in a manner quite different from that of the rest of his family. (Benson, 1987).

And now consider all the points raised by the various footnotes in this chapter in regard to Churchill and others like him; being upper class, he got the advantages and opportunities others didn't.

Chapter Twenty-One

In which snark returns triumphant and bold upon the main page! (Though the pages here only exist as my PhD supervisor told me I needed to explain my literary influences, hence the insertion of Reginald Fortescue-Birtwistle – a character who appeared in the early drafted notes before being culled – as a means of doing precisely that). Also featuring a short essay on humour.

That evening, two married strangers who knew each other well sat in solitary silence in their small, rented terrace. The man, Helen's husband, (who is not, alas, important enough to be given a name here), had already made great play of getting into the room on his crutches, banging into walls, the door frame, and any other piece of solid furniture even remotely within reach of his weaving supports. This performance, alas, was but wasted emotional theatre, for his wife didn't glance up once at his carefully arranged expression of silent suffering and noble independence.

Had she looked up and offered any help, he would (naturally) have waved it away for he was a MAN, a strong MAN, a MANLY MAN who could cope MANFULLY with all the world threw at him, and he would merely have asked for another cushion for his back, and possibly a cup tea, and a slice of coffee cake, and just a little help on the stairs, and his favourite dinner being made in place of his usual self-microwaved meal, and maybe also a sticky-toffee-pudding for after, and rather more expressions of concern and attention from his life companion.

Unfortunately, Helen's complete absorption in her phone rather robbed her husband of any of this, and as he crashed down onto the sofa with his plastered leg thrust ostentatiously ahead of him he resolved, there and then, that he was not going to take any such selfishness anymore. He was finally going to do it. He was going to tell his wife fully and frankly he had needs, and those needs were not (in anyway) being met. He was going to tell it to her straight that she ought to be more considerate and – basically – rather more wife-like. But then he glanced across the sofa at her face and crumbled. Again.

Helen, oblivious to her spouse's performance art, was only in the room as she was waiting anxiously for her cat, Mr Fluffy, to return home from his evening adventures – possibly mousing, possibly looking for a juicy bird, but more likely sucking up to her at number 38 who always gave him extra food despite Helen's repeated insistence that Fluffy was well fed and needed no other dietary supplements.

This being the case, Helen had three options while waiting for the feline wanderer: do some work, talk to her husband, or watch TV. She accordingly picked up the TV remote and flipped through channel after channel of utter drivel, with reality shows, biased documentaries, soap operas, and innumerable gritty-a-like crime dramas proliferating.

She then pondered work; Vansittart had recently thrust a manuscript at her for a "critical editorial assessment" as she was "the best editor they had" and "he needed it urgently reviewing", which meant she was expected to get it done even if she had to work in her free time.¹⁸⁸

Helen was uncertain why she was expected to do the assessment, given the book came from one of their established authors – a pompous bore by the name of Reginald Fortescue-Birtwistle who (quite coincidentally) was one of Vansittart's old friends (they had been at Eton together) – meaning they would most likely publish the manuscript anyway.

This triggered an image of Yvonne's enthusiastic, innocent face, and Helen shook her head sadly; the young woman was unfortunately intelligent, meaning she was now learning how the rat race was rigged from the get-go, with Vansittart and his like being positioned three quarters ahead on the track before the starting pistol was even fired. And then she would have to learn to live with that knowledge.

And with that in mind, did she, Helen, really want to spend her evening doing yet more office work? Why not talk to her husband? They had been married for almost two decades, yet they barely spoke outside of necessity.

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If your boss is constantly trying to guilt-trip you, you're being manipulated. There's simply no way around it. Even if your boss doesn't consciously realize what they're doing, the behavior [sic] is still wrong. (CBN, 2020).

Why not try and rekindle their past days and make a fresh start in both their lives?

So thinking, Helen picked up the manuscript and departed for the bedroom, where she could lie or sit depending on how she was inclined, and there she found Mr Fluffy had snuck back into the house and was lying innocently on the bed, a sure sign of feline guilt. Helen scooped up the large ball of soft fur, gave him a kiss and several minutes attention, and then settled down with both cat and manuscript, the former curling into a tight purring ball, the latter opening at the introduction:

A place of Dark Water and Earth; My Literary Influences by Reginald Fortescue-Birtwistle.

For many years now, ever since my first award-nominated novel We All Live Down the Lane debuted...

‘What award?’ demanded Helen of Mr Fluffy. ‘I know his local paper shortlisted him in a public vote for a book award – once – but he didn’t even get that. He lost out to Dan Brown, as I recall.’

...I have been asked repeatedly to put down my thoughts and impressions on our current, undistinguished literary landscape, and finally I have agreed, albeit reluctantly, to do so.

‘Ah, he’s descended into the literary madness of thinking he’s holy writ,’ murmured Helen. This wasn’t surprising, however, as the media and their puppet-readers lapped up Fortescue-Birtwistle’s wartime novels which all featured Churchill as the Bulldog Defender of Britain, wise beyond his years, compassionate to all, (except the Germans, obviously), free of snobbery, and untainted by the venality practiced by just about every real-life member of parliament since day one.

It is difficult, however, to know who exactly has influenced my literary technique, for when one is a voracious reader, and has been reading beyond one’s physical age since childhood, then one ends up absorbing far more stimuli than one can recall...

‘Oh, does one indeed?’ snickered Helen. ‘Pompous asshole!’

...Obviously, Shakespeare and Dickens can both be seen directly in my work, though of course I would never dream of elevating myself to that august rank of literary giant...

‘Meaning that is *exactly* where the little prick sees himself,’ muttered Helen, lighting a fresh cigarette from the remains of her previous butt. *...However, one clear influence upon my developing talent lay in the construction of Susanna Clarke’s Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell, in which copious footnotes explain the context of the novel in a manner reminiscent of a Penguin or Oxford Classic book, and thus a contemporary editor gives scholarly explanations of everyday 19th century life, attitudes, language, and beliefs, so that the modern-day reader can understand the better understand the story, characters and themes.*

‘I see Fortescue-Biscuit-Whistle hasn’t bothered proof-reading this,’ muttered Helen. ‘And by “clear influence” what he actually means is he nicked the idea.’

In this way, Clarke successfully takes the fantasy world of supernatural magic and overlays it with an academic patina, grounding the work in our real, mundane world.

‘And she did it so successfully, the entire novel is rendered utterly mundane and dull,’ muttered Helen, who had read far too much over the years to be impressed by anything anymore.

William Goldman’s The Princess Bride also dislocates the conventional linear narrative by use of constant authorial interventions concerning the author’s own (fictionalised) life and relationship to the text. This, alas, added nothing of real literary merit, however, for the commentary failed to impact upon the main narrative and thus the novel failed in its first purpose of successfully synchronising its disparate elements into a cohesive entity, and in this, Goldman, whose real trade was a Hollywood scriptwriter, demonstrated his naïveté for the higher literary genre as he simply inserted a gratuitous meta-layer of commentary which impacted upon nothing whatsoever.

‘God, why is this arse writing so pretentiously?’ asked Helen of Mr Fluffy, who remained diplomatically silent on the issue. ‘Oh, wait,’ continued Helen in a withering tone as she answered her own question. ‘He’s the great and popular Reginald Fortescue-Birtwistle. He’s *literary*. And seething with envy, I suspect, given his snide remarks on Goldman.’

It's interesting to note how even lesser writers have attempted – unwisely – to copy the stylistic technique of post-modern or meta-narrative, and I say “unwisely” for these are literary devices only open to those who can command them unflinchingly and unhesitatingly. One such failed example is seen in the Poppy Orpington series by Jon Hartless.

‘Who?’ asked Helen, her vast knowledge of published authors bringing up a blank.

Hartless utilises a form of meta-narrative that is, at least, connected to the main subject by making it relevant to the main story, in that a fictionalised editor looks back on the life and events of the so-called ‘heroine’, Poppy Orpington, offering a modern-day analysis and perspective on the main character and the world she lived in, thus allowing Hartless to make scurrilous attacks upon our own society and its traditions.

‘How long does this go on for?’ demanded Helen, tickling Fluffy under his chin.

The whole project was doomed to failure, of course, partly by Hartless’ lack of control of the material, for a meta-narrative requires a firm, clear and trained mind, and Hartless, it appears, only went to an upgraded polytechnic, but also the premise was squandered on an inferior form of sub fiction known as “Steam Punk” – something to do, I believe, with the wholly reprehensible D&D movement.

‘Ah, the snobbery and ignorance is showing,’ murmured Helen. ‘Almost makes me want to read this Poppy Orpington series. Almost.’

Had he ever attended a proper university, it is possible Hartless may have had his abilities raised high enough to reach the lowest echelon of superior fiction, but he did not make the right choice with regards to his seat of learning and hence he cannot write.

Of much greater import is The French Lieutenant’s Woman, by John Fowles. In this classic example of post-modern fiction...

‘Classic? Oh, yes, it was published back in the late sixties,’ said Helen, squinting into her memory. ‘And anything done in the past immediately gets a free pass from certain types of critical commentator.’ She refocused on the present and continued with the manuscript, hoping she could skip a few of the more tedious paragraphs along the way.

...Fowles creates a living, breathing world by continually interrupting that world via a chatty prose style which addresses the reader in a meta-direct manner, and thus the lexical cohesion is broken by these interregnums as fact and fiction collide to create something almost new – though here the book falters somewhat, and the genre did not reach its final form until the early twenty first century with Figgy Andilet's Here a Radish Sits, Hubert Gorman-Featherswallow-Putental's There Flies the Armadillo, and my own modest To Switch, To Note, To Do (which masterfully juggled the complexities of cause and effect as seen through our temporal prism), and hence the Novel form finally achieved the literary transcendence Fowles was only able to nudge at in times gone by.

'And Vansittart actually wants to publish this drivel?' sighed Helen.

'Reginald Fortescue-Birtwistle is an absolute tosser, and so far up his arse he's formed a near perfect ouroboros loop of literary pretension.'

To be fair, however, sometimes we must search in the lower mud of the literary world for the occasional nugget of pure shining gold, as seen in the careers of Umberto Eco and David Cornwall – or John le Carré, to give him the name he adopted for his potboilers.

What both Eco and Cornwall did, or at least attempted to do, was to take pop cultural forms and say something important with them. Cornwall took the easy route of choosing to work in a debased but popular genre, the spy-thriller, in which the hard work had already been laid down by Ian Fleming, who had prepared the public for the spy genre, thus allowing Cornwall to transgress against the accepted norms of that genre which in turn gave him the appearance of a towering literary talent.

'What's that smell?' asked Helen. 'Oh, it's the unmistakable odour of sour grapes. And shit writing.'

Though of course, it is not difficult to appear as a giant in a land of picaninnies.

'Fuck me,' boggled Helen. 'Did Biscuit-Whistle really use that term and not see anything wrong with it? Maybe he's the reincarnation of Agatha Christie? Delivering the same stuff over and over while being riddled with class hatred and racism. And yet still sells by the bucketload.'

We see a similar ploy in the case of Eco, whose The Name of the Rose was a barely competent murder mystery elevated by those who judge glibly by a mish-mash of random thoughts, opinions, and facts, on certain philosophical, and historical matters, all ultimately designed to give the illusion of high literature while being little more than pulp fiction. In this it failed artistically, if not commercially, though I do tip my hat at Eco's populist attempt to get the great unwashed involved in higher cultural ideals than hitherto.

'Bloody hell,' groaned Helen to the cat. 'I wouldn't use this manuscript in your kitty tray. *The Name of the Rose* is a modern classic that treats the reader as being intelligent and open to learning. Maybe that's what horrifies Fortescue-Birtwistle so much?' She skipped ahead a few pages in utter disdain, but found nothing better further on.

Of course, writing historical fiction is a challenge that has defeated many, especially when dealing with such a fascinating enigma as Churchill. Trying to infuse fictional excitement into a real event can be difficult, though in the case of Churchill this is not the a problem, as the man himself had such a varied, rich, successful life...

'Yet another example of how proof-reading matters...'

...that he offers many facets, meaning the latter-day author is spoilt for choice in which aspect he wishes to present to the reader.

'That he wants to present?' growled Helen, knowing full well Fortescue-Birtwistle did indeed mean "he" rather than "she" or "they"; the man was a patronising sexist snob whose self-absorption was total, while his belief in his own literary powers went far beyond his actual abilities.

'And it's a pity,' continued Helen, 'that he hasn't got any factual books on how to read history on his shelves. Hayden White's *Metahistory*, EH Carr's *What is History?*, *The Craft of Research*, *Power Without Responsibility*, and other relevant books such as *Mapping The Nation* and *The English Nation*. Not to mention works on race relations, class, capitalism, sociology, gender studies – all the sort of books you would expect to find on the shelf of a reasonably well-researched creative writing PhD student. Even if the student is something of a fat lazy git.'

But, as Helen knew, Fortescue-Birtwistle was the product of wealth and privilege, hence his mind and writing revolved around the assumptions he had been brought up with – and he lacked the reason, the desire, or the ability to look beyond his own limited horizons.

Of course, one should never confuse what is popular with what is good; Dan Brown has sold by the million, yet only a simpleton would ever consider his work to be in any way literary, for it lacks merit and it would be an insult to my gift to write such trash.

‘Dan Brown again?’ mused Helen, wondering why Fortescue-Birtwistle was referring once again to the American author before her lower memory prodded her. ‘The disingenuous little shit! I remember him sending in a synopsis for a techno-religious thriller featuring a handsome Oxbridge professor who stumbles on a plot by socialist space lizards to overthrow democracy and rule the world – and that was a month or so after Dan Brown first hit the headlines with his “Harvard educated hero stumbling into conspiracy” stuff.’

See also Terry Pratchett, whose crowd-pleasing Discworld series found fame by appealing to the lowest common denominator, despite a lack of any genuine literary talent.

‘Ha! Fortescue-Birtwistle can only dream of having Pratchett’s genuine understanding of humanity and way with words,’ sniggered Helen to Mr Fluffy.¹⁸⁹ ‘Mind you, I’m pretty sure Pratchett copied from Graham Chapman’s *A Liar’s Autobiography*. Certainly, Pratchett’s *Moving Pictures*, featuring a student wizard deliberately failing his exams so he can continue enjoying an inheritance, is identical to a story Chapman told of a medical student deliberately failing his exams for an inheritance. And Chapman made use of abundant footnotes in his book. But then, PG Wodehouse also made use of humorous footnotes in one of his autobiographies, *Over*

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It was as if even the most intelligent person had this little blank spot in their heads where someone had written: ‘Kings. What a good idea.’ Whoever had created humanity had left in a major design flaw. It was its tendency to bend at the knees. (Pratchett, 1997).

Seventy, and I'm sure other authors have followed in their approach to writing.

'Ah well, what goes round comes round, I suppose. And on that note, I don't want to come round until tomorrow, so I'm off to bed. Goodnight, Fluffy.'¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ This would seem to be as good a place as any to expand on our previous brief footnote (#64) on the use and purpose of humour, given Helen has raised the spectre above.

The purpose of this book's heavy-handed humour is purely satirical, for the "overall purpose of satire is usually to make some kind of moral or political change in society through the use of critical humor." [sic] (Queen, 2022). This definition immediately brings to mind the power and rage of Charles Dickens, who frequently turned to satire to highlight injustice. *Bleak House*, for example, focuses on how:

Those in whom power is vested remain persistently remote and insensitive: their sins are not sins of passion but sins of neglect. Dickens's triumph is to render intelligible and vivid the consequences of this social impasse. (Crompton, 1958).

This observation on the remote nature of those who hold power could be applied to *Constructing Churchill* – were it not that this author believes our own ruling elite is not merely remote but is in fact actively cruel and malicious in its attitudes toward the most vulnerable in society, i.e. anyone who isn't posh, wealthy, and socially connected. (See pretty much the rest of this book). However, while Crompton notes how Dickens's satire has strengths and weaknesses – "it succeeds... by virtue of its sweeping energy and sharp wit; ... it fails... because of its overly elaborate rhetoric" (ibid) – *Constructing Churchill* fails as it merely preaches to the converted through heavy-handed sarcasm while succumbing to god-awful clichés like "preaching to the converted". And "god-awful".

Turning to more modern literary satirists, one of the most successful (at least in terms of sales, see also below on whether satire is effective or not) is Terry Pratchett, whose Discworld series:

seems at first glance to be in the vein of such renowned authors as Lewis Carroll. In his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Carroll intertwined fairy tales and the absurd to poke fun at his contemporaries' foibles. The filiation is all the more obvious in that the forty-one novels set in Discworld make myriad references to current events..." (Blanc, n.d.).

One such example is Pratchett's approach to gender conformity and trans rights, filtered through the prism of the Discworld's dwarf community. On the surface, the dwarves are standard fantasy fare; shorter than humans, bearded, with iron helmets, large axes, bad tempers, and all identify as male. However, as more dwarves move into the city, new ways of living/existing are opened to those dissatisfied with their lives, as seen in the character Cheery Littlebottom, introduced in *Feet of Clay*:

When they were out in the fog Carrot said, 'Do you think there's something a bit . . . *odd* about Littlebottom?'
'Seems like a perfectly ordinary female to me,' said Angua.
'*Female*? He *told* you he was female?'
'She,' Angua corrected. 'This is Ankh-Morpork, you know. We've got extra pronouns here.' (Pratchett, 1997).

The reaction to Cheery's coming out as female in the dwarf community demonstrates the folly and hubris of human society, "... that's disgusting! In public too! What happens if kids come in?" (Pratchett, 1997) though humour is never far away as one dwarf, once the dominant censorious social group has moved away, expresses their approval of Cheery's ankles, while another asks shyly if they can try Cheery's lipstick. And Pratchett pushes this line to demonstrate how bigotry affects everyone in society by limiting choice, awareness, experience, and thus personal freedom:

... Look, there's plenty of women in this town that'd love to do things the dwarf way. I mean, what're the choices they've got? Barmaid, seamstress or someone's wife. While *you* can do anything the men do . . .'
'Provided we do only what the men do,' said Cheery. (Pratchett, 1997).

In short, gentle chiding is used to make humans more humane, as Pratchett "began to employ humour not simply to evoke laughter but to address serious issues by ridiculing them" (Lüthi, 2014), which links nicely to the satirical intent of the ancient Roman poet Horace, who saw the exemplary satirist as "an urbane man of the world, concerned about folly, which he sees everywhere, but moved to laughter rather than rage" (Elliot, 2022). Furthermore, Pratchett allows his laudable characters to grow and mature, while those who are (and remain) small-minded are shown to be wrong in their ethics and basic humanity, thus demonstrating a marked contrast between his character types. In contrast to Pratchett's progressive humanism, however, is Evelyn Waugh's sneering Elitism. And racism. Huge amounts of racism:

It's also important when reading these novelists to understand how endemic antisemitism and racism was in British literary culture, before the Holocaust and afterwards. No writer of the period was exempt from this, even if it doesn't always appear in their collected works: read the letters and diaries of TS Eliot and Virginia Woolf to see some startling examples. It's not good enough just to squeal in outrage at the notorious cases. By reading more widely, we can identify the writers who really relished writing vilely about Jews and Africans, and how often they did it. (Macdonald, 2015).

Waugh's racism can be seen plainly in *Scoop*, (1938, a highly relevant text for my PhD, dealing as it does with fraudulent and dishonest journalism), in which a mis-identified journalist, William Boot, in search of a visa to a fictional African country, has to visit the Ishmaelian embassy. The unnamed Ishmaelian ambassador is portrayed as having to wipe "the line of froth from his lips" (Waugh, 1938) as he appropriates the work and achievements of others on behalf of Black people – presumably as he (and every other Black person) has no genuine accomplishment to laud.

The Ishmaelians themselves are presented as "untroubled by the speculative or artistic itch" (ibid), and further contempt comes when we are told numerous European visitors to Ishmaelia – "missionaries, ambassadors, tradesmen, prospectors, natural scientists" (ibid) – were all eaten, for in Waugh's world "Black" is synonymous with "savage" and "cannibal". The country itself, meanwhile, lacks any coded descriptor of civilisation, "language, history, habit, or belief" (ibid), and perhaps most damningly, the land is a republic – a further hint on the degeneracy of the entire country as it could have chosen to be a 'proper' monarchy, with a legitimacy derived (as with all monarchies) from its own existence.

Waugh, then, appears fundamentally opposed to any idea of Black people being worthy of respect, and they are encoded from first to last as untrustworthy, inferior, and dangerous, unlike the white English who are merely untrustworthy in journalism and genially

incompetent elsewhere. Certainly the humour employed against Black people is in sharp contrast to Waugh's light, ironic detachment toward his bumbling white characters such as the press baron Lord Cropper, who believes himself to be a visionary when he is but a fool, or Lord Cropper's editor, who selects the wrong William Boot from the staff list, while William himself knows nothing of being a war correspondent.

At no point does Waugh seriously challenge these characters, or by extension the Establishment and its systems; instead, he merely gently mocks the world that formed and supported him, and the Establishment is left unharmed and unchanged by the book's end. Which may explain why Waugh remains perennially popular with the elite, for he posits that human nature will never change, which logically dictates that human society will never change, thus leading to the comforting conclusion for the Establishment that their lives and privilege will likewise never change).

But then, according to one critic, it is Waugh himself who is the true victim – of modern woke society. Bruce Newsome, luxuriating in this Establishment victimhood, claims that "Upper classness alone would prevent his [Waugh's] novels from being debuted today (although publishers reprint his past successes). (Newsome, 2020). One wonders how Newsome came to this conclusion, given that the actual statistics on the publishing industry found that "A total of 94% of authors in the U.K. are white, with 2% Asian, 2% mixed race, and 1% black", (Denny, 2019), while further statistics:

...show publishing to be the least socially diverse of all the UK's creative industries, including film, television and advertising. If the majority of decision makers – gatekeepers – come from such a narrow social and cultural set (white, middle-class, good contacts, right accent and cultural references), then the question of who gets published and which stories get told is unlikely to change. (Waal, 2018).

Focusing on Newsome's spluttering elitist outrage at things that literally don't exist does seem to confirm the oft-repeated statement that satire is dead. Or at least, it may suggest that satire was never much more than a warmed-over Frankenstein creation, lurching through the Establishment village and frightening the inhabitants but ultimately changing little of consequence.

This leads to the question of exactly how successful satire can be. Henry Fielding's plays made a considerable negative impression upon the Establishment in the eighteenth century, resulting in the Prime Minister in all but name, Horace Walpole, putting:

censorship on a statutory footing with his Licensing Act 1737, giving the responsibility of stage censorship directly to the Lord Chamberlain. Under the Act, the Lord Chamberlain could suppress any performance without recourse of appeal. The measures were softened with slight modifications in 1788 and 1843, but essentially our public entertainment remained thus bridled for over 200 years. (Paterson, 2017).

However, a cursory search on the condition of satire today finds many eager to dismiss its relevance and effectiveness; Emma Burnell, writing in *The Independent*, (majority owned by sanctioned ex-KGB agent Evgeny Lebedev) begins her attack on satire by praising another article by (privately educated son of a wealthy ex Conservative MP) Hugo Rifkind, who apparently attacked satire for being useless. (The article is behind a paywall on *The Times*, [owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, the entity behind the phone hacking scandal of the early 2000s], and as such, I'm not paying to see it. Suffice to say, Burnell gushes over it, so we can safely assume her opinions coincide with the original). And the basic gist of the article emanating from the very heart of the Establishment? Satire doesn't work:

Satire hasn't had any real "effect" on political culture for decades. Just as Ben Elton didn't bring down "Mrs Thatcher", nor did Rory Bremner stop the Iraq war, both performed generally for audiences who enjoyed cheering them on rather than those who were intended to be on the sharp end of their wit. (Burnell, 2017).

Burnell then disappears even further up her own Establishment arse by firmly placing the failure of satire onto the common herd who, it seems, are the ultimate holders of power in society:

In the last few years, politicians have actively and repeatedly given up their power in favour of plebiscites. Referendum after referendum has been held on both simple and incredibly complex questions alike because politicians no longer really feel in charge. (Ibid).

Burnell then doubles down on how the electorate, i.e. those with one vote every five years, no true representation in parliament, no money, no connections, and thus no power, are to blame for everything because of their natural indolence and selfishness:

How does satire find a way to challenge and discomfort "the people"? How do you bring that message to an audience who will naturally choose not to listen and whose choices are broad enough not to have to? (Ibid).

All this does raise the question of why the media trustafarians and their lackeys have taken it upon themselves to write so heartily on the topic. After all, if satire is so useless, it's never going to threaten the unfair privilege of the few, so why waste time writing on it? But then, knee-jerk belittlement does seem to be the standard response of the Establishment toward anything that could *potentially* threaten them, presumably to ensure there is no chance of meritocratic change occurring anywhere in society. Perhaps the last word on satire should go to Juvenal, whose definition of the satirist is that of:

the upright man who looks with horror on the corruptions of his time, his heart consumed with anger and frustration. Why does he write satire? Because tragedy and epic are irrelevant to his age. Viciousness and corruption so dominate Roman life that, for someone who is honest, it is difficult not to write satire. He looks about him, and his heart burns dry with rage; never has vice been more triumphant. (Elliot, 2022).

Helen, incidentally, would send Fortescue-Birtwistle's manuscript back to Vansittart with the comment "Utter Drivel" written on the front. It was published the following year.

Chapter Twenty-Two

In which the narrative snark encroaches ever more onto the main page of the Establishment. And quite coincidentally, Yvonne get to grips with some real history and thus increases her knowledge and learning...

‘What are you looking puzzled about?’ asked Helen of Yvonne the following morning.

‘I was wondering about Tonypandy,’ said Yvonne, trying to simultaneously read through four Churchill biographies spread over her desk while also focusing on two Internet tabs on the same subject as she continued her doomed quest to impress Authority into giving her an opportunity.

‘Ah, right,’ grunted Helen.

‘What’s Tonypandy?’ asked Sarah.

‘A town in Wales where Churchill sent in the troops when the miners were striking,’ answered Helen. ‘The arguments have festered ever since as to what their orders were, the appropriateness of the action, and whether the troops shot anyone or not.’

‘Troops shot at their own people?’ goggled Sarah, unwilling to believe any such thing could ever happen in England; that sort of thing only ever featured in foreign reports. In foreign places. With foreigners.

‘Maybe not at Tonypandy, but using the army to suppress or even kill strikers was a typical response back then,’ said Helen. ‘I bet the buggers would do it today as well, if they thought they could get away with it. Which they probably could, given the supine nature of the English,¹⁹¹ coupled with the country’s police force which exists to protect the status quo, not to serve the public or pursue justice.’¹⁹²

¹⁹¹

The British are, in large part, a deferential people, with a tendency to look up to, and not down upon, governments which remain suffused with the trappings of a monarchical and aristocratic society. (Cobain, 2017).

¹⁹²

Police breached “fundamental rights” at a vigil for Sarah Everard and “Kill the Bill” protests, a parliamentary inquiry has found. (Thompson, 2021).

‘How can you say that?’ demanded Sarah, supported by vigorous nods from Vansittart, Hutchinson-Cockburn and Felicity.

‘How much corruption have we got in the government?’¹⁹³ asked Helen.

‘And how often have the police done its job of investigating that corruption, unless forced to?’¹⁹⁴

‘Well, I still don’t believe the troops shot at anyone,’ replied Sarah, primly.

Though “won’t believe” would have been closer the truth, for Sarah was thoroughly indoctrinated by the tabloid media and thus she was already blaming the strikers for (a) not moving on when told to do so by authority, and (b) for striking instead of working. As such, it was also terribly easy to blame the miners for their lives instead of blaming the corrupt society that kept the poor and oppressed at the bottom of the heap.

‘It was a text-book response,’ shrugged Helen. ‘You can look up the Llanelli riots as well, where troops shot and killed two people, one of whom wasn’t even a rioter. Churchill was the Home Secretary then, and he

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Could it be that UK politicians are not corrupt? Let’s look at that evidence – cases so well known that they require no explanation. The Jenrick-Westferry Affair. The Jenrick pork-barrelling allegations over the Towns Fund. The Cummings Barnard Castle Affair. The resignation of the independent adviser on the Ministerial Code over the Priti Patel Affair. The Hancock Man-in-Pub Affair. Multiple allegations of PPE procurement cronyism, and the National Audit Office’s unease about an unaccountable fast-track system for politicians’ contacts. The Cruddas House of Lords Affair. And now the Cameron-Greensill Affair. That’s all just in the past year: the sheer number in that space of time is unprecedented in the modern era. (Barrington, 2021).

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Cressida Dick has *finally* confirmed that the Met Police will investigate the parties held in No 10 Downing Street and Whitehall, after we initiated formal legal proceedings against them.

...

The Met’s determination to outsource this vital job to the civil service, via Sue Gray, was unbelievable then – and remains so now. It is hard to imagine the Met Police acting “in concert with” any other workplace that is suspected of wrongdoing, because they “have access to all sorts of things” and “know the systems” (to quote Dick’s announcement today).

We remain deeply concerned by the perception that it’s one rule for the Government and one rule for everyone else. (Good Law Project, 2022).

suspended the act stating troops had to be called in by the local authorities, meaning the army could instead be despatched on the government's say so – without waiting to see what was happening with the situation.'

'What does the Manchester biography say on it?' asked Sarah, clinging to the hope that the thick, solid, reassuring biography would explain all.

'It seems to gloss over it,' said Yvonne, rifling through the pages of *The Caged Lion*. 'There's a reference here to some people – I assume he means Labour members – who never forgave Churchill for Tonypandy, but that's it. There's nothing else. At all. Which makes me wonder what the significance is of Manchester omitting it.'

'I'm sure Churchill did nothing untoward,' sighed Hutchinson-Cockburn in exasperation.

'No, he must have had his reasons,' insisted Sarah, briefly struggling with the cognitive dissonance of keeping her sociological indoctrination of Churchill as a Great Man intact against the knowledge he had been literally trigger happy when it came to the working classes. Sadly, it didn't take long for the indoctrination to triumph over the mere facts.

'Let's have a proper gander at Tonypandy, then, and see if we can find the truth,' said Helen. 'Though I doubt we will, as the truth rarely gets out in history. We just get the interpretation.'

'Here's one article,' said Yvonne, printing out enough copies for everyone.¹⁹⁵

There are fears that statues of Winston Churchill and Mahatma Gandhi in the UK could be toppled after both were named in a Welsh government report reviewing historical figures as 'complicit' in colonialism and slavery

'It's manipulating the reader from the off, isn't it?' said Helen. 'I mean, stating there are "fears" rather than, say, "discussion". And statues are always "toppled" instead of "removed with good reason".'

'Without Churchill, the allies would have lost the war!' snorted Vansittart, ignoring the specific issues within the article of colonialism and slavery in

¹⁹⁵ (The Tribune, 2020).

favour of a general point no one had raised.

‘I think several million soviet and American soldiers would disagree with that,’ said Helen, transmitting the most obvious look of contempt possible while remaining within the bounds of future employment.

‘The soviets were Nazi allies in the early days, before Hitler invaded and they switched sides!’ jeered Hutchinson-Cockburn, following Vansittart’s lead of ignoring the issue at hand in favour of focusing on something else entirely.

‘Gosh, switching sides for the sake of power,’ smirked Helen. ‘Now, who does that remind me of? Oh, wait, was it Churchill in his early years, abandoning the Conservative party¹⁹⁶ for a chance of power with the Liberals before running back to the Conservative party after he lost his seat?’¹⁹⁷

Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn snorted simultaneously to show their contempt of these ~~historical facts~~ woke lefty ravings before finding refuge within the next part of the article:

The report said that “many reputations have been brought into question” and “there is a need to assess the culpability or otherwise of individuals who are publicly commemorated and celebrated”.

This comes amid the Black Lives Matter protests and brings into question the reputation of the former wartime Prime Minister Churchill and civil rights leader Gandhi.

‘Black Lives Matter?’ sneered Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Those woke lefty immigrant atheist PC Muslim Marxist trans gay agenda thugs who want to indoctrinate our children into being woke lefty immigrant atheist PC

¹⁹⁶

It was becoming apparent that the Conservative Party was steadily losing its popularity... It was obvious that Conservative election prospects were declining. (Cowles, 1953)

¹⁹⁷

During this period Winston had fought and lost three contests, had severed his connection with the liberals, and made his way once more back to the Conservative ranks. (Cowles, 1953).

Muslim Marxist trans gays?’¹⁹⁸

‘They’re fighting a system which routinely kills Black people for being Black,’ snapped Yvonne. ‘A system that discriminates against Black people at every level.’¹⁹⁹

‘That’s not true. The police are fair and even-handed!’²⁰⁰

‘You only say that because of media manipulation,’ said Helen. ‘The police are often quoted freely and framed as justifiable, incorruptible authority. And whenever corruption or criminal activity carried out by the police is reported on, it’s always presented as the cliché of one bad apple rather than as an issue with systemic failure.’²⁰¹ Do you ever think about that, or consider it at all when you’re reading the newspapers?’

Another double snort erupted from the two posh men, thus demonstrating they had no real answers to the points being raised:

Churchill, which [sic] has two buildings and 15 streets named in his honour, had been found to be

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I call it “smokescreen trolling”: flooding the zone with (bull)shit and lighting the fuse to every moral panic possible, while obscuring the underlying assaults against pluralistic, multiracial democracy. (Whitney, 2021).

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It’s starkly evident that major ethnic and racial inequalities persist in employment, housing and the justice system. Black and Muslim minorities have twice the unemployment rate of their white British peers and are twice as likely to live in overcrowded housing. They are also much more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. We could also add to the list the alarming ethnic differences in deaths from COVID-19. (Heath & Richards, 2020).

200

Organisers of anti-racism protests in the UK have accused the police of unfairly targeting black people during the lockdown and called for further demonstrations this week.

...

The Guardian revealed last week that BAME people in England were 54% more likely to be fined under coronavirus rules than white people. (Mohdin & Dodd, 2020).

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Measures taken by the Metropolitan police to tackle corruption are “fundamentally flawed” and “dire”, with continued failings down to arrogance, secrecy and lethargy, a devastating independent report has said. (Dodd, 2022).

“widely hated in South Wales mining communities for his actions as Home Secretary during the Tonypandy riots”, the report said. The report added that Churchill “expressed a belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race”, was “opposed to dismantling the British Empire”, and failed “to take sufficient action to relieve the Bengal famine”.

He was of his era,’ insisted Vansittart, tapping his copy of the article as though it contained irrefutable proof supporting his point. ‘What do you expect of anyone in that time?’

‘Maybe some basic humanity, as demonstrated by Churchill’s contemporaries who criticised him for his attitudes?’ asked Helen.

‘And I suppose you want every monument to be torn down and history to be rewritten so it fits your narrative?’ yapped Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Why not?’ said Yvonne. ‘History has already been written to support *your* narrative – the white establishment narrative. And it’s been that way for centuries. So why not let others have a place in the history books?’²⁰²

‘Yes, but look at this next section!’ proclaimed Vansittart, his face glowing with the smug righteousness of deflection:

The report also named Indian independence leader Gandhi, whose statue stands in the Welsh capital.

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A few on the left are suggesting that statues, and in particular Churchill’s statue which has become such a bone of contention, are somehow a distraction. But it is the fact that protestors who are talking about police murders – and increasingly putting forward the critical structural demand of defunding the police and prisons – are also talking about *pulling down statues which represent a history that continues to reproduce itself*, which makes the significance of this political moment inescapable.

...

And we cannot shy away from exposing the myth of Churchill on the grounds that he is too well-entrenched as an icon of Britishness. Rather we have to confront head on that it is an imperialist, racist scion of the upper class – who also viscerally hated the working class in his own country and was hated in return – who encapsulates best what British nationalism means today. It cannot be reappropriated or reframed – it must be replaced by the vibrant anti-racist, anti-imperialist, revolutionary abolitionist solidarities which are growing across the world. (Wilson, 2020). [Emphasis mine].

Gandhi has been implicated for “racism against Black South Africans”.

‘See?’ continued Vansittart. ‘It’s a problem everywhere!’

‘Exactly! But you never hear about Indians being racist in the media, do you?’ agreed Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘What, apart from right here in this media report we’re all reading right now, you mean?’ asked Yvonne.

‘We’re not allowed to talk about it,’ whined Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘We can’t mention the religion of peace, can we? Or their grooming gangs!’²⁰³

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This week marks a watershed moment in a decade of discussion of “grooming gangs”: a much-anticipated Home Office report has concluded that there is no credible evidence that any one ethnic group is over-represented in cases of child sexual exploitation.

For many in Britain today the term “grooming gang” immediately suggests Pakistani-heritage Muslim men abusing white girls, but the Home Office researchers now tell us that “research has found that group-based offenders are most commonly White”.

A powerful modern racial myth has been exploded. What started as a far-right trope had migrated into the mainstream, meeting little resistance along the way. (Cockbain & Tufail, 2020).

The above highlights perfectly the enormous overlap between right-wing extremism and the UK mainstream media; indeed, one is tempted to conclude it’s not so much an overlap as a happy marriage of beliefs and bigotry. Only the behaviour is different, for while the extremist favours violence, the UK media prefers destroying lives by innuendo, lies, and propaganda:

The existence of racism in the UK media, which has been brought to the fore in the wake of the Meghan and Harry interview with Oprah Winfrey, is fuelled not only by archaic attitudes but by a lack of newsroom diversity.

After the interview aired, Ian Murray, head of the Society of Editors, penned a statement headlined “UK media not bigoted”. He resigned after facing objections in the form of a strongly worded letter from journalists of colour from the Guardian, Metro, New York Times and others. (Sloane, 2021).

And also:

The media plays a central role in shaping public opinion: offering partial, selective and ideologically-loaded access points to the world beyond our everyday experiences. For many heterosexual people, it is through the media that they encounter LGBT identities. This is why media representation has been, and remains, such an important issue in the struggle for LGBT rights.

Whether national treasure or person on the street, in recent years these representations have become increasingly negative.

With a smirk of triumph, he returned to the article:

“An audit of memorials in Wales has assessed the historical figures they celebrate for ‘culpability’ in the slave trade, imperialism and racial bigotry,” The Telegraph reported.

Leading the audit, Gaynor Legall told The Guardian that some contentious memorials “could be moved to museums so people can see the links”.

“I don’t see the point of destroying things, there’s

In May this year, the Daily Express put the word “marry” in inverted commas when tweeting about the openly gay, Olympic medal-winning diver Tom Daley.

The grammar breathed new life into the old, homophobic idea that “real” marriage can only take place between heterosexuals.

This was not an isolated incident, but the tip of a growing iceberg of thinly veiled homophobia since the EU referendum.

The right-wing press in Britain has a well-deserved reputation for homophobia. In 1986, for example, The Sun “discovered” that a teachers’ resource library in the London borough of Islington held a copy of a children’s book called *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* about a young girl and her two gay dads. The paper branded the book “vile”, “perverted”, and a direct threat to the children of Britain.

This homophobia did not spring out of nowhere, but was part of a joint effort, in the run up to the 1987 election, between the right-wing media and Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government to paint Labour as the “loony left”, who were apparently prioritising the needs of minority groups over “normal” – white, heterosexual – families. Homophobia was central to this strategy, and throughout the AIDS epidemic of the late 1980s the press persistently associated gay people with danger, contagion and death.

...

Amid the current government’s drastic programme of austerity, and under the newer shadow of economic uncertainty posed by Brexit, the right-wing press has begun to repackage these old homophobic myths. (Lovelock, 2017).

And now consider who makes up the bulk of the media:

... journalists are more likely to come from households where a parent works/worked in a higher-level occupation, one of the key determinants of social class. 80 per cent of journalists had a parent in one of the three highest occupational groups, compared to 42 per cent of all UK workers... (Spilsbury, 2022).

In other words, journalists are usually posh, white, and wealthy. They form the media narrative according to their own insular beliefs, and thus they mould society. No wonder most of the office staff unthinkingly align themselves with racism, classism, sexism etc; for Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn, it is their inheritance. For Felicity and Sarah, it is their indoctrination into cultural serfdom.

enough death and destruction around as it is,”
Andrew Roberts, author of “Churchill: Walking
with Destiny”...

‘Yes, exactly!’ crowed Vansittart.

‘But the article just said the statues could be moved to museums,’ countered Helen. ‘Hardly “destroying” them, is it?’

‘It’s destroying their context and history,’ flubbed Vansittart after several moments thought.

‘So a statue with a plaque saying why the person was great is proper history, but a statue with a plaque giving some genuine historical context is somehow destroying history? Right, got it, that makes perfect sense.’

“It’s rare for quite such a level of ignorance to be squeezed into one single paragraph, but the Welsh Government has exceeded itself in the bilge it has regurgitated about Winston Churchill.”

“Churchill did not order troops with bayonets into Tonypany. Nor did any of Churchill’s actions make the Bengal Famine worse than the typhoon had already made it,” Roberts said and added that the Welsh government had authorised “tripe posing as history”.

‘Hang on a minute,’ interrupted Yvonne, whose anger was growing exponentially at the casual dismissal by her employer and her employer’s favoured volunteer of anything they disagreed with. ‘The article doesn’t mention bayonets at all, except for when this Roberts person dismisses them. So, where does he suddenly get them from?’

‘Probably the original report the article is based on mentioned bayonets somewhere?’ sighed Vansittart.

‘If so, in what context?’ demanded Yvonne. ‘Why didn’t the article specify? Especially as Roberts is explicitly rubbishing that claim.’

‘Probably the reporter asked Roberts about that issue, received the reply, and then omitted asking the question, thus leaving Roberts’ comment orphaned and without context,’ boomed Hutchison-Cockburn. ‘Typical shoddy lefty journalism.’

‘Or just typical shoddy journalism full stop,’ said Helen. ‘Then again, maybe Roberts brought up the bayonets himself, even though no one else

mentioned them?’

‘All of which means we’ve got no idea if the article is badly written or disingenuously written, or if Roberts was bringing up points no one had asked about,’ observed Yvonne. ‘So what, exactly, are we supposed to believe?’

Chapter Twenty-Three

A continuation of Chapter Twenty-Two.

‘We can at least ascertain the truth concerning Churchill’s role at Tonypandy,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn with smug pomposity.

‘Really, Rupert?’ simpered Sarah.

‘How so, Rupert?’ asked Felicity simultaneously.

‘We have Andrew Roberts’ very own *Churchill, Walking With Destiny* right here,’ announced Hutchinson-Cockburn, pointing at Yvonne’s stack of biographies as though he alone was responsible for its presence. ‘We simply have to reach out, open the book, and we will see exactly what the truth is.’ He suited the words to the action, grabbing the book from the top of the pile.

‘Or more likely we’ll see what Roberts *says* about Churchill and Tonypandy,’ muttered Yvonne, whose remaining faith in biographers and historians was fading faster than a politician’s ethics when presented with a wodge of cash from a dodgy donor. ‘And that’s not necessarily the same thing.’

Hutchinson-Cockburn smirked in derision, knowing Yvonne was going to have to eat her words. He was convinced that Roberts, who had so indignantly and scornfully dismissed the Welsh report, would prove to be a deep well of information on the Tonypandy affair, with close research into all the relevant archives, thus giving Roberts the platform of truth upon which he could make the robust assertion that Churchill was innocent of any and all wrongdoing.

That power lay beneath Hutchinson-Cockburn’s hand. And he intended to use it.

He turned to the index.

And scanned down.

And found nothing.

Hutchinson-Cockburn looked again, rather more slowly, and then again, and then once more, his eyes moving ever more carefully until he finally found just four references, of which only the first actually dealt with what

happened – but even then, nothing was really explained in depth. But he couldn't admit to that, for his reality would not permit it, so he instead read out loud as though Churchill was being entirely vindicated:

“Churchill sent 300 Metropolitan Police officers, and although troops were dispatched to the area under the command of General Sir Neville Macready they were not deployed after serious rioting broke out on 7 and 8 November in Tonyandy in the Rhondda Valley, where 63 shops were damaged and looted. One striker was killed, even though the police used rolled-up raincoats to control the violence. Churchill's decision not to use troops was criticised by the times for showing weakness but praised by the Manchester Guardian as having 'saved many lives'.” (Roberts, 2019).

This, to Yvonne's developing critical faculties, seemed to raise more questions than answers. 'Hang on;' she said, causing a wince to flit over Hutchinson-Cockburn's face at her uncouth mannerism. 'Were the troops actually used at all?'

'I don't know,' muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn.

'When, where and how did the violence break out?'

'I don't know.'

'Who was the striker who was killed, and who killed him?'

'I don't know.'

'How exactly did the police use rolled-up raincoats? How would that be effective?'

'I don't know.'

'And which police force? The metropolitan, ordered in by Churchill, or the local forces? Who directed them? Who told them what level of force to use?'

'I don't know.'

'Why is Roberts so vague here, but so specific on the exact number of damaged and looted shops?'

'I don't know.'

‘We have to take a hell of a lot on trust, and that section frames the police as being in the right from the very start. And the final point being made is pro-Churchill, which surely gives the impression Churchill is in the right as he’s given the luxury of the last word?’

‘I don’t know! I mean, I think you’re reading too much into things,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, looking for support around the office and receiving it in smiles and nods from three of the people present, which put him (and his views) in the majority and thus proved he (and his views) were right, as was history and (by extension) all of society. Or at least, the wealthy parts of society.

‘Hey, look at this,’ said Yvonne, her voice rising in surprise at what she had found online:

There is much emphasis, in Churchill hagiography, on refuting the idea that he ordered troops to attack striking miners in South Wales (something for which he is despised by the local community to this day). What in fact happened is that Churchill sent battalions of police from London, and held troops in reserve in Cardiff, in case the police couldn’t get the job done. There was never any doubt that Churchill was on the side of the employers, and prepared to mobilize the full force of the British state to see matters settled on their behalf. During a standoff with armed Latvian anarchists in Stepney, he took the unusual step of assuming operational command of police for the duration of the siege, and ultimately opted to kill the enemy by allowing them to be burned to death in a house where they were trapped. (Seymour, 2018).

‘Typical lefty lies!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘Stick with Andrew Roberts. Now there is a scholar!’

‘This calls for more research,’ said Helen, directing the comment at Yvonne as she knew Hutchinson-Cockburn possessed a hackneyed mind which had been effectively sealed off from the world by his elitist background. ‘Why not try looking up who Roberts actually is? That way, you may get some idea of who he is and where he’s coming from. And what his agenda is.’

‘He’s a historian,’ sighed Vansittart in theatrical exasperation. ‘He doesn’t have an agenda.’

‘Everyone has an agenda,’ replied Helen. ‘It’s called being human.’
Yvonne turned back to the Internet, her fingers flying over the keyboard.
‘Right, I’ve just found this on him; an article in *The Independent* by another writer. I’ll print it off for everyone.’²⁰⁴

What does it say about Britain that today we merrily laud a historian who celebrates the most murderous acts of the British Empire – and even says women and children who died in our concentration camps were killed by their own stupidity?

Andrew Roberts is routinely described in the British press as a talented historian with a penchant for partying. They affectionately describe how the 46-year-old millionaire-inheritee sucks up to the English aristocracy.

‘Sour grapes from a lefty troublemaker,’ mumbled Hutchinson-Cockburn, but only loud enough for Vansittart to hear.

This is not merely a matter of the past. Roberts sees his histories as road maps to the future, advising George W Bush, at a White House dinner to celebrate his histories, to adopt "the whole idea of mass internment", saying: "I think it is the way the administration of Iraq should go." Incredibly, he cited Ireland as a model of how internment can work, a claim that provokes incredulity in Irish historians.

This man is a high-society yob and he would be shunned in a culture that took human rights seriously. But it appears that in Britain today justifying mass murder will be cheerfully overlooked, provided the killing was carried out under the flapping of the Union Jack, and you can sprinkle some tart gossip into the pages of Tatler afterwards.

‘It’s a hatchet job!’ exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘It’s the tolerant left being anything but!’ He barked with laughter at his own original wit – actually picked up from innumerable right-wing websites and message boards.

‘And what if it’s true?’ asked Helen, her eyes gazing at her handbag and thus the location of her cigarettes. ‘Is it still a hatchet job if the facts are accurate?’

²⁰⁴ (Hari, 2011).

‘Hey, it looks like the article writer has a dodgy record as well,’ said Yvonne, who – unlike Hutchinson-Cockburn – was determined to find out as much information as possible so she could reach a fair analysis. ‘His name is Johann Hari and he got caught committing plagiarism. And editing articles on Wikipedia to attack journalists who criticised him.’

‘There, you see?’ bellowed Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘It’s the lefty liars twisting things!’

‘Well,’ said Yvonne, opening fresh tabs and finding out more information, ‘here’s another assessment on Roberts by someone called RJ Stove, who seems to be writing for a publication with the word “Conservative” in their title, so I’m guessing he’s a solid right winger. And he’s really lashing into Roberts.’

Roberts's newfound vogue rests almost entirely upon A History of the English-Speaking Peoples Since 1900. Whether this 754-page blockbuster is the most mendacious tract marketed as nonfiction within the last decade, or whether Roberts genuinely believes the tripe he spouts therein, is among our era's more conspicuous literary puzzles... Roberts has become... not a historian at all but an advertising agent, whose account happens to be the Anglosphere... (Stove, 2008).²⁰⁵

‘That’s pretty brutal,’ said Helen.

‘It gets worse,’ replied Yvonne:

To expect in Roberts’s effusions the smallest nuance or humility makes hunting for four-leaf clovers seem like an intelligent use of one’s time. He is incorrigible. Not only must every good deed of British or American rule be lauded till the skies resound with it, but so must every deed that is morally ambiguous or downright repellent.

The Amritsar carnage of 1919, where British forces under Gen. Reginald Dyer slew 379 unarmed Indians? Absolutely justified, according to Roberts, who curiously

²⁰⁵ Once again, the character reading out loud doesn’t actually say “Stove, 2008”; that’s just for academic referencing. And to reinforce the unreality of the scene. And the novel. And the very concept of history. See Chapter Thirteen for further details.

deduces that but for Dyer, “many more than 379 people would have lost their lives.” (Stove, 2008). (Again).

‘It shows the problem with history, doesn’t it?’ said Yvonne. ‘We have to take it all on trust that our historians and biographers and leaders²⁰⁶ are being honest, rigorous and fair, because we don’t have the time or opportunities to research for ourselves.’

‘Of course you have to trust!’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn in shock – but then, he was genuinely unaware how much he was part of the system, and how he had been supported by it from birth.

Yvonne shook her head; it was simply impossible to know who to trust. She was clearly *meant* to believe the white Oxbridge privileged set, just as she was supposed to accept whatever the media spoon-fed her. Take the criticism on Roberts; how could she ever be sure which side was right? Could Roberts be trusted? Could Stove? Or Hari? Were they telling the truth? Were they lying? Or were they telling *their* truth, the only truth they could see, completely unaware of their own inherent biases and unable to see anything beyond that?

Only one thing was clear; the UK Establishment, owned by a small cross-section of the wealthy cultural elite and staffed almost entirely by that elite and their quislings, was an institute of cultural oppression, not a means of fair governance for the masses.

²⁰⁶ A perfect summary of the issues facing my project with regard to how Churchill is constructed through articles, biographies etc; all such material gives the illusion of the truth and the concomitant illusion of authority, with both concepts feeding off the other in an eternal cycle of self referentiality, but these texts/truths are all carefully constructed façades for the facts therein, and their presentation to the public/reader, is a careful selection, omission, and revelation of data, (or opinion masquerading as data), with ‘facts’ often becoming facts only because they are presented and then repeated as such.

Chapter Twenty-Four

In case anyone is wondering where Chapter Thirteen got to, it was dropped over superstitious concern of the number itself. If the reader is wondering where the promised information set to appear in Chapter Thirteen is now going to be, the answer will be forthcoming, in the fullness of time, when matters are less precipitate, after a period of quiet reflection and a full independent investigation into the full alleged facts has been carried out, and all the criteria and other miscellaneous elements which need to be fully investigated and documented before any analysis into the relevant section of the hitherto mentioned investigative remit can hope to be in any way put forward without any ambiguity to see the full light of day in some not too distant point in time.

See Chapter Thirteen for further details.

The following day, with the rest of the staff in another convenient meeting, Yvonne was sitting musing on the behaviour, attitudes, and assumptions of the elite when a facsimile of these behaviours, attitudes and assumptions flung open the outer door and stamped into the office, her face set in a belligerent scowl. It was this expression which confused Yvonne, for it meant she did not recognise one of Clavier and Coldwell's few token ethnic female authors, Nina Rogerson.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ The reader may wonder here at the behaviour and naming of Nina Rogerson. The naming ties in to how many Black people today still bear the name of their ancestor's slave owner:

There are... millions of people, in the Caribbean and the UK, who do not need a database to tell them that they are linked to Britain's hidden slave-owning past. The descendants of the enslaved carry the same English surnames that appear in the ledgers of the Slave Compensation Commission – Gladstone, Beckford, Hibbert, Blair, etc – names that were imposed on their ancestors, initials that were sometimes branded on their skin, in order to mark them as items of property. (Olusoga, 2015)

And the reason for giving Nina Rogerson the exact same name as fellow fictional character Terrance Rogerson, our elitist Prime Minister in waiting?

Ancestors of the novelist Graham Greene, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott all

‘I’m here to see Michael Vansittart!’ snapped Rogerson, her tone making it clear she expected to be shown straight to the publisher’s office. Her gaze, which up until that point had been flicking around the room in the hope of seeing a more important person she could deal with, finally came to rest on Yvonne’s face.

‘Have you an appointment?’ asked Yvonne, leaning back slightly in her chair from the anger radiating off the woman.

‘I emailed him yesterday to let him know I was coming in,’ replied Rogerson in a haughty tone.

‘So, you have an appointment?’ insisted Yvonne, noting the woman hadn’t answered the question.

‘I emailed him yesterday!’

‘And did he email back to confirm an appointment?’

‘Don’t you take that tone with me!’ snarled Rogerson. ‘Don’t you know who I am?’

‘No.’

‘No wonder this publishing house is going down the drain, with this sort of ignorance on the front desk!’ snorted the woman. ‘Kindly tell your employer that Nina Rogerson MBE is here to see him on a matter of utmost importance.’²⁰⁸

received compensation for slaves. As did a distant ancestor of David Cameron [former United Kingdom Prime Minister, 2010-2016]. (Ibid).

The behaviour of Nina Rogerson, meanwhile, is making a point on how our attitudes and conduct is often little more than a replication of the attitudes and conduct we see in our leaders and supposed social betters, for the behaviour of our role models influence how we think and act – meaning all levels of society are infected with the behaviour and assumptions of those in control. And, of course, the oppressed become the oppressor, the bullied the bullies:

Why do members of the same oppressed group fight each other, sometimes more viciously than they fight their oppressor? Why do some who experience oppression develop a life-long commitment to fighting oppression, while others turn around and oppress others? (Bishop, 2022).

²⁰⁸ Born to a “modestly” wealthy family which enabled her to attend private school and then Cambridge before being found work thanks to her parents’ contacts in the media, Rogerson had long yearned for a level of success hitherto denied her for which she blamed immigration, feminists, gays, dwindling Christianity, liberals, a lack of deference, and young people in general. She is, sadly, oblivious to the fact she has been handed

‘He isn’t here,’ said Yvonne, feeling the last few remnants of her ideals wither and die. She had read – and identified with – Nina Rogerson’s *The Estate*, an intense insight into racism as experienced by the author²⁰⁹ as a child of the 1980s, but Yvonne was now seeing the woman behind the name. And that woman was merely a carbon copy of Establishment privilege.

‘Not here? This is an outrage! This tinpot company is a disgrace!’

‘Can I take a message?’

‘You can tell Michael bloody Vansittart that’s he’s lost his best author; that’s the message you can give him! His marketing is appalling, his sales techniques are risible, and I’m ending the contract.’

‘I’ll pass that on to him,’ murmured Yvonne.

‘And you can tell him I’ve had a better offer from Firefly Publishing for *The Estate*, so I expect the rights to be returned immediately, including all the overseas rights that he’s done nothing with, despite the novel being described as a work of great originality and depth!’

‘Um, well, I’m sure things are moving,’ said Yvonne, wondering why the hell she was unexpectedly defending her boss and thus upholding the status quo, despite knowing that neither he nor the status quo deserved any support. She had a nasty suspicion it was a stimulus-response effect, stamped onto her by years of social conditioning.²¹⁰

‘That is inadequate,’ replied Rogerson, glaring in antipathy at the young Black woman who no doubt came from some God-forsaken part of

opportunities denied to those lower down the social scale, and she genuinely believes her talent had carried her to literary glory before her career was derailed by immigrants, feminists, gays, dwindling Christianity etc.

²⁰⁹ Or so Rogerson claimed; she had, in fact, appropriated several experiences from other people for her book before submitting it to an agent (and family friend) who was looking for stories of hardship and exclusion from the Black community. This, incidentally, was an extension of Rogerson’s time at university, in which she had worked diligently by regurgitating her tutors’ ideas into her essays and final exams to gain their approval. Rogerson, however, was totally oblivious to this fact, thinking her ability to get a pass on almost every paper was a sign of her intelligence and ability, rather than a simple stimulus-response of writing up approved answers in an approved manner to find approval with approving authority.

²¹⁰ Further proof of Yvonne’s exponential learning as new vistas of thought are opened to her.

Jamaica.²¹¹ ‘You think this is an acceptable way to treat an MBE and top author?’

‘Um,’ said Yvonne, feeling an uncanny sense of déjà vu about the whole exchange.

‘You need to sort your priorities out,’ snapped Rogerson, making it clear she was referring to both the business in general and Yvonne in particular as she strode to the door, turning only to make her exit line. ‘I’ve worked hard to get where I am, and I’m not going to be pulled down by anyone. Of any colour or background!’²¹²

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There is undoubtedly a prejudice that exists between the islands of the Caribbean. Islanders both at home and abroad often make their biased and snotty comments against each other as often as can be counted. But the distaste that often shows its ugly head between Jamaicans, Barbadians and Trinidadians sometimes seems to take on meteoric proportions... (Robinson, 2013).

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“The Snobbery” refers to the ego that seems to come with an advanced degree or an increased paycheck. It’s the way the newly-privileged black folks condescend to underprivileged black folks. It’s snarky statuses and memes that criticize those who aren’t well-traveled, well-educated, or well-paid. There’s nothing more disgusting than watching classism on display and it needs to be addressed. (Banks, 2017).

Chapter Twenty-Five

In which we start to explore how right-wing attitudes are a door into extremist belief – and we see how Churchillian worship is a factor in both ideologies.

It was the last day for Yvonne at Clavier and Coldwell, though she and the rest of the staff were unaware of this as they started work. The only abnormality was the early morning presence of Vansittart and Hutchinson-Cockburn, though this carried a simple explanation; an important client was booked in for an eleven o'clock meeting and Vansittart wanted all his staff present, to give the appearance of a unified, well-run operation.

'What's up?' asked Helen, noting Yvonne's distressed face and thus inadvertently precipitating the entire morning's chain of events.

'It's an article I found online. This is from an American site, run by someone called Richard Langworth, who published this in 2019.'²¹³ As she spoke, Yvonne printed off enough copies for everyone. 'It's about Churchill's racism – but all the writer does is excuse it.'

"Keep England White"

Here is another supposed quote with current connotations. The Hillsdale College Churchill Project was asked to confirm Churchill's alleged proposal of "Keep England White" as a Conservative slogan in the 1955 election. Is this misunderstood or misattributed? Yes.

'Well?' demanded Hutchinson-Cockburn, shrugging at his copy while the rest of the staff were still reading theirs. 'What of it? Straightforward account by an academic.'

'First of all,' answered Yvonne, her expanding awareness roving over the document, 'Langworth says it's a "supposed quote", as though to diminish it by claiming it isn't real, but within a couple of lines he's then saying it's

²¹³ (Langworth, 2019).

misunderstood and misattributed, which surely would not be necessary to say if it was only a “supposed quote” to begin with?’

‘I see he takes pains to say the quote isn’t found in any official documents, only in a private entry by Harold Macmillan,’ observed Helen as she read through the document:

This was neither a public nor a confirmed private statement. It is not in official minutes, or *The Churchill Documents*, Volume 23 (2019). Its origin is a diary entry by Harold Macmillan. After a 20 January 1955 Cabinet meeting, Macmillan wrote: “The P.M. thinks ‘Keep England White’ a good campaign slogan!”

‘I noticed that,’ said Yvonne. ‘It seems like yet more deflection from the quote itself. And saying the comment doesn’t appear in the official minutes or in the official *Churchill Documents* is surely just cajoling the reader into thinking the remark was never made, or is unofficial, as though that somehow makes it better?’

‘He’s keeping to the facts!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘It reads more like an attempt to excuse the comment,’ replied Yvonne.

‘Anyway, it seems the quote itself is referenced elsewhere.’

I first found the Macmillan reference on a website called Traditional Britain. You will quickly grasp their political stance, but in fairness, they do link two negative references to the remark. The first is from *The Guardian*, to cite Churchill’s “true views” on immigration. The second is a 1993 uproar involving Sir Winston’s grandson, Winston Churchill (1940-2010). He called immigration “the no-go area of British politics.” He stated: “If we are to curb the scourge of racism we must first and foremost stop adding to the problem.”

Macmillan was a reliable diarist, not given to exaggeration, but the context matters.

‘I’m not sure what point he’s trying to make with that comment on the linking of two negative references,’ continued Yvonne. ‘I mean, he just glosses over them and their supposed relevance, other than to say one is

from *The Guardian* and one is a quote from Churchill's grandson. What are we supposed to be taking from that?'

'And note he's talking about the context of Macmillan reporting a racist phrase rather than tackling the phrase itself?' added Helen. 'But then, a racist phrase is still racist.'

'Churchill was probably making a joke!' exclaimed Hutchinson-Cockburn. 'Look, it says so there!'

He wrote in his diary, "The P.M. thinks..." That is not a direct quote, nor did the words ever appear in public. Also, Macmillan followed it with an exclamation mark, which could mean that Churchill said it in jest.

"It could mean?" echoed Helen. 'It *could* mean Macmillan was disgusted by Churchill's remark, or astonished by it, or was even in agreement with it, yet Langworth only gives one interpretation, which is in defence of Churchill.'

'And Langworth admits Macmillan was a reliable diarist,' noted Yvonne.

'And then he makes this valid point!' snorted Hutchinson-Cockburn, pointing to the next part of the article:

Ask yourself: Would any astute politician, even then, seriously propose "Keep England White" as a campaign slogan?

'There, you see?' demanded Hutchinson-Cockburn. 'What politician would ever do that?'

'A massively racist one, maybe?' replied Yvonne. 'One who was known to be racist by his own contemporaries? A racist speaking in a time where open racism was even more acceptable than it is now?'

'Racism has never been openly acceptable,' snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, turning to an entirely fictitious past to try and salvage the argument.

'Really?' asked Helen. 'How about when landlords could put "No Coloureds" signs up in their windows? The Notting Hill race riots of

1958? The race riot of 1919?²¹⁴ And, of course, Enoch Powell and his “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968? Well over a decade after Churchill’s comment.’

‘I’m just looking at the article in front of me,’ huffed Hutchinson-Cockburn, quickly shifting his ideological defence. ‘Churchill’s comment was about immigration, not racism. It says so right here!’

Out of context, the three words seem pretty stark. In context, Churchill was favoring limits on Caribbean immigration.

‘Yes, because “Keep England White” becomes so less racist when it’s in the context of Caribbean immigration,’ sneered Yvonne.

‘But look at this!’ declared Vansittart, riding to the rescue of the sweating Hutchinson-Cockburn.

He did not discuss other black or brown people.

‘More deflection,’ said Yvonne. ‘Presumably you’re saying racism can only be racism if it’s directed at *every* non-white person? Racism is racism no matter who it’s aimed at,’ she added with a slight feeling of shame as her opinions on Indians and Pakistanis bubbled up in her mind, but she quickly stamped down on the threat to her self-image to focus on the failings of others.

Of course, it is well established that Churchill in the 1950s resisted unlimited immigration. Is this racist? We report, you decide.

‘Exactly!’ barked Hutchinson-Cockburn. ‘He’s given us the unvarnished facts, so we can decide for ourselves.’

²¹⁴ The 1919 race riots were the first time many people became aware of the presence of black and minority ethnic people living in Britain, including those who had lived and worked here for many years and served in the war.

At the end of the First World War, the demobilisation of troops caused severe post-war competition for jobs. The perception that foreigners were ‘stealing’ jobs was one of the triggers for the rioting and attacks on black and minority ethnic communities in British port cities. (National Archives, n.d.).

‘No, Rupert,’ sighed Helen, wearily. ‘He’s spent the article excusing Churchill, justifying Churchill, and generally presenting the story to make sure the reader agrees with him before presenting this mealy-mouthed “you decide” comment. If he truly wanted the reader to decide in an open and fair way, he would have given more than just one side of the argument. He would have searched out and then presented all the facts in the fairest manner possible.’

‘And look at his excuses in the comments beneath the article,’ said Yvonne. “‘If you or I had our every word, or alleged word, recorded, interpreted or analyzed to the extent of Churchill, I daresay we would suffer by comparison.” I mean, yes, we would be judged badly if we said racist things!’

‘Unless you’re a member of the establishment,’ said Helen. ‘Then you get away with it. In fact, you’re probably encouraged in it.’²¹⁵

‘He’s given us the facts!’ yapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, regaining his authority (in his own mind) by the repetition of his mantra.

‘And yet Langworth ties himself in knots to minimise the racism of saying “Keep England White”,’ pointed out Yvonne. ‘It’s as though he doesn’t realise he’s actually doing it. He probably thinks he’s being detached and academic, yet he’s controlled the narrative in a Pro-Churchillian manner from beginning to end.’²¹⁶

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[UK Prime Minister] Boris Johnson has a long record of controversial comments about women, gay people and ethnic minorities.

He has called gay men "bumboys," and compared Muslim women to "letterboxes."

In one column he labeled black Africans "piccaninnies" with "watermelon smiles."

He suggested that Malaysian women only go to university "to find men to marry." (Bienkov, 2020).

²¹⁶ Interestingly, a similar point has been made about TV writer Mark Gatiss and his *Doctor Who* episode *Victory of the Daleks*, set during the Blitz and featuring Churchill the Myth, and it is worth quoting here:

... for Gatiss, *Doctor Who* isn’t the forum for investigating Churchill’s ‘flaws’... and yet, somehow, it is the forum for celebrating his greatness. It is obviously considered somehow neutral (i.e. unpolitical or apolitical) to depict Churchill in an entirely positive light (i.e. as “the legend”), whereas introducing a critique of the man would be inappropriate, presumably because it would be seen as evidence of a political agenda...

This is the properly educated orthodox mind at work. This is heavily ideological thinking which perceives itself as non-ideological, precisely because it hugs the doctrinal orthodoxy, which is perceived as normal and mainstream and neutral, and hence appropriate... there is nothing neutral or “apolitical” about praise, about approval, about presenting a politician in terms of his “legend” ...

Mind you, I’m not accusing the Doctor Who production team of consciously taking on the roles of ideological commissars. That would be to credit them with too much self-awareness... (Graham, 2011).

The above raises several excellent points, but because the blog is “only” about a TV show, a bit of ephemeral pop culture, it won’t be taken as seriously as it should for its incisive commentary on how Churchill’s attitudes and actions are excused or vindicated by second-rate pop-culture bootlickers engaging in regurgitative masturbatory fantasies about Churchill, the war, England, cream teas, cricket, warm beer etc etc etc. But returning to Langworth; is he also blindly replicating the “Churchill is Great” argument? Is he so invested in Churchill as a *positive* that he genuinely cannot see any negative at all? Is he simply lacking in self-awareness? Or is there something more sinister going on in terms of Langworth’s attitudes and beliefs? After all, one website he links to is nothing less than a cesspit of nationalism and white supremacy, and yet he casually passes this off quite lightly, presumably because they support his pro-Churchillian argument: “You will quickly grasp their political stance, but in fairness, they do link two negative references to the remark.” (Langworth, 2019).

This is relevant here as I have been told by my PhD supervisor that I must consider both sides of the argument(s) raised in this creative writing project, and this seems as good as place as any focus on the right-wing view of History and Churchill. Unfortunately, neither History or Churchill are straightforward subjects, for while accepted history and conventional Churchillian biographies are easy to read or watch on TV, the reason why people accept the myth rather than reality is far harder to glean.

Also, my own feelings on ‘bothsideism’ (as it is sometimes referred to) is ambivalent, for the simple reason that sometimes the other side doesn’t deserve to be heard. Although this may seem counterfactual, offering both sides of a debate as being inherently fair is, on occasion, blatantly false: “This misguided pursuit of balance sets up a false equivalence, a form of specious reasoning in which two sides are treated as the same when they are not.” (McCarthy, 2022).

One factual example of this, as noted by McCarthy, can have serious repercussions:

Although there is overwhelming scientific evidence that humans are responsible for climate change, journalists regularly included climate change deniers in their reporting. The consequences of this bothsidesism are serious. Misinformation is amplified, and the public is misled into believing there is no scientific consensus on what causes climate change. (Ibid).

This demonstrates how the public can be easily misled into believing something which is entirely untrue – and even more pertinently, the public doesn’t even know there is an issue with their knowledge, which they believe to be complete and true, with no bias or gaps whatsoever:

In 2016, a disturbing analysis revealed the Daily Express had carried 179 front pages in five years devoted to anti-migrant stories, while the Daily Mail had published 122. Through repetition, disinformation, misinformation – warnings of “hordes” to come from various war-torn or impoverished countries – and the omission of any positive material, papers incited fears of immigrants. Migrants, readers were told, were being treated to

more homes, more jobs and more generous benefits than the indigenous population. (Greenslade, 2020).

We pondered the question earlier in this book as to whether the media distorts reality, consciously or otherwise, with the answer (at that point) seemingly being somewhere in the middle. However, research like the above quote makes it clear that their distortion of reality is deliberate, targeted, and cynical:

We are being gaslighted by our tabloid media. They hurl abuse at a specific target or targets and when anyone dares to stand up to them, they double down with faux indignation and pivot towards playing the victim. They have constructed a whole structure of political and cultural discourses that have become a set of binary choices. Vilification and ostracisation then occurs if anyone ever dares to stand up to them. (Melville, 2020).

This leads to the obvious question as to why the media deliberately fabricates a fundamentally dishonest world view which they then knowingly present to their readers as being entirely factual. The answer is simple and consistent: "They want a culture war because hate still sells. They also want to deflect the blame away from decades of government misdemeanours and onto something else." (Melville, 2020). And sadly, these attitudes are the mainstream, with the organisation History Reclaimed providing an excellent focal point:

We agree that history consists of many opinions and many voices. But this does not mean that all opinions are valid, and certainly none should be imposed as a new orthodoxy. We intend to challenge distortions of history, and to provide context, explanation and balance in a debate in which dogmatism is too often preferred to analysis, and condemnation to understanding. (History Reclaimed, n.d.).

However, this mission statement has been criticised by Alan Lester of the University of Sussex for being narrow and elitist, denying voices to those who suffered:

...the history that this group defends is far from "shared". It is the history created by White Britons over many decades to justify their denial of sovereignty to others. The millions of people of colour around the world who were made British subjects whether they liked it or not, tended to endure a very different historical experience from these White Britons – as subjects rather than citizens, as enslaved, indentured or otherwise coerced labourers rather than employers, as servants rather than masters and mistresses, and as dispossessed rather than landed. (Lester, 2021).

And finally on the subject, History Reclaimed has also been criticised for its basic set up and philosophical precepts:

Crucially, ... [History Reclaimed offers] a history that we are less invited to buy into, and more ordered to believe. History as faith not discipline.

The truth is that Robert Tombs and his chums are not 'reclaiming history' – they are seeking to preserve *their version of it* as the orthodoxy. This is the establishment cosplaying as the resistance. The Brexit winners, in league with the Brexit Government, Brexit think tanks and Brexit believers, presenting themselves as anti-

‘woke’ outsiders who are seeking to wrestle back control of the narrative from people who dare to question it. (English, 2021).

Once again, we see how history is little more than a narrative, and those with power (i.e. access to publishers to print their work, access to the media to promote their work etc) are those whose narratives get placed before the audience and thus become “the truth”. And who has access to sympathetic Establishment publishers and newspapers etc? The people they already know, because they are all part of the same restricted (and restrictive) clique.

And who – to move the focus from the creators of these narratives to the consumers – are the people most likely to believe in ‘bothsideism’, and the media in general? One hint comes from psychological studies:

A recent comprehensive meta-analysis confirmed a reliable negative relation between cognitive ability and right-wing ideologies

...

...individuals with lower cognitive abilities may gravitate toward more socially conservative right-wing ideologies that maintain the status quo and provide psychological stability and a sense of order (Hodson & Busseri, 2012).

Possibly the sense of order is the key aspect in why people are so invested in Establishment narratives (including Churchill the Myth) rather than taking an unflinching, questioning look at all the evidence on any given subject. Though we could also speculate that a fear of being different drives many Little Englanders to docile acquiescence:

Conformity is a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behavior [sic] in order to fit in with a group. This change is in response to real (involving the physical presence of others) or imagined (involving the pressure of social norms / expectations) group pressure.

... Group pressure may take different forms, for example bullying, persuasion, teasing, criticism, etc. Conformity is also known as majority influence (or group pressure). (McLeod, 2016).

Sociology has also noted these tendencies back in the early twentieth century, showing that sheep following the shepherd is in no way a modern manifestation:

When I perform my duties as a brother. a husband or a citizen and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfil obligations which are defined in law and custom and which are external to myself and my actions. Even when they conform to my own sentiments and when I feel their reality within me, that reality does not cease to be objective, for it is not I who have prescribed these duties; I have received them through education. Moreover, how often does it happen that we are ignorant of the details of the obligations that we must assume, and that, to know them, we must consult the legal code and its authorised interpreters!

...

Here, then, is a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him. Consequently, since they consist of representations and actions,

they cannot be confused with organic phenomena, nor with psychical phenomena, which have no existence save in and through the individual consciousness. Thus they constitute a new species and to them must be exclusively assigned the term *social*. (Durkheim, 1982).

These observations explain the continuation of virtually all societal norms, including the unquestioning acceptance of authority, established 'truth', and thus the Churchill Myth; most people are too afraid/shallow /stupid/untaught (delete as applicable) to question established norms. (Any by 'question' I mean do serious open-minded research, not simply read something on the Internet and then believe without doubt that chemtrails are suppressing human thought/fertility etc). And once a person succumbs to a social belief, they enter "the deepest level of conformity were [sic] the beliefs of the group become part of the individual's own belief system.... (McLeod, 2016). And crucially, this occurs "when the majority have greater knowledge, and members of the minority have little knowledge to challenge the majority position." (Ibid).

This one observation provides the reason why Myths and false beliefs persist; people lack both the will and the knowledge to counter the dominant narrative. And given those beliefs come from newspapers, histories, biographies etc which are almost all written by privileged people, the beliefs of the privileged elite become via cultural imposition the beliefs of the rest of society, and thus the model is set.

However, it seems likely that pure malice and bigotry also powers the Establishment. Open Democracy, for example, has noted how far-right rhetoric has now become part of the mainstream:

This idea will be familiar to anyone in the UK who has read a tabloid, listened to a politician or watched TV. Barely a day goes by without accusations that the country is being 'overrun' by migrants, facilitated by 'lefty lawyers' and the 'north London liberal elite' (is it a coincidence that north London has long been a centre of the UK Jewish community?). (Fowles, 2022).

Fowles goes on to point out how far-right ideals such as the Great Replacement Theory is being frequently platformed by the mainstream media, while politicians "...are happy to adopt far-right tropes if it helps them... win votes. Just as the media are happy to platform the far Right to stir controversy and drive hits." (Ibid). But then, fear has always been profitable for the media, for a climate of fear sells newspapers and makes people compliant:

News programming uses a hierarchy of *if it bleeds, it leads*. Fear-based news programming has two aims. The first is to grab the viewer's attention. In the news media, this is called the teaser. The second aim is to persuade the viewer that the solution for reducing the identified fear will be in the news story. (Serani, 2011).

And the effect of this on society? Catastrophic for those at the bottom, but perfect for those at the top:

It's been said that fear-based media has become a staple of popular culture. The distressing fall-out from this trend is that children and adults who are exposed to media are more likely than others to

- Feel that their neighborhoods and communities are unsafe
- Believe that crime rates are rising
- Overestimate their odds of becoming a victim

-
- Consider the world to be a dangerous place (Serani, 2011).

In a Daily Mail society, social cohesion is gone. In its place is fragmentation, tribalism, and paranoid fear that the 'other' is out there, lurking, waiting to take over, which not only keep people compliant, but also makes people approve of the elite's policies:

In most contemporary societies, people underestimate the extent of economic inequality, resulting in lower support for taxation and redistribution than might be expressed by better informed citizens. (Summers & Accominotti, 2022).

If we apply the above groupthink onto English society, with specific regard not only to Churchillian Myth but also the associated myths concerning the identity of the modern UK, its place in the world, its self-perception in regard to its (real and fictitious) past which thus forms its (real and fictitious) present, we start to see how an entire nation (or at least enough of it) can be gaslit into thinking that society can only be structured one way, that politics can only work one way, and thus real change or difference is something to be feared because it is different:

...as long as the idea of Britishness is tied to the monarch – and therefore the class system – and Empire – and therefore racism – the Tories were always going to win the struggle to represent it.

The deep desire to make Britain 'Great again' which drives this nationalism takes form in a whole collection of policies: Brexit and the desire to return to imperial glories is the most obvious...

...

It's this feeling that makes England Conservative (even if not generally conservative): the Tories are the party of Anglo-British nationalism and Empire, the party of the ruling class. And the underlying message in much of Anglo-British nationalism is that posh people – and the monarchy first of all – ought to be in charge. That is, after all, who ran things when Britain was 'great'. (Ramsay, 2020).

Either way, the elite is dominant, and it uses its own mythology as a hammer of conformity, even unto ludicrous levels:

A Nazi-sympathiser has been told he can stay out of prison as long as he steers clear of white-supremacy literature and reads classic novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* instead.

Ben John, 21, was given a suspended jail sentence after he was caught with nearly 70,000 white supremacist and neo-Nazi documents and bomb-making instructions.

The university student was told by Judge Timothy Spencer *that as long as he reads books and plays by Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare*, he could avoid prison. (McTaggart, 2021). Emphasis – and astonishment – mine.

And this ties in neatly with the issues surrounding Churchill, in which the man is presented in a wholly positive manner, with his racism, sexism etc being relegated to minor issues hardly worth mentioning, never mind judging. The real Churchill is lost, the Mythical Churchill is presented as fact, and the wheels of obedience and conformity go round and round...

Have we arrived at a situation in which serious analysis into Churchill, and wider history, is only ever going to be undertaken by non-traditional (i.e. non-Establishment)

commentators? Will it be left to these non-Establishment figures to point out how Churchill's writings on the supposed International Jewish conspiracy "can nowadays only... [be found] on neo-Nazi and far-right websites"? (Graham, 2011). Are Establishment historians simply selling the regurgitated Establishment history because they have unthinkingly absorbed the myths during their Establishment indoctrination? Or are they *knowingly* repeating the orthodoxy, and to hell with academic rigour?

This author has no idea what the answers are. But we can at least look at the consequences of allowing such right-wing ideology to flourish in society. We have already seen what may be called the Daily Mail approach to history in previous chapters, but now we take an altogether more sinister step into the world of the far right, to see how they filter and distort history – and how this filter is not so different from that found within the UK's mainstream media.

Be warned.

Chapter Twenty-Six

A continuation of the issues started in the previous chapter...

‘Some people just want to find things to complain about,’ muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn, perhaps feeling a little sensitive as he had been finding so many uncanny parallels recently between himself and Churchill, and hence any attack on the Great Man’s values were an attack on his own. Which also meant calling Churchill a racist would infer that he, Hutchinson-Cockburn, was also a racist, which was quite clearly absolute rubbish because he had never once used the N word. At least not recently. In public. And then only *ironically*, as a joke with his Oxbridge friends, because he wasn’t in the least like that.

‘Complain about?’ echoed Yvonne, her voice rising as weeks of close proximity to arrogant privilege finally burnt through her reserves of social conformity. ‘Have you even looked at the organisation Langworth mentions?’ Yvonne waved a sheaf of printouts taken from the *Traditional Britain Group* website. ‘It’s a right-wing authoritarian manifesto founded by posh wealthy people with the explicit idea of having everyone else conform to authority and tradition. The whole thing stinks of class hatred and white nationalism.’

The moral belief in egalitarianism as the highest good must be utterly opposed... we must discredit the pursuit of equality.

We must be united by a core commitment to Tradition, not to detail. We must unite, not behind policy proposals and political detail, but rather the eternal truths of European and British Tradition: kinship, family, duty, faith, uniqueness, hierarchy, community, sovereignty, authority, nation, identity, liberty, justice, truth, beauty, and excellence.

...We must be consistently and courageously traditionalist and conservative in our behaviour and communications.

We must embrace abstract and moral ideas – the morality of an ideal trumps empirical reality.

...

We must promote and nurture a traditionalist culture.

...

We are opposed to mass immigration and multiculturalism
(Traditional Britain, 2021).²¹⁷

‘And Langworth wants to be fair to them,’ noted Helen.

‘Well, I don’t see anything wrong,’ muttered Hutchinson-Cockburn as he glanced over the first paragraph:

An historical fact that is little known is that Sir Winston Churchill tried to introduce a Bill to control immigration in 1955, but it was not ready until two months after he had stepped down because of his health. He also wanted the Conservatives to fight the general Election with the slogan “Keep England White.” There is a great and evil slander laid upon those who call for control and common sense in open-door immigration. They are demonised as “Nazis” and “Racists” - we fought Nazism and many lost family in that war. They are accused of following Hitler when we follow Churchill.

‘They actually admit Churchill wanted the campaign to be based on racism, and you see nothing wrong with that?’ demanded Yvonne.

‘It was a different time,’ replied Hutchinson-Cockburn, casting an approving eye over the next section:

Churchill was aware that religions compete with one another for power and territory and he knew the truth of slavery. In The River War he wrote of slavery but not the

²¹⁷ The reference above looks a little skimpy as the date and author are both unknown. Hutchinson-Cockburn, incidentally, will remain oblivious as to why the Black girl is making such a fuss about being proud of England’s great traditions. Neither can he see a problem with the “self-evident truth” expressed on the website concerning tradition, multiculturalism, and everyone knowing their place. But then, Hutchinson-Cockburn is unaware that his tradition is anything other than a sham:

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. A striking example is the deliberate choice of a Gothic style for the nineteenth-century rebuilding of the British parliament, and the equally deliberate decision after World War II to rebuild the parliamentary chamber on exactly the same basic plan as before. (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2003).

See also the footnotes on King Arthur, nationalism, Shakespeare, Great Men etc.

perverse version we are taught to instil guilt into us. “The stronger race soon began to prey upon the simple aboriginals... The dominant race of Arab invaders was unceasingly spreading its blood, religion, customs, and language among the black aboriginal population...” This is especially pertinent now that the widespread Muslim raping of young White girls is starting to come out. These abuses of our youngsters by a rival community is obscured by the Cultural Marxist Establishment. (Hamilton, 2021).

‘It all makes sense!’ nodded Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Sense?’ demanded Yvonne, angrily reading aloud from the “About” section of the site. ““Since World War II, serious assaults on our culture, heritage, constitution and institutions have gathered apace, leaving many dismayed and eager for change. Political correctness and enforced multiculturalism have watered down our rich national character and have forced honest and intelligent people to hide their true feelings for fear of reprisals.””²¹⁸

‘But listen to this,’ countered Hutchinson-Cockburn. ““We believe in Britain and the British people, their heritage and customs.” How can anyone be against that?’

‘And listen to this,’ replied Helen. ““We believe that the heterosexual family is the primary social unit.””

‘That’s their belief and they should be respected!’ snapped Hutchinson-Cockburn, noting favourably the organisation’s adherence to authority and Christianity without once considering the pagan religions which had flourished long before Christianity.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ All quotes here from the “About” page. (Traditional Britain, 2021).

²¹⁹ Noted religions that existed before Christianity spread over Europe include:

- Albanian mythology
- Baltic mythology
- Basque mythology
- Celtic polytheism
- Etruscan mythology
- Finnic mythologies
- Germanic paganism
- Ancient Greek religion
- Hungarian Native Faith

““We believe in the obligation of labour and the rolling back of the welfare state”” read Yvonne in disbelief. ‘So people will be forced to do all the manual work their glorious leaders won’t do? Do you think the employers are going to start paying a living wage under this new system, rather than the lowest amount they can get away with?’

‘People who have failed in life just like to blame others instead of taking responsibility,’ said Hutchinson-Cockburn.

‘Yes, that’s true!’ exclaimed Vansittart, nodding vigorously. ‘We all have the same opportunities.’

‘The same opportunities?’ snarled Yvonne, angrily fighting back tears.

‘Who outside the elite ever get the same opportunities the elite give themselves?’

‘It’s the typical lefty culture of envy,’ sneered Felicity, another keen Daily Mail reader.

‘That’s why they want positive discrimination,’ agreed Hutchinson-Cockburn, supremely unaware he was already at the front of the queue by virtue of the capitalist class system which discriminated positively in his direction.

‘Then answer the point about those from elite backgrounds being given opportunities denied to the poor,’ retorted Helen.

‘Utter nonsense,’ spluttered Vansittart.

‘Then answer the point, Michael, or are you going to admit you can’t?’

‘That’s enough of that sort of talk,’ snapped Vansittart, thoroughly disturbed by the communism flooding through the office. ‘We are here to do our jobs, not listen to socialism, and I’ll have no more of this sort of talk in my family business!’

Minoan religion
Mari Native Religion
Mordvin Native Religion
Norse mythology
Religion in ancient Rome
Sámi shamanism
Scythian religion
Slavic paganism
(Wikipedia, 2021).

‘It seems *Traditional Britain* shares your ideas,’ snapped Yvonne, glaring at Vansittart. “‘We believe that our country is best served by our indigenous customs & traditions, its time-honoured hereditary principle and our monarchy.’ And look at the rest of their supposed values!’

We are opposed to internationalism and globalisation
We are opposed to communism, to socialism, to
liberalism and to anarchism.
We are opposed to mass immigration and
multiculturalism
We are opposed to the Class War.
We are opposed to Political Correctness and support the
repeal of all cultural-Marxist legislation.

‘Bloody hell,’ muttered Helen. ‘Everyone should know their place and be happy with the boot of the oppressor stamping down on their face, forever.’
‘And look at the people behind it,’ growled Yvonne, her eyes still on the squirming Vansittart. ‘Wealthy aristocrats, ex Conservative party members, and a professor who is also a man of the cloth.’²²⁰

²²⁰ President: The Lord Sudeley, F.S.A

A hereditary peer, Lord Sudeley succeeded to his peerage aged just 3, his father having died from wounds inflicted at Dunkirk. Educated at Eton and Oxford, from the age of 21 he was one of the regular active members of the House of Lords for 39 years, until the expulsion of the bulk of the hereditary peerage by the Labour government in 1999...

Vice President and Treasurer: Gregory Lauder-Frost, F.S.A. Scot Gregory is well known in traditional Tory circles. A member and activist in the Conservative Party 1976-1995, he is the former Chairman of the Conservative Monday Club’s influential Foreign Affairs Committee...

Vice President: Samuel (Sam) Swerling

Samuel Swerling is a retired solicitor and law lecturer who was an active member of the Conservative Party from a young age...

Vice President: Professor John Kersey

John Kersey works internationally, leading a group of private-sector educational organizations at university level that offer bespoke professional education for high achievers, as well as maintaining a busy consultancy in his specialism of comparative international education, chiefly for the benefit of law firms in the United States preparing immigration petitions. He is also an award-winning concert pianist, having made the first recordings of several works by Beethoven, and a non-stipendiary minister in a Continuing Anglican church. He advocates for a society based on the principles of monarchy, feudal aristocracy, private property, and tradition, and for the creation of a counter-establishment that embodies these aspects. (Traditional Britain, 2021).

‘They’re hardly mainstream.’ snorted Vansittart, desperately searching for wriggle room.

‘Hardly mainstream? The British public laps this up on a daily basis,’ retorted Yvonne.²²¹

²²¹ From the relentless demonization of migrants and refugees to scare stories about “no-go areas” in London (a falsehood reprised by former U.S. President Donald Trump) to lies about Muslims supporting Christianity under attack and banned Christian festivals, British tabloid culture is easily one of the top peddlers of bigotry across the nation. (Gopal, 2021).

See also:

How does the British media get away with such insulting representations of working class people? (Ullman, 2020).

And:

Much of the focus on so-called “culture war” issues in the UK is based on confected controversies, a thinktank analysis has suggested, with the debate artificially inflamed by politicians and commentators and then amplified by social media. (Walker, 2021).

And:

Daily Mail columnist Peter Hitchens slammed for ‘comparing’ left wing Brits with the Taliban (Plummer, 2021).

And:

This is not to suggest that the cabinet is full of secret fascists. But politicians are happy to adopt far-right tropes if it helps them create wedge issues to win votes. Just as the media are happy to platform the far Right to stir controversy and drive hits. The far Right doesn’t become safe just because it puts on a nice suit or describes itself as ‘anti-woke’ rather than ‘fascist’. (Fowles, 2022).

And in summary:

All of this normalised hatred is played out on our traditional media and then amplified and regurgitated as the world’s biggest pub argument on social media. Extremism on the margins have now rebranded as ‘populism’ and a resulting snowball effect of unleashing wider bigotry within society. It’s hardly a surprise that racially linked hate crimes in England and Wales have doubled since 2012, and have significantly spiked since the EU referendum in 2016.

...

... But this is what the tabloids want. They want a culture war because hate still sells. They also want to deflect the blame away from decades of government misdemeanours and onto something else.

...

Divide and rule, that is how we end up in a culture war, and that's what our current government and their media supporters want... (Melville, 2020).

Chapter Twenty-Seven

A continuation, and the beginning of the end...

‘Hey, we’re in the *Daily Crier!*’ exclaimed Sarah in sudden excitement, for she had grown bored with the conversation she didn’t (want to) understand and had decided to browse through the open post, wherein she found a courtesy copy of the magazine – with the appropriate article highlighted heavily on the contents page – sent to Vansittart as part of Rogerson’s campaign to get the Churchill biography.

How the lefties are infiltrating our cherished arts!

By Terrance Rogerson.

Churchill is a hero. We know it, the world knows it. And in honour of this fact, a new and exciting announcement was recently made by one of our oldest and best publishers, Clavier and Caldwell, who called for a new biography of our greatest man.

Ordinarily, this would be a reason to rejoice. After all, what man achieved more than Winston Churchill? A humble man, despite his aristocratic lineage, Churchill would shape the nation and the world. But even here, the lefty moaners will not stay away, and they insist on intruding on the hallowed ground of Churchillian grandeur!

Incredible as it may seem, the lefty presence is making itself felt at all levels, spreading its intolerance of greatness into all our sacred areas, for the left can’t stand the idea that one man can be better than another, and in the future, they will demand we will all be alike, with no difference between us!’

For, dear friends, what did I find when checking out the background story of this new call for a life of the Greatest Ever Brit? I found lefty sedition!

For in the sanctified land of publishing, so long a symbol of our heritage and tradition, I found the moaning voices of the socialist,

one Yvonne Jones, demanding that Churchill books be rewritten to show supposed socialist “facts”, facts that appear in no official history!

The left now demands that only certain types of “fact” be allowed in Churchillian biographies! Only “facts” showing how horrid Churchill was. But these are not facts at all. They are fictions! Churchill was the greatest Brit of all time, but listening to the left, you’d never know this! According to them, he was a racist and a warlord!

I mean, he was of a different era; Of course he was different! And maybe his views are a little old-fashioned now, for Churchill was a man of his time, not to be compared with men of our time, for he was born when the great British Empire still ruled the waves! But when push came to shove it was Churchill, and Churchill alone, who stood up for everyone: black, white and brown and yellow alike!

He stood up for all of us; he fought for you, for me, for everyone! Did Churchill do this through the greatest catastrophe we have ever seen, the second world war started by the Germans, just so the left can rewrite history in this way? I think not!

And besides, who could stand up and say their life contains no shameful episodes? None of us, that’s who!

Thankfully, level-headedness and common sense have returned to Clavier and Caldwell, thanks to a timely intervention by the Daily Crier: “Despite the more enthusiastic comments from our volunteer staff,” said head honcho Michael Vansittart, “We at Clavier and Caldwell are committed to publishing a good, solid, traditional biography of the Greatest Brit ever.”

What a relief! We look forward to seeing it, Michael!

‘What in hell?’ exclaimed Yvonne. ‘Where did they get my name from?’

‘They’re the press,’ babbled Vansittart. ‘It’s their job.’

‘And what’s all this crap about “enthusiastic comments from our volunteer staff” supposed to mean?’

‘Well, they wanted a quote,’ shrugged Vansittart, glossing over how the quote was obtained over a lengthy dinner with Rogerson (and his expense account) at the Chummo Club.

‘And you just told them my name and let them make up whatever shit they wanted to about me?’ demanded Yvonne, her voice rising to almost a shout.

‘I was on the spot; I had to give them something reassuring,’ blustered Vansittart.

‘So you happily let them attack me?’

‘You can hardly claim quoting your own words is an attack,’ huffed Vansittart.

‘I was throwing out suggestions, not dictating the bloody biography!’

‘Language, please!’ barked Vansittart, for foul language was unnecessary and he would not tolerate it, would not listen to it, and would not respond to it.²²² I don’t tolerate bad language in my business place, or any woke nonsense. We are here to do our jobs, and that job is to publish books. Now, there are several jobs that haven’t been done today, like cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen, so let us all continue as normal.’ So saying, Vansittart did as normal and hurried up to his office.

Behind him, Felicity jumped up with a small gasp of horror and made for the small tin containing the tea kitty, realising she hadn’t done her usual daily check on the coins as she had been distracted by the early morning Churchillian discussion. She grabbed the tin from the shelf, her eyes straying suspicious to the Bla—*young* woman sitting opposite.

‘There’s nothing missing from it!’ bellowed Yvonne as the final walls of her reserve broke down.

Felicity swung round angrily. ‘I’m just counting it, that’s all!’

²²² An expedient way of dismissing any points raised, and hence a standard response from the elite, as noted by a couple of political commentators:

We must recognize that the ubiquitous ways patriarchy has socialized women to shrink themselves—physically and intellectually—extend also into language, into what we can and cannot say. It is not just a fight for airtime. It is not just a policing of women’s egos. It polices women’s very language. (Eltahawy, 2019).

‘You never count it when anyone else has been in the office alone with it!’ snarled Yvonne.

‘That’s not true! How *dare* you say such a thing?’²²³

‘You never count it any other time,’ repeated Yvonne, angrily. ‘And you never clutch your bag to your chest with anyone else either. Don’t think I haven’t noticed that little signifier, either.’

‘You’re imagining things!’²²⁴

‘I’m seeing what’s there!’ shouted Yvonne. ‘The assumptions of colour, of me being a criminal!’

‘I don’t see colour when I look at someone,’ retorted Felicity. ‘That’s obviously your problem!’

‘My problem is having my entire existence categorised and denied by racists!’

‘How dare you?’ shrieked Felicity. ‘I know exactly what you go through as an oppressed minority; I’m a woman!’

‘Gender oppression is not the same thing as racial oppression,’ glowered Yvonne. ‘You only experience one of them. You perpetuate the other.’

‘How dare you?’ sobbed Felicity, tears pouring down her face. ‘I’m an ally and you’re attacking me!’²²⁵

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...my entire journey here in England from 1989 until now has been fraught with ‘you are too passionate’; ‘you are very sensitive’; ‘I don’t mean to be offensive or anything but.....’ and my personal favourite ‘You have a chip on your shoulder’. (Daniel, 2020).

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Invalidating peoples lived experience is not a new phenomenon in discussions of prejudice. It plays a central role in systemic racism, and we see it time and again when white commentators take an incident of racism and turn it in to a question of whether racism even occurred, demanding people of colour to argue their own experience against absolute denial. (Elgy, 2019).

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Picture it: a white woman feels challenged or uncomfortable about something a Black person said or did. Instead of using her words, she cries. Instantly, no matter what the initial catalyst of the situation is, she ends up being appeased, pacified and pampered. (Ajayi Jones, 2018).

‘What on earth is going on?’ asked Vansittart, reluctantly reappearing in the main office. His usual strategy for dealing with workplace drama was to hide in his office, but the important eleven o’clock client would be arriving soon.

‘She’s calling me racist, it’s a disgrace, I’ve never been racist!’ shouted Felicity, getting her version in first.

‘She is racist; every day and in every way!’ snarled Yvonne.

‘That’s a lie!’ wailed Felicity, bursting into a fresh surge of tears.

‘And this is an official complaint!’ shouted Yvonne in angry frustration.

‘I’m complaining about the racism from her, and the fact she’s just called me a liar.’

‘You’d better both come up to my office,’ sighed Vansittart, forced into action by the fact he was under silent observation from the rest of the staff, though he remained hopeful he could persuade Yvonne to drop her complaint before it was committed to paper and thus became official. ‘I’m sure we can sort this out by civilised discussion, as befitting rational adults,’ he added, sending out a coded warning concerning the behaviour he expected from his staff in the forthcoming interviews, for he did not want to find himself in an awkward or embarrassing scene.

Vansittart squirmed behind his desk for the next twenty minutes as his Office Manager and the Angry Black Woman²²⁶ threw claim and counterclaim at each other until eventually silence fell, inviting Vansittart to demonstrate that integrity and equality ruled in his domain. ‘What I need to know,’ he said, ignoring both integrity and equality, ‘is whether you can both work here professionally, as professionals, and not act as though you’re in a school playground.’

‘Playground?’ snapped Yvonne. ‘This is an official complaint about your employee’s racism!’

‘Yes, well, I think you need to consider your course of action most carefully,’ coughed Vansittart. ‘Such things are not done lightly.’

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Black women are not supposed to push back and when they do, they're deemed to be domineering. Aggressive. Threatening. Loud. (Prasad, 2018).

‘And what else should I do about her racism?’

‘How dare you! I’m putting in a complaint about your lies and bullying and threatening behaviour!’ cried Felicity, pulling a fresh tissue from her handbag.

‘Then you’d better get an Industrial Tribunal ready to hear us both,’ snapped Yvonne at Vansittart.

‘I think you’d both better go home and think very carefully about how you wish to continue,’ pronounced Vansittart, making a mental note to deduct the hours left in the day from Felicity’s wages. He also wondered if he could deduct anything from Yvonne before reluctantly deciding, as he didn’t actually pay her anything, that he couldn’t. Which just didn’t seem right or fair to him.

‘Fine,’ snarled Yvonne. ‘I’ll get the complaint written up over the weekend and handed in on Monday.’

Vansittart stared at his desk diary to avoid making eye contact with either woman as they left the office. He had already resolved that Yvonne would be allowed to leave her unpaid post as she was clearly a disruptive presence in the office, no doubt a result of carrying so much Bla – so many *unresolved* issues. And if he made that official by the end of the day, then Yvonne would not be able to hand in her official letter of complaint on Monday...

Vansittart nodded in self-approval. He’d quietly post the letter of termination at Yvonne’s home that evening, informing her of his decision and telling her to clear her desk by no later than midday on Monday. And with that decision made, Vansittart phoned his wife to suggest a surprise weekend away, for he was concerned she was looking tired recently and he felt a good rest would do her the world of good, and there’d be no reason to hurry back, the office could do without him for a day, ha ha, they’d return late on Monday afternoon, and no doubt the baby sitter would be delighted to earn some extra money²²⁷ for the weekend and also the Monday²²⁸ by

²²⁷ Rather less than the minimum wage.

²²⁸ Though Vansittart only paid her for the morning, not the whole day, as they returned in the late afternoon and thus the girl had not done a full shift.

looking after the children and no, it didn't matter she might be missing her Monday classes at the local college, she could always make the work up later, and that's quite all right, darling, I just thought you'd like it as a little surprise, I was only thinking of you...

So ended Yvonne's dreams, strangled by the status quo before they could even draw breath.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The End

Monday morning dawned bleakly for Yvonne, for she was travelling for the last time to Clavier and Coldwell. But rather than looking forward to a day in the office, a career in the office, and finally a literary career launched from the office, she was now going in simply to clear her desk.

She had got up on Saturday morning, her head dull and heavy after the previous day, and found her parents sitting in joint disapproval at the kitchen table, an open letter propped up ostentatiously against the condiments.

‘This is for you,’ said her mother, her voice carefully modulated to reveal the anger, disappointment, and distress she was feeling.

‘Why’s it open?’ asked Yvonne, picking the letter up and seeing the envelope carried her handwritten name and a large slit at the top, evidence of her father’s letter opener.

‘I recognised Michael Vansittart’s handwriting,’ replied her mother, her tone shifting to betrayed accusation. ‘I thought he was offering you a job. But instead I found this!’

Yvonne pulled the letter out and read the short note of dismissal. Her services in the office were no longer required. A brief thanks for her hard work. And the request (command?) to remove all her personal belongings before Monday lunchtime.

‘Well?’ demanded her father.

‘Well what?’ snapped Yvonne.

‘What do you have to say about losing this opportunity your mother found for you?’

‘Opportunity?’ exploded Yvonne. ‘What opportunity? The opportunity to be exploited and discriminated against? The opportunity to see how wealthy people with contacts get everything?’

‘You have to make your own way in this world, like we did,’ snorted her father.

‘You borrowed a shitload of money off nan!’ yelled Yvonne. ‘You’d have got nowhere if you hadn’t guilted her into cleaning out her life savings!’
‘She got the money back!’ shouted Lily. ‘And don’t raise your voice at your father!’

‘And that’s all you can see, isn’t it?’ raged Yvonne. ‘The money, the big house, the flash car; all the signifiers of success! Everything society tells you to get, even though society makes sure only the elite can get anywhere!’
‘You need to make your own way,’ repeated her father.

‘How, exactly? Michael Vansittart and Rupert Hutchinson-Cockburn just stroll through life being given opportunities by their mates and family, and they take it all! Anything left over are just crumbs under the table – and we’re supposed to be sodding *thankful*?’

‘You watch your language in this house!’ responded Lily, partly as this was an automatic reaction to any hint of profanity but also because the phrase was a useful verbal placeholder as she tried to think of a refutation to her daughter’s observations.

‘Why? So I can copy my social betters and dream of becoming like them one day? Because that’s the truth, isn’t it? I’m not even allowed my own dreams in this world; only the second-hand dreams imposed by the wealthy elite – work hard, don’t raise your voice, and for the love of God don’t ever dare think there could be another way of life out there! Just be a dutiful drone, doing everything you and society tells me!’

For a moment it seemed Yvonne’s words had made some sort of impression on her parents as they glanced uneasily at each other. ‘Look, darling, we only want the best for you,’ muttered Derek, modulating his tone to “male reasonableness”.

‘But your idea of the “best” is to be a wage slave your whole life. Isn’t there anything more out there?’

‘Well, what do you want to do?’ asked her father, his reasonableness quickly melting into rising exasperation.

‘We’ll support you, darling, you know that,’ added Lily, an unexpected spurt of maternal guilt prompting the unusual promise.

‘I want to go to University and read History and English Literature.’

‘What? You need to get a job, my girl!’ snorted both parents simultaneously.

And now it was Monday. The weekend had been filled with recrimination and awkwardness, and Yvonne was glad to leave the house even if it was only for a few hours. She arrived at the office at her usual time, an hour before anyone else, though today this was because she didn’t want to see anyone else. What, after all, was there to say? Apart from “Hello, I’ve been sacked, goodbye.”

And besides, Yvonne could already guess the reaction of Sarah, (mouth hanging open in a vapid O shape), Helen (coughing fit), Hutchinson-Cockburn (casually assuming Yvonne had a trust fund or family connection or an old pal from university days to lean on), and Felicity, (smug racist superiority).

The thought of Felicity reminded Yvonne she hadn’t written the letter of complaint; she’d been too upset to even think of it over the weekend, what with the ongoing squabbling with her parents and her anxieties about the future and scouring the job adverts – and that had proved enormously depressing, for it was a glimpse of the sheer awfulness of her future; dead-end jobs leading to a dead-end life. And this was the only future available to her.

She unlocked the office door and saw the vast pile of Churchillian books still on her desk. It took some time to gather them together using the excess of carrier bags under the kitchen sink but finally she was done, after which she awkwardly thrust her pens and notebook down the side of the lightest bag, furthering the likelihood of developing a tear before she got very far down the road.

She looked around for one last time before throwing the office keys onto Hutchinson-Cockburn’s desk, hoping he would understand the message that he, and others like him, held the keys to life thanks to their birth and maybe – just maybe – he would recognise himself as a smug, arrogant, privileged wanker.

She then had to take the keys back anyway as she realised she needed them to lock the door as she left, meaning all she could do was shove them through the letterbox and listen to the mocking jangle as they hit the floor. Hauling the heavy bags along, Yvonne staggered to the library only to find a sign on the door announcing the services within were all permanently closed owing to budget cuts, the listed building was now part of the Urban Development Company and was scheduled for demolition, (soon be replaced by an exciting complex of office blocks, retail units, and coffee shops), and all books now needed to be taken to the next nearest library some ten miles distant.

Epilogue

After the end. Yvonne is gone, the office staff are compliant, and the prole narrator is once more relegated to making ineffectual snarky comments in the chapter headings and the footnotes, where no-one will ever read them.

The following morning, Vansittart peered cautiously through the office window to check that the angry Bla – that the disruptive influence was gone. He noted the clear desk and thus strode with confidence through his kingdom, smiling graciously at his office staff of Helen, Felicity and Sarah who were all, in truth, little more than office serfs. The empty desk may have made a lesser man feel guilty, but Vansittart knew from the quiet atmosphere he had Done the Right Thing.

He settled himself at his desk, plump and relaxed after the weekend away at his mother's house in Tunbridge Wells, wherein Mrs Vansittart senior had performed all the domestic duties expected of her by providing (with her daughter-in-law) to her son's needs. But now he was back in the real world, and work awaited him.

He was still browsing the Internet two hours later when the call came through from his old friend and school chum Sebastian Featherstonehaugh, MP, Deputy Minister of Culture (Regions) and self-proclaimed rising star of the government, who wanted to discreetly congratulate Vansittart on getting the extra funding on the back of his marvellous project to give the public a wonderful new authoritative record of the Greatest Man in British History, Sir Winston Churchill.

'Marvellous news, Seb, simply marvellous!' enthused Vansittart. 'And it's very kind of you to call me personally.'

'That's quite all right,' said Featherstonehaugh, breezily, though in fact he had good reason to call in person, for what he was about to say was not something he wanted written down, for things which were written could be read by anyone and thus be misunderstood.²²⁹ 'Have you decided which author you'll be going with?'

‘Well, it’s an extraordinarily strong pool to choose from,’ said Vansittart, his finely tuned social antennae telling him some unspoken message was hovering in the air.

‘Oh, I’m sure,’ twittered Featherstonehaugh, ‘but representations have been made that the writer needs to be the right sort of chap. One who will truly communicate the greatness of Churchill himself.’

‘Naturally, naturally,’ smiled Vansittart, reassuring Featherstonehaugh that he knew the code. ‘Someone in just the right position to do the work, yes?’

‘That’s it *exactly!*’ burred Featherstonehaugh. ‘And we do have someone in the right position, I believe, in that Terrance – er, in that *representations* have been made that our very own Terrance Rogerson is interested in taking on the role. He’s just the man, given his enormous media platform in the *Daily Crier*, and his twice weekly column in *The Explorer*,²³⁰ as well as his weekly column in *The Trumpet*,²³¹ and I know Terrance will be using those platforms judiciously to sell – to inform the public the book is on the way.’

‘Ah!’ beamed Vansittart, swiftly drawing the independent conclusion that Terrance Rogerson was, in fact, exactly the right man for the job. True, Terrance could be a little slow with his deadlines,²³² unconventional in his writing,²³³ and maybe a touch eccentric in the research,²³⁴ but if they hired (at Terrance’s expense, to be recouped from his side of the royalties) an old

WhatsApp and text messages have replaced face-to-face meetings and letters as the favourite method of communication for politicians. The casual, and sometimes untraceable, nature of these communications can make it harder for the Civil Service to ensure everyone - ministers, officials, businesses and lobbyists - plays by the rules. (Parkinson, 2021).

²³⁰ The biggest selling broadsheet of the day.

²³¹ The biggest selling tabloid of the day.

²³² i.e. Rogerson never handed anything in on time.

²³³ i.e. Rogerson’s prose was often racist, hackneyed, and plain bloody awful.

²³⁴ i.e. Rogerson skimmed over the research before making up the rest.

school chum who was now a respected, hardworking, but above all *discreet* historian to help get the book written...²³⁵ ‘I think we can work with that.’

‘Excellent! But do bear in mind this is unofficial; the announcement will be made next week, so until then, mum’s the word!’

‘Mum’s the word!’ echoed Vansittart as he cut the call, delighted now the future of his company was assured. And that meant he could offer young Hutchinson-Cockburn an official post and a small wage, which would undoubtedly please the boy’s father, Perceval, a man who held many useful contacts.

Vansittart closed the tab *Schoolgirl Sexpots* and instead opened *Home County Classic Car Sales*, for he rather fancied himself in a Jaguar E Type. And what’s more, he *deserved* a Jaguar E Type, because now his company could tell the truth of the Greatest Man of History, ensuring Winston Churchill’s shining light would never go out, and all could bask in the full glory of England’s Greatest Hero.²³⁶

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How much of the book is actually Boris’s own work, I wonder? He acknowledges it could not have been done without ‘the dynamic researches and encouragement’ of Cambridge history fellow and Churchill author Dr Warren Dockter. (Hardcastle, 2014).

²³⁶ And this is the self-replication of the privileged few, hogging the opportunities while ensuring only the Establishment-approved view, unquestionable and untouchable, is allowed.

We are all utterly fucked.

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