

# GEORGE ORWELL

## ENGLISH REBEL

ROBERT COLLS



*George Orwell*

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I think on the whole you have moved too much away from the ordinary world into a sort of Mickey Mouse universe where things and people don't have to obey the rules of space and time...I have a sort of belly-to-earth attitude and always feel uneasy when I get away from the ordinary world...

(Orwell to Henry Miller, from The Stores,  
Wallington, 26 August 1936)

I rather enjoyed your using the phrase 'Mickey Mouse Universe'. The intellectual would have said 'surrealisme'.

(Miller to Orwell, from 18 Villa Seurat,  
Paris XIV, September 1936)

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Orwell has had a number of fine biographers. He has also enjoyed the services of the best editors a writer could hope for, beginning with Ian Angus and Sonia Orwell in the 1960s and ending magisterially, and definitively, with Peter Davison's *Complete Works*, published by Secker & Warburg in 1986–7 and 1998. There have been other fine studies of Orwell that have followed a particular line, or investigated a particular aspect, or said something special about what sort of man he was or what sort of reputation he enjoyed. And now that Orwell's century is beginning to enter the realm of finished past, we can expect works that parody him, or explore him in non-factual and unreal ways.

My book shares a number of these approaches but is offered here as an intellectual biography that follows his sense of Englishness.

I was encouraged to pursue this theme by two apparently throwaway remarks by Professor K. O. Morgan. The first came *sotto voce* at a conference in Lille in 2004. As I left the podium, Morgan met me by the door. 'Strange thing that, about Orwell,' he remarked. 'You know, putting your belief in the people.' I had never thought of Orwell's commitments in this way—as something quite strange—and Morgan's remark came like a bolt from the blue. It set me thinking. A few years later the Welshman threw another dart, this time in *The Lamb and Flag* in Oxford, when he charged me there and then to go and write *The Englishness of George Orwell*. I was told to go forth. Morgan will not remember any of this, but that set me thinking for the second time. This is the result: *George Orwell: English Rebel*.

It is always nice to write the Preface at the end (a light at the beginning of the tunnel) and I want to thank some special people for their part in helping me write this book. I thank Matthew Cotton, commissioning editor at Oxford University Press, who never stopped asking about it. He never stopped asking, it is true, but he was patient as well, and offered significant guidance along the way. I thank as well OUP's anonymous readers for giving me confidence, and the sort of advice I would never have given myself. I thank Jeff New, my copy-editor at OUP, for seeing what I wanted to say—sometimes better than me. I thank Andrew Hawkey, proofreader for OUP, who helped me make the final cut. I thank Emma Barber, Senior Production Editor at OUP, who for a time seemed to be everywhere all



at once. I thank the Orwell Archive at University College London, which manages to be friendly, well run, and cramped all at the same time. I thank my third-year students on the Special Subject at the University of Leicester who over the years helped me more perhaps than they (or I) knew at the time. I thank my brother Graham Colls and my friend Albyn Snowdon for always being on hand to talk about everything and anything in bracing and stimulating ways. I thank Professor Wolfram Richter and the Gambrius Fellowship for giving me the chance to first air my ideas about Orwell and Europe in a public lecture at the University of Dortmund. I thank William Whyte for giving me the opportunity to write an essay in honour of Ross McKibbin that served as a direct try-out for the Englishness theme pursued here. I thank De Montfort University for giving me the time to finish the book, and make good. I thank my colleagues at Leicester and at De Montfort's International Centre for Sports History and Culture who were generous critics: in particular Mike Cronin, Jeremy Crump, Ron Greenall, and Simon Gunn; and Andrew King, an astrophysicist whose taste for the truth has led me round more circuits than I care to remember; and Dick Holt, who felt the full force of the subject. All that said, the book's faults are mine. Where would I be without my prejudices?

A word on the notes. Although the book is intended for the general reader as well as those with an academic interest in Orwell, for the benefit of the latter group there are quite a few of these. My advice to both parties is to suit yourself. If you want to follow the scholarly trail, look to the notes at the back. If you would rather just get on with it, don't bother. The story should carry you through. One of my main reasons for writing the book was a belief that scholars of literature and politics had had a good go at Orwell and now it was another historian's turn. The notes rather support that belief—as does the bibliographical essay, which sets Orwell's reputation in context.

Finally I dedicate this book with all my heart to my father, Bob, who showed me what decency in an English working man looked like long before I read George Orwell; to the women in my life, Amy, Becky, and Rosie, *best friends*; and to my mother, Margaret, who was giving me my life just as Orwell was losing his.

*R.C.*

Clarendon Park  
Leicester  
1 May 2013

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# Introduction

George Orwell was what they used to call a ‘Socialist’. He shared also some of the attitudes to life that used to be called ‘Tory’. Right from first principles, therefore, he was not as simple and straightforward as he made out or, indeed, as others made out for him. A deep-seated contrariness marked his writing and contributed to the wide and conflicting range of his appeal. Any attempt to understand his thinking must attend to life as he lived it, a step at a time, in and out of argument, right up to the end.

## *A step at a time*

Born in India in 1903, Eric Blair (George Orwell) was brought up and educated in the south of England. His family was comfortable in a ‘lower upper middle-class’ sort of way—a way he defined as upper middle class without the money. He attended the country’s top public school on a scholarship.

After Eton he joined the Imperial Police and went to Burma. Like many things in his life he did it because he chose to do it. It was not a happy time, however, and he returned to England five years later eager to cross the line. What line? Many lines, as we shall see. His first published works are on the side of the poor and dispossessed and we find him writing, or trying to write, from their point of view. Although England and the British Empire is usually his subject, so is poverty, opposition, and rebellion. He shows no apparent sign of any affiliation to his country or its traditions.<sup>1</sup>

Then, in 1936, he went north and for the first time in his life found an England he could believe in. He saw how the miners kept the country going. He pondered why their labour was the most valuable, but not the most valued. He noted how the working class did not ask for much, and

not much was gladly given. But from this point on he knew he belonged. Theirs was another England to believe in and, as time went on, he even came to believe in his own.

Not that Orwell came to England just by thinking about it. Your prose finds you out, he warned. So how he lived mattered to how he wrote, and because he wanted to live and write in certain ways, he took pains to do so. He kept his journal in a neat, purposeful hand. He tried to see situations exactly as they were. He took things in. He took things on. He changed his mind. He wanted to be exact and exacting at the same time. He carefully weighed his experience and tried to turn it into literature. Above all, he fell in line with his country at a critical time in its history. When he died in 1950 his reputation was growing and it has never stopped growing. The literary scholar John Rodden has made Orwell dead almost as interesting as Orwell alive.<sup>2</sup>

Who influenced him? Whom did he influence? How do we read him now? Scan just a single page of the Modern Literary Association's *International Bibliography* and you will come across studies of Orwell and Somerset Maugham, Orwell and Samuel Beckett, Orwell and Søren Kierkegaard, Orwell and Salvador Dali, Orwell and Salman Rushdie, Orwell and Evelyn Waugh, Orwell and William Morris, Orwell and Walker Evans (and James Agee), Orwell and Thomas Carlyle, Orwell and Albert Camus, Orwell and Michel Foucault, Orwell and Thomas Pynchon, Orwell and Benedict Anderson, Orwell and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and Orwell and Virginia Woolf.<sup>3</sup> No one, in the Anglo-American literary world at least, seems to doubt his importance. Rodden cites him as 'more quoted and referenced than any other modern writer'.<sup>4</sup>

And yet, when it comes to the more general question of what he believed, or how we should see him, this most quoted and referenced of writers is almost impossible to pin down. Scholarly papers on what he is said to have been *against* (from Nazis to Jews) are no guide to what he is said to have been *for* (from Protestants to puddings). He did not appear to believe, for instance, in the existence of God, but he did believe in the importance of continuing to believe in the existence of God. He did not like capitalism, but he believed in the importance of the culture that capitalism produced. That he was both an iconoclast and a traditionalist is beyond doubt—just about everybody agrees on that—but it is as difficult to decide whether he was a conservative iconoclast or a socialist

traditionalist as it is to decide whether he was a Protestant atheist or an atheistical atheist. Orwell spent the best part of his adult life saying he was a socialist and a non-believer, but those who knew him well swore that deep down he was really a conservative, and there are a number of (good) books claiming he was a Christian.

Too young for the last of romanticism, too late for modernism, and dead by the time of the post-modernists, Orwell is not particularly susceptible to aesthetic labels either. Alexandra Harris, in her excellent book on *Romantic Moderns*, finds a slot for almost everyone but him.<sup>5</sup> Nor does he fit easily into any intellectual movement. He might have been a literary Marxist, but he might equally have been a cultural Tory. Indeed, almost all general statements about who or what he was can be matched by equal and opposite statements. For all his gifts of clarity and precision, and for all his ability to persuade you that he was showing you the world as it was, and for all his seriousness, George Orwell is difficult to pin down—a writer who held many points of view, some twice over. He was, after all, the inventor of ‘Doublethink’: the man who told you that highly civilized human beings were trying to kill him, the man who told you that all animals were equal only some more so. This is not to say that he was fickle, or that he did not believe in anything or that he did not know what he believed. It is only to say he has to be taken a step at a time.

### ***His Englishness***

Orwell belonged to a generation who took their Englishness for granted. It is just possible that a boy like him could have grown up free of it, or even against it, but only by chance and only by finding something else to put in its place. Most boys of his class (and not only them) came of age against the gigantic moral backdrop of British global interests and responsibilities. Brought up in a distinctly old-colonial family, he believed in Englishness like he believed in the world. It existed. It existed like ships in the Channel, the king in his castle, money in the bank. It existed as a sort of public poetry to be intoned insistently, regularly, nationally, all one’s life through, like the shipping forecast or the football results, to remind you of who you were and where you lived. His was a country, moreover, where a very small group of politicians and other significant figures of state and civil society were trusted, more or less, to stand for



the nation and speak on its behalf. In other words, being English was not open to question. It could not be avoided, and, whether one was for it or against it, one was never less than conscious of it. When Orwell thought of other people, he thought of national types. He could see at bottom that such attitudes were probably irrational, yet he never travelled far without them. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, his first book, is rife with foreigners (English types just across the water).<sup>6</sup>

Orwell's first attempt to write self-consciously about such things was probably 'The Tale of John Flory (1890–1927)', written on Burma-police notepaper sometime during the late 1920s. He sketches the story of 'the degeneration and ruin, through his native faults, of a gifted man'.

A second attempt at Englishness followed sometime in 1939, just after his very south-of-England novel, *Coming Up for Air*. 'The Quick and the Dead' is a collection of notes (the book itself was never written) towards another tale of degeneration, this time in a middle-class family. Living without 'colour, pleasure, interest or sense of purpose', their 'guiding principle was to save trouble'. If they do not know how to die, this is a family that has forgotten how to live. 'Steady the Buffs' if you eat too much. 'I hope nobody wants a second helping' if you eat too little. 'Don't dirty a clean plate' before you start.<sup>7</sup>

It was an American who first drew Orwell's attention to the stifling effects of his English upbringing. Writing from Paris in 1936, Henry Miller warned him of his guilt, his 'false respectability', his 'inadequacy', and his 'bloody English education'. In a couple of smarting but affectionate rebukes, the American tried to liberate the Englishman from his sense of responsibility for everything that happened in the world. 'Stop thinking...!' 'Do nothing...!' 'Fuck your capitalistic society!' Thirteen years later, in 1949, alongside some very English advertisements for Rose's Lime Juice and Rudge Bicycles, Lionel Trilling in the *New Yorker* recognized that same 'peculiarly English' idiom in Orwell. But this time the American found strength in his Englishness, not impotence.<sup>8</sup> A lot had happened to Orwell since 1936. Not least, he had found his country.

When he died in 1950, *World Review*'s distinguished contributors made nothing of Orwell's Englishness. Tom Hopkinson too missed it in 1953, but John Atkins was quick to spot it ('stronger than class') in 1954, and got somewhere with it in his idea of a national 'persona'.<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams in 1958, George Woodcock in 1967, and Jenni Calder in 1968

all spotted Orwell's Englishness again, only to subdivide it into aspects of other things, such as community, or tradition, or patriotism.<sup>10</sup> Williams returned to the theme in 1971, in his short sketch in the Fontana 'Modern Masters' series, where he devoted the first two chapters to this 'most native and English of writers' and Orwell's 'uncertain and ambiguous relationship with England'—only to fade away in the rest of the book.<sup>11</sup> Bernard Bergonzi had picked up on an 'ideology of being English' in Orwell the year before, but failed to take it on and, with two partial exceptions and one full one, the same can be said of a gallery of Englishness-spotters beginning with Lionel Trilling and Atkins in 1949 and 1954, and including Martin Green ('essential', 1961), Richard Rees ('hard-headed', 1970), J. R. Hammond ('acute', 1982), John Rodden ('quintessential', 1989), Malcolm Bradbury ('engrained', 1993), David Gervais ('reminiscent of Priestley', 1993), D. J. Taylor ('shrewd', 2003), John Brannigan ('deep', 2003), Christopher Hitchens ('ambivalent', 2003), and Ben Clarke, who restricted himself to 'interpretive' possibilities in 2006, and national myths in 2007. The one full exception is Michael Walzer, whose 1998 essay 'George Orwell's England' stands out as a fine and original contribution. The two partial exceptions are Bernard Crick and Julian Barnes, who in 1980 and 2009 respectively addressed Orwell's Englishness in ways that suggested there was more to come. In Crick's case, his reference to Orwell as a member of the awkward squad of dissident Englishmen was exactly right, if all too passing. There was to be no adequate follow-up, though he went on to write about national identity in other contexts. For Barnes there is still time. We stand ready.<sup>12</sup>

Nearly all these writers sniffed Orwell's Englishness in the air but were too busy seeing it as other things and did not track it down. When it passed under their noses, as in Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn*, or *Coming Up for Air*, or *The English People*, they tended to regard it as an English variant of socialism, or nostalgia, or whimsy, or individualism, or populism, or some aspect of something 'characteristically' and 'indelibly' English, without explaining further.<sup>13</sup> In a lengthy index entry appertaining to Orwell's 'Attitudes, Habits, Characteristics', D. J. Taylor gave 'Englishness' only one mention. In an equally fine work, Gordon Bowker tried to explain the contradictions in Orwell's 'profound sense of Englishness'. That he 'was against private schools' but sent his son to one, that he 'disliked Scots' but chose to live in Scotland, that he 'was a staunch atheist' but 'asked to be buried according to the rites of the

Church of England', and so on tells us something, but by no means enough.<sup>14</sup> Other biographers hardly noticed it, though of course it was there all the time.<sup>15</sup> Not that this should surprise us. Given the kind of men who were its guardians, Englishness was either too familiar to be noticed or, if it was noticed, it was supposed to be held in check. Like their persons or, if you like, like their 'masculinity', being English for this class of men was *supposed* to be held in check, *supposed* to be implicit, assumed, not easily put into words, indefinable.<sup>16</sup> They were so stuck for words for things so personal they used French words instead. Englishness enjoyed a certain 'je ne sais quois'. In the sense that it assumed the dignified part of the constitution, the Englishman's Englishness was there for all to see. But in the sense that it told you something about the man himself, it was a life best kept private.<sup>17</sup> It used to be thought, and to some degree it still is thought, that Englishness made explicit is Englishness exposed, and Englishness exposed is Englishness undone.

In the first place, therefore, I am trying to prove an absence: Orwell saw his identity as his own affair, Englishness as a backdrop, the British Empire in the wings, the state nowhere to be seen. He certainly was not going to talk about it in a personal way. But as he tried to come to terms with himself in times of great threat to his country, England moved centre-stage and front. This is not to say he built his identity out of it. Identities are never 'built' or 'constructed' so much as lived and breathed, day to day, until they run out of meaning and have to change. Driven by his 'need for constant self definition', 'his mind still grinding over the same old political questions' with 'no sense of peace or relinquishment in him', he kept at it right to the end.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Keeping up***

This book tries to keep up. Orwell produced no body of work—that came after. Peter Davison's twenty blue volumes might look like a body of work, but Orwell never saw such a thing. He responded to the vagaries of an eventful life. Understanding how this worked is not just a question of doing the research and coming up with new knowledge. Knowledge in the humanities is rarely new in that way, and even if it was, it is not a question of knowledge transfer. It is a question of being convincing. For there is no objective 'England' against which I can measure Orwell's 'Englishness', any more than there is a full and final

‘Orwell’ who is the standard by which all the other Orwells can be judged. Suffice to say that his Englishness had nothing to do with royalty or regiments, cricket or cucumber sandwiches. It was not about being ‘old-fashioned’, ‘Victorian’, or a bit of an ‘old fogey’—though he might have been all these things. It was about how at a certain stage in his life he wanted to identify with his country, understand it, explain it, be convinced by it, and reconnect with it in its current and previous manifestations. He thought of a future that could be made more bearable by marching towards it carrying the best of what had inspired previous generations—like the Sikhs carried their holy books aloft into battle. In other words, Orwell’s Englishness sat somewhere between what had been lived and breathed in the past and what might be lived and breathed in the future. I am not saying in this book that Englishness is the key to Orwell. I am saying that it was something that he thought *with* as well as about, and that it stayed with him from first to last. If it does not explain all the strands in his thinking, it is at least the strand which runs through all the others. There is no ‘key’ to Orwell any more than he is a ‘box’ to open. His Englishness, though, is worth following through.

## Angry Old Etonian

### ‘*Scrub*’

In the English left-wing periodical *New Leader* for 30 April 1937 there is a report from the Spanish Civil War telling of a night attack on the Aragon front. It describes how a contingent of British Republican volunteers crawled their way across a field up to the edge of the enemy line, where they crouched listening to the guards before standing up to throw their bombs. *New Leader* identified the comrades:

A Spanish comrade arose and rushed forward. ‘Por ellos, Arriba!’ (For the others, charge!) ‘Charge!’ shouted Blair. ‘Over to the right and in!’ called Paddy Donovan. ‘Are we downhearted?’ cried the French Captain Benjamin. In front of the parapet was Eric Blair’s tall figure coolly strolling forward through the storm of fire. He leaps at a parapet, then stumbles. Hell, have they got him? No, he was over, closely followed by Cross of Hammersmith, Frankford of Hackney, and Bob Smillie, with others right after them.<sup>1</sup>

The report goes on to describe how they seized the trench, killing two. Blair, apparently, was first in and last out. Bayonet fixed, he chased an enemy soldier who scampered away down the line wrapped in a blanket. Having taken the trench, there was nothing more for the attackers to do than relinquish it. They made their way back to their own lines under cover of darkness.

Rival leftist groups in Britain suggested that this foray was made for no other reason than to draw attention to the Independent Labour Party, one of the many *marxisant* parties supporting the Republican side. The Communist Party in particular claimed that the attack had had no strategic value, that it was only done for publicity, that it was a ‘stunt’.

Well, whatever Eric Blair was doing or thought he was doing that night in the dark, he was not trying to make friends or influence people

back in England. He was not following, for instance, the rules for getting on as a public figure.<sup>2</sup> He was not enjoying the warmth of a good club. He was not trying to make the right literary contacts which would help him further his career in London. Nor was he comfortably in chambers, or living off a private income, or worming his way onto an expense account, or petitioning for a fellowship—all of which would have given him the freedom to write. Least of all was he carrying a rifle in Spain in order to solve what Stefan Collini calls ‘the riddle of Englishness’ in England. Englishness was every public moralist’s favourite subject in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> To have been able to say what it was would have rendered a great service to his country and an even greater service to his career.

In the event, under the name of George Orwell, Eric Blair did become a famous public moralist, England’s finest, in fact; and he did make a profession out of writing, consummately so, in the end; and he did solve the riddle of Englishness, for a time at least. But he never set out to do these things. He did not intend to be a moralist or a national figure. He had no plan. He had no patron. He was not a ‘joiner’. He did not follow an obvious path. George Orwell, the most significant British political writer of the twentieth century, was not even an ‘Orwellian’. In his old school slang, he was a ‘scrub’: someone who liked to do what is not done.

All this makes him a difficult subject. There is little in the way of a trajectory in Orwell’s life. It is more a series of intense reactions to peoples and places as he came upon them. Nor is there any trace of a career or much sign of a ‘set’. He threw himself into situations, not always to his own advantage. He liked to go against the grain because he believed that was where the truth usually lay. But it led him into all sorts of awkward and angry corners which fed the contrariness in his nature. He loathed nationalism, but defined Englishness for a generation. He was an enemy of the right, but had little to say in favour of the left. He was no friend of the left, but tried to work within it. He was violently opposed to totalitarianism, but had little interest in political parties. He didn’t write well about women but tried, in one novel at least, to write about being a woman, and in his last novel he invested his best hope, such as it was, in one woman and (almost) all women. He did not trust intellectuals, but mixed with them, was one himself, and never tried to pretend otherwise, though sometimes he conveniently forgot the fact.

***The world as it was***

Most of all, Orwell wanted to encounter the world as he found it and tell the truth by turning it into art. As we know from his two most famous books, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949), he least wanted to give way to the blandishments of Fascism and Communism. I say 'blandishments' because he was writing at a time when, for many people in Europe, Fascists and Communists seemed not only necessary and modern, but truthful and attractive too. Only in the summer of 1939 did Nazism become the official enemy of the British people and, once Russia was invaded by Hitler in June 1941, the Soviet Union became Britain's official friend and ally and remained so all through the war. On the whole, he was against both systems almost from the minute he first discovered them. He did not always get things right, but unlike some who lived through the 1930s and 1940s, he did not have to recant, or excuse, his former associations.

He was against capitalism and imperialism too, and reserved some of his harshest criticism for their British variants. All round, he believed that all four systems—capitalist, imperialist, Fascist, and Communist—encouraged the strong to plunder the weak and the few to deceive the many. He made modifications and distinctions within and between them of course, as any serious observer must, and in the end he was forced into siding with one over the other, but in 1946 Orwell claimed that every line he had written since 1936 had been against imperialism and totalitarianism and in favour of 'democratic Socialism' as he hoped it would develop in Britain and Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Orwell was against all the major world systems of his day, including nationalism and Catholicism. Apart from an early gut attraction to a sort of folk Marxism where 'the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong', he did not believe in political ideologies either.<sup>5</sup> In other words, he painted himself into a very small corner of the things he knew and supported, largely by default, and set his face against the vast ideological spaces of all the things he opposed.

He understood 'ideology' as a form of abstract knowledge which, in order to support a particular tendency or regime, has to distort the world and usually does so by drawing off, or separating out, ideas from experience. Ideology therefore (in Orwell's eyes) could never afford to get too close to the lives of the people. The more abstract the idea and the

language that expressed it, the more ideological the work, and vice versa. A key feature of his writing, therefore, was a desire to put himself as far away from abstraction and as close to experience as he could, followed by a meticulous attention to the detail of what he saw, heard, touched, tasted, smelled, and reasonably assumed to be the case. For Orwell, this was the first test of truth. He challenged the world by burrowing into it, and expected to be challenged in turn. He knew that if he was saying something so abstract that it could not be understood, or falsified, then he was not saying anything that mattered. Which is to say, he staked his reputation on being true to the world as it was, and his great fear of intellectuals stemmed from what he saw as their propensity for abstraction and deracination—abstraction in their thinking, and deracination in their lives. Orwell's politics, therefore, were no more and no less than intense encounters turned into writings he hoped would be truthful and important. Like Gramsci, he believed that telling the truth was a revolutionary act. But without the encounters he had no politics, and without the politics he felt he had nothing to say.

If Orwell feared the deracination of intellectuals, it was because he himself was prone to it. So much of his later life was spent ill in bed. So much of his early life was cordoned off. Soon after his birth to English parents in British India—a cocooned life if ever there was one—Eric and his mother Ida and older sister Marjorie returned to England to settle in Henley-on-Thames. There they lived agreeably on Mr Blair's 600 rupees a month, about £440 per year, or over £8 per week—well above the lower range middle-class income of £250 p.a., if not quite reaching the middle range of £500 and over. And in the 1930s, when the Blairs had long since retired to the seaside, what was bad for Indian peasants, it seems, was good for them. The British had grossly overvalued the Indian rupee against the pound at a fixed rate of 1s. 6d., and Mr Blair's pension did well out of this.<sup>6</sup> Orwell always said that the British lived off the backs of Indian peasants. Well, at 36 High Street Southwold that certainly seems to have been the case—not forgetting that Blair's pensionable salary had been culled from the opium trade, hardly one of the choicer ends of the imperial project.<sup>7</sup> Orwell went to Burma and came back hating the British Empire. Given his family circumstances, it is not impossible to imagine him walking no further than to the end of Southwold pier and coming to the same conclusion.



At the same time, he regretted how, as a child, his Henley upbringing had forced him to stand apart from the everyday life of the town. He was forbidden to play with neighbouring children because their father was believed to be a plumber. He came to fear manual workers, and never forgot his revulsion on venturing too close. Being invited to swig their beer, or smoke their dog-ends, or smell their sweating bodies ('bacon-like reek') was enough to make a boy retch.<sup>8</sup> Later in life he would force himself to do it. Meanwhile, down in Henley-on-Thames, his mother enjoyed a life of coffee and cards while young Eric was encouraged to make friends with his own sort.<sup>9</sup>

In 1911, when he was 8, he won a scholarship to a boys' private boarding school in Sussex. St Cyprian's seems to have been no different from most English private schools, in that it was set as far away as possible from other people without looking like an asylum—well outside the town, with landscaped grounds, at the end of a drive glimpsed only through a gate. Gilt letters on the board might say 'preparatory school', but only in the sense that it was a preparation for the next school, not for life over the wall.

Looking out on the South Downs, beyond the games-field and miniature parade ground, there was little chance that Eric Blair and the eighty little fellows of St Cyprian's were going to chance upon life as it was actually lived, in Eastbourne, in 1911. He was unhappy here for all sorts of reasons, from the sour porridge to the tepid baths and an early spot of bed-wetting (as reported by him), but most of all he was unhappy because (as he came to regard it later) St Cyprian's was a totalitarian institution which, having lied to him about who he was, proceeded to bully him for being what he thought he had become—snotty, smelly, and unloved.<sup>10</sup> The school was only half a mile from Eastbourne Union Workhouse. Two types of confinement so near and so far would have pleased Orwell's taste for paradox, but as a boy he never knew paupers existed. It may have been that St Cyprian's was his first introduction to ideology. It may have been that St Cyprian's was his first small world. It was almost certainly his first strong reaction to a people and a place. He came to hate it for wrenching his character out of shape at such a tender age and for cramming him with large doses of information that was either useless or wrong. In the event it was the useless part (the Latin and Greek) that won him a scholarship to the most prestigious school in the world.

He went up to Eton College in May 1917. He was nearly 14 years old and one of seventy King's Scholars. The six hundred others, the 'Oppidans', were there because their parents could afford to send them. Blair was there because he was clever. Eton scholarships were formidably difficult. Whatever else we learn of Eric Arthur Blair, we should remember his natural gifts.<sup>11</sup>

Although far more open and relaxed than the little prep school, Eton did not teach him much about the outside world either. In 1900 Arthur Clutton-Brock characterized it as a place happy in its customs.<sup>12</sup> In 1905 it had thirty-two classics masters and four science masters. In 1936 it had nine scientists and thirty-nine classicists. Sixth-formers spent half the week construing Latin and Greek verbs and the other half wondering what lay beyond the school bounds. Eton High Street and the principal thoroughfares of Windsor leading up to the Castle and the Park were in bounds; every other street and thoroughfare except Brocas Lane (at such times as boating was allowed) was not.<sup>13</sup> Around the time of Orwell's arrival Eton still believed it had lost a truly great headmaster in Dr Edmond Warre (1884–1905)—though it did not take long for them to forget why they believed it.<sup>14</sup> The headmaster during Orwell's time was the Revd Dr Cyril Argentine Alington (1917–33), formerly of All Souls College, Oxford. Alington had replaced his brother in law, the Revd Edward Lyttelton, formerly of Middlesex County Cricket Club.<sup>15</sup>

Orwell showed no interest in any of it, no more than it showed interest in any of him. He appears to have sidestepped the most powerful boy ideology of the day, sport and the English gentleman.<sup>16</sup> He resisted the Eton cult of oarsman and tutor. Neither headmasters nor housemasters figure in his writing. There are no memoirs of lazy days on the river or cosy evenings in house. One cannot imagine him singing the Eton Boating Song ('we'll still swing together') with the *Anarquistas* in Spain (though you never know).<sup>17</sup> He only ever wrote about sport once.<sup>18</sup> As a King's Scholar he fooled around with other boys (in the grounds), played a bit of football (Eton rules), swam (in a reserved place), learned dead languages (he opted to do a term's science), grew twelve inches, and naturally enough learned nothing more about real life than he had at St Cyprian's. He did, however, stay long enough to earn the right to wear flannels, 'fag fags',<sup>19</sup> and otherwise fit into an institution whose capacious grounds and toleration of what it called 'boys' side' traditions

afforded him some measure of independence which over the years grew into a mild delinquency.

For all its cultishness, Eton could show boys how to be awkward and independent too.<sup>20</sup> It also afforded (some of) them the opportunity to think and imagine. When he was about 15, maybe slightly younger, Blair wrote a three-act play, 'The Man and the Maid', about a bunch of useless intellectuals who live on roots and herbs and think that righteousness lies in the acquisition of a black skin. Their leader, the youthful Lucius, son of Mireldo, feels 'the desire for adventure and romance'. He also wishes 'to be quit of this island'. At around the same time, maybe slightly later, Blair also wrote three stories for the college newspaper. 'The Adventure of the Lost Meat-card' is a pastiche of Conan Doyle. The great detective knew the man was not who he said he was because: "‘What American”, said Holmes, “would spit on the floor boards when he could spit on the carpet?”’ (a remark which had enjoyed previous literary outings). 'The Slack-bob' has a touch of Richmal Crompton in it, about a boy who only pretends to be a rower and is found out by his cousins—'noisy girls with red hair' and very pronounced opinions. 'A Peep into the Future' concerns a college professor who announces 'the reign of science' and with it the inferiority of all women. This is pure vaudeville. People eat pills and carry babies in string bags. In the end the mad professor is slapped down by 'a mighty woman' who strides down the chapel aisle to knock him off his perch. "‘A good smackin’ is what you want”, she said'. And a good smackin’ is what he got.<sup>21</sup>

At least young Eric paid enough attention to his lessons to scrape through his exams, and he does not seem to have been particularly irritated by the place except, of course, much later in the drawling Old Etonian way about poor form, bad show, and so forth. Even his snobbery was effortless.<sup>22</sup> When he left, he did not try to keep in touch or fondly remember, though Old Etonians kept popping up and became important to him. But it was no different with the other places that mattered in his life. He was not sentimental. Commentators have struggled to make sense of his time there. Eton claimed to be able to instil in each boy the will to 'to save himself by his sole exertions' while the schoolboy Blair proved the point by coolly observing that there were at least six clerical masters on the staff who made a good living out of the Crucifixion.<sup>23</sup> School friends remembered him as a rebel and a bit of a dark horse:

‘certainly able to look after himself from the beginning... obviously a character.’ In later life Orwell declared the place a nuisance and an anachronism, but concluded, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, and against Patrick Joyce’s expert judgement, that the ‘atmosphere... gave each boy a fair chance of developing his individuality’.<sup>24</sup> Public school seems to have left him personally undamaged and might even have given back some of the boyish confidence the prep school had taken away. He put his own son’s name down for Westminster.

After Eton, a boy like him should have gone straight to university or into one of the professions, and it is perhaps a sign of the scrub that he didn’t. He joined the Imperial Police, and at least one of his tutors at Eton would have taken the view that it was a sign of the scrub that he did.<sup>25</sup> Maybe not going into a well-heeled world represented some sort of snobbery on his part. Maybe he had had enough of being a boy. There were no scholarships this time round, so perhaps it was a simple lack of funds. A friend of his at the time says that Blair wanted to go to university but was forbidden by his father.<sup>26</sup> King’s Scholars at Eton traditionally went to King’s College, Cambridge (the colleges were joint foundations), but had he gone there he would have learned nothing about England either.<sup>27</sup> True, he might have chatted with porters at the college gates or bedders in his rooms, but by and large life as he might have lived it at Cambridge would have had nothing to do with life as it was generally lived in England in 1922. Most English people could not have named a single Cambridge college, or shown the slightest knowledge of what college life involved. That a young man in a scarf should be chased around the streets by an old one in a hat for staying out late would have struck them as bizarre. On the other hand, if he had gone to King’s he might have been taught by John Maynard Keynes, or met E. M. Forster on the stairs.<sup>28</sup> But Eric Blair did not go to Cambridge, or Oxford, or any university. At 19, he went to Burma.

### *The Empire as it was*

At school Orwell played the role of interesting rebel.<sup>29</sup> He recalled it as part of the spirit of the time. But he did not mean it. When he wanted to mean it he played the white man and put on a uniform. One could suppose that he was part of some great imperial plan: that little boys like him were sent away in order to forget their Mummies and remember

their Fathers and grow into big boys who would want to run the Empire, or join the army, or teach in a prep school, or *something*. Coarse as it may sound, in Blair's case there was some truth in this supposition. Scrub or not, he was inclined to want to do the right thing.

He chose Burma out of nine Indian provinces, and spent five years there learning something of himself and a lot about the world.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, he had to unlearn nearly everything else. For a young public-school man who had been born in Bengal, whose mother had been brought up in Burma, and whose father had worked his entire life in the Indian Civil Service, this must have come as something of a shock—skeletons in the family cupboard. He went out to Burma in 1922 as part of a great British world system held together by the extraordinary wealth and power of his native country and the extraordinary size and key strategic position of India, his adopted one.<sup>31</sup> When he came back in 1927 that world system had not lost one cubit of its stature, but the point was he no longer believed in it.

First discoveries came in the heat and chaos of everyday life. India comprised 675 states and 824,000 square miles, and administered other places besides. The British were heavily outnumbered in all of them, and not surprisingly saw all of the subcontinent's history as a search for control. So did Gandhi, their main antagonist, who appealed to the British to give self-control to Indians (*Hindswary*) by giving self-control (*swary*) to themselves. If they looked into their hearts, he claimed, that is what the British would do: there was no need for violence, only an overwhelming spiritual will born of the truth. In M. K. Gandhi the rulers of the world's most formidable imperial power met their most formidable imperial foe—a man who told them they had to withdraw because it was a question of their own identity and freedom that they do so.<sup>32</sup> Burma had its own nationalist movement, but there would not have been a British officer in the territory who did not know about the man in the loincloth who was capable of making all their lives miserable.

Gandhi's message was not just spiritual. It made political sense too. In calling for liberty for India, he was not asking for anything the British did not ask for themselves. And in among the sayings and the 'truths' of his own homespun philosophy, he was simply turning a mirror on his rulers. Do you look like this? Do you look like the man you say you are? If you are freeborn, then why have you not made us free? If you never shall be slaves, why are we your slaves? This was a spiritual version of

the Indian National Congress's call upon the *Raj* to honour its own national myths and, in this sense at least Gandhi may have been Blair's first serious encounter with his own Englishness. Orwell remembered as a young policeman reading Gandhi's *The Story of my Experience with Truth* in an Indian newspaper, and how the arguments made a good impression—'which Gandhi himself did not'.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, he recalled also a strange degree of respect for the man, even among those who would be only too pleased to throw him into jail.

The British *Raj* (the *rule*) ran on a 'warrant of precedence' that laid down seventy-seven distinctive ranks for officials, not counting caste and racial ranking. By the book, India's provinces appeared to be very carefully modulated systems of administration: from King Emperor at the top to dockside coolie at the bottom, a place for everyone and everyone in their place. Next to the King Emperor was the British high command in London and New Delhi—the India Office, the Viceroy, his staff, their advisors and generals. Then came the princely states, naturally pro-British, covering two-fifths of the territory and containing one-fifth of the population. Then the industrial upper classes, pro-British but increasingly anxious to do better for themselves, possibly in an India that was able to govern itself; then the white-collar classes, a vast collection of desk-*wallahs* from counting-house clerks to city lawyers; then the industrial proletariat, ever growing; then the peasantry—immense. The Indian army and police were paid regular wages, at least.

G. W. Stevens described the District Officer's little court—the fold-up desk, the two chairs, three clerks, and man at the tent door letting in and seeing out the little queue of plaintiffs. Behind the desk, just 30 years old, 'sat the Presence'. 'British Rule incarnate is a young man.' But as a front-line paramilitary police officer in a British Indian province, dealing with people who did not always want to be dealt with, Blair did not see it like that. He remembered instead that hierarchies did not mean much on the ground. When you had to hold a man, or kick him, or punch him, or hang him, or when you were spat at or tripped or bumped off the path, fold-up desks and warrants of precedence did not save you.<sup>34</sup> In a fine, manly flourish John Ruskin once said there was 'no nobler career' than that of imperial service. But Eric Blair returned home from postings where he was hated by large numbers of people knowing that the Empire was not missionary work, and the virtue of young men like him did not lie in its service.<sup>35</sup>

For the British, every hill station was somewhere to escape from. Orwell remembered rather enjoying the company of locals (not counting Buddhist monks), when he could get it, and he made serious efforts to learn the languages, but the ordinary business of being an English *sahib* disgusted him. His great-great grandfather had been a slave-owner in Jamaica. His father-in-law had been a teak dealer in Burma. His father had been an official in the opium trade. These family heirlooms gave him a personal stake in what he witnessed. Presiding over thousands of little ceremonies of control and consent, even the control and consent of a man about to be hanged, Orwell did his duty. But when he came to reflect upon that duty, he laid down his swagger-stick and took on the role of colonial anthropologist instead. Increasingly detached from Burmese and British alike, but exposed to the colonial relationship all day, every day, he came to the conclusion that it was a racket. Or, as he put it, the policeman held the native down while the businessman went through his pockets, and the British Empire pronounced it a good thing for all concerned.<sup>36</sup>

The British had been trading in Burma since the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century they turned it into a colony, partly for strategic reasons to do with Indian security, and partly for economic reasons to do with raw materials and the Irrawaddy's enormous capacity for growing rice. The country was taken in three bites from the south: the first, taking Rangoon and the Delta, in 1824–6; the second, taking Lower Burma, in 1852–3; and the third, under pressure from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce demanding a trade-route to China, taking Upper Burma, including Mandalay, in 1885.

Cash-cropping started in the late 1860s. The railways came in 1877. Burma Oil commenced operations in 1886. A lieutenant-governor and a non-elected Legislative Council were appointed in 1897, a Department of Jails and Hospitals in 1899, ministries of Public Instruction in 1900, Land Revenue in 1900, Forestry in 1905, Agriculture in 1906, Excise in 1906, and a Judiciary between 1900 and 1905. By 1913 British firms owned 90 per cent of capital assets in grain, timber, rubber, oil, and minerals.<sup>37</sup> A poor neighbour of India and almost as far away from Delhi as from London—or so it must have seemed on station—Burma was ruled by the Indian Civil Service and other institutions of the *Raj*, including the various military and police forces. Joppen's map of 1926 shows it as a thick pink wedge, some 800 miles by 400, with one city

at its base and one long river down its middle.<sup>38</sup> Buddhism, the majority religion, was not officially recognized.

The suppression of the Indian 'Mutiny' in 1858 redrew the British presence in the subcontinent. An aggressive trading empire, the East India Company, was replaced by a Viceroy in Calcutta and direct rule from the India Office in London. Attitudes changed. There was less talk now of winning new territories, more talk of steady government and staying on. In particular, there was no longer any question (as once there had been) of turning Indian civil servants into little Englishmen.<sup>39</sup> Macaulay had once hoped 'to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. That was in 1835. By 1876, on the British side at least, that was all over. Lord Salisbury let it be known that Bengali clerks could only be in opposition.<sup>40</sup> In the wake of this complete change of face, the hill station, the compound, the bungalow, the club, and the regimental mess became private places, islands 'secure from noxious India'. When the Prince of Wales visited Burma in December 1921 they held a Military Police Ball at Mandalay in his honour. It was 'a white tie affair'. Such things mattered. They kept you onside.<sup>41</sup>

But having put themselves on the inside, the colonists looked out only to gaze back upon themselves.<sup>42</sup> Were they worthy? Were they strong? Were they keeping face? More to the point perhaps, could they keep control with little more than a gendarmerie as back-up?<sup>43</sup> At any rate, this was how the administrators of the high Indian Civil Service saw it: an India so different that it was only governable in the Oriental manner—which is to say, splendidly, remotely, and strictly hierarchically, with touches of English progress thrown in here and there as was seen fit. Other than that, they faced India down and, depending on how you looked at it, held her down, by force or the illusion of force, by what the Eden Commission in 1879 called 'the grand counterpoise' of a European army backed by the second counterpoise of a country comprised of 'Natives against Natives'. In 1942 Lord Linlithgow's harsh words shocked Clement Attlee, who hoped for finer feelings from a Viceroy:

India and Burma have no natural association with the Empire, from which they are alien by race, history and religion, and for which as such neither of them have any natural affection, and both are in the Empire because they are conquered countries which have been brought there by



force, kept there by our controls and which hitherto it has suited to remain under our protection.<sup>44</sup>

Except, it has to be said, this was not entirely the case. What Linlithgow said was what Linlithgow wanted to hear, but it was not the case that India was a conquered country, pure and simple. The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885 by high-minded liberals, some of them Indian, some British, but turned into a mass movement by Gandhi from around 1917, held on to the idea that self-rule, or home-rule within a commonwealth of nations, could be achieved along British lines, or at least along the lines that the British had so recently conceded to the Irish and before that, in happier circumstances perhaps, to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. For all his ragging of British rule, and for all his unlikely (and unpredictable) mixture of old-fashioned political brinkmanship and immovable non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*), Gandhi never asked for more than dominion status for India until 1942, and even then it was negotiable. It had been the *Raj*, not the Congress Party, who had given up on 'natural associations with the Empire', at first refusing, then haggling over dominion status, before opting instead for Oriental hierarchies. Those Indians who wanted Englishness most wanted that which England was least willing to give.

These were Salisbury's and Curzon's *babus*, so-called—Hindi for 'clerk', but a word with a range of meanings, not all of them nice, referring to those politicized, English-speaking Indians who looked to British imperial progress as a higher stage of human development and wanted an Indian share of it.<sup>45</sup> All through Orwell's childhood and youth, men like these had argued for Indian independence on what they took to be British (or English) grounds of liberty. It had been the British, after all, who had made them *babus*, who had given them authority of a kind, and no one could be surprised that, having the pens and the pencils and wanting to join the club, they wanted to sign the book.<sup>46</sup> Against them stood the 'Civilians', the most senior civil servants of the *Raj*, and most British people. Most British people, of course, knew nothing about India, and those who did, in the armed forces or engineering, were glad to leave.<sup>47</sup> As for the Civilians, said to be the most powerful interest-group in Edwardian Britain, they argued that India was India, and unless the British stayed British it would collapse into a heap of castes and fragments. Indeed, they argued that there could be no such thing as an independent 'British India',

because the very liberty which such a state sought would be unequal to the task of ruling such a vast and diverse country.

Here they had a point. In 1939 353 million Indians were ruled by around one thousand Civilians, supported by a large under-class of Indian civil servants and a ludicrously lightweight army of 200,000 mixed Indian troops, but mainly Sikh, Gurkha, Pathan, and Punjabi, with 60,000 British to stiffen the mix. With the Royal Navy ready to dispatch them near and far, this force was prepared to keep the peace laterally from Suez to Hong Kong, with long reaches south—which it made in 1875 (Perak War), 1878–80 (2nd Afghan War), 1882 (Egypt), 1885 (2nd Burman War), 1885 and 1900 (Sudan), 1899–1902 (South Africa), and 1900–1 (China). Its main purpose was internal security, but in Bihar province alone, for instance, one of the most populated in India, there were only twelve policemen. For all their talent, the Civilians did not understand what they ruled. They believed in control. They believed in warrants of precedence. In their own way, they believed in caste, and in the virtues of being *pukkah*. But they did not know what Blair knew.

Burma was not only the largest province of India, it was the most crime-ridden and, from an administrator's point of view, the furthest-stretched. Blair was part of a civil force of 13,000 police officers supported by 10,000 soldiers responsible for thirty-six districts and 13 million people. He recalled having to shoot an elephant—which he did with all the *swaraj* he could muster because he was on his own. After initial training, he served in six postings over three years: three of them in the Delta, close to Rangoon, flat, alluvial, swampy, pumping oil day and night; two of them in the jungle—one in Lower and the other in Upper Burma; and one in Moulmein, the third-largest city. He was especially responsible for the discipline and inspection of a police force that was, according to an official report, underpaid, under-employed, poorly trained, badly housed, and low in morale. Constables even disliked their uniforms.<sup>48</sup> But because this was an Empire that outpaced rather than outgunned its subjects, British officials were encouraged to work the channels and never lose face.<sup>49</sup> When Orwell finally did shoot the elephant he felt the strain of being alone in a strange land with an entire global project bearing down on his shoulders. He fired not because he wanted to, but because two thousand jeering Burmese wanted him to—drawing his own conclusions:

I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives' and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him... my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.<sup>50</sup>

Although it seems Assistant District Superintendent Blair was instinctively drawn to what scholars now call 'the contact zone' of Anglo-Burmese relations, the job in hand made it almost impossible for him to meet the Burmese as friends or neighbours (though they were easier to procure as lovers).<sup>51</sup> He had come upon a troubled country. Infant mortality stood at 20 per cent. Peasant proprietorship was breaking down, with high levels of peonage and debt.<sup>52</sup> There were struggles also between various ethnic groups—between the nationalist Burmese and the colonial British, and between the Burmese and those immigrant Indians who had come to buy land and help themselves. Indian and Chinese businesses dominated Rangoon, a city rich in moneylending and prostitution.<sup>53</sup> Politically, the relationship with India was the key issue. From the Government of India Act in 1919 up to Burma's final separation from India in 1937, Burmese leaders blamed Indian leaders for taking more from the British than they could manage, while peasant Burmese blamed foreign moneylenders for the growing alienation of land, as everybody blamed Rangoon for degenerate Western influences. The police were unpopular with all groups. Gandhi's non-cooperation example, from 1919 up to its abandonment in 1922, had looked increasingly likely to put them to the test. Orwell said he was hated, but when there was deference (as there must have been to the tall young Old Etonian in an officer's uniform), it must have been hard for him to read. Thirty years later Claude Lévi-Strauss would speak of walking through the crowds of Calcutta as 'a permanent repudiation of the notion of human relationship. You are offered everything and promised everything...'<sup>54</sup>

That said, the British in Burma had not made life easy for themselves. Even the best they achieved, such as irrigation and railways, had not always been for the best, and trying to invent a working political system was even harder.<sup>55</sup> In India they had opted to rule by a system based on village stability.<sup>56</sup> But in Burma they had rendered the rural areas unstable by disbanding the village-headman system, while in the towns they

faced an increasingly active nationalist movement led by the Buddhist monk U Ottama, an admirer of Gandhi, who campaigned widely from 1921 up to his imprisonment in 1924. Worse was to follow with the Hsaya San armed rebellion in Lower Burma in 1930. Commissions of inquiry came and went, but it was Orwell and his constables who held the front line in a gradually deteriorating situation which included over 700 judicial hangings over the period of his stay.<sup>57</sup>

Under these difficult and sometimes solitary circumstances, the expatriate club was an extremely important place—a ‘spiritual citadel’, according to Orwell. During the day the British sat in the full glare of their office. At the end of it they could fall back into themselves, cool off, have a few drinks, say what they wanted to say not in front of the servants. This was a tight social round. No matter how small the circle, it had to be joined. Only rarely were locals allowed in. When Clive Dewey wanted to write about the British contribution to *The Mind of the Indian Civil Service*, he devoted a whole chapter to ‘Experiments with Friendship’.<sup>58</sup>

In *Burmese Days* (1934) Orwell would come to address all these issues. John Flory is a timber manager in Kyauktada—one of a long chain of managers and officials who hold the Empire together.<sup>59</sup> The British in Burma are only as strong as their weakest link, and Flory is that link. There is friction among them, largely played out at the club.<sup>60</sup> Verrall, for instance, is a cavalry man with the knack of looking down on Flory, usually from a saddle. At the same time it is tartly observed that Verrall only went to a third-class public school. More devoted to his ponies than to his compatriots, when the trouble starts he is not around to deal with it.

Like Verrall, Elizabeth Lackersteen does not want to be in this stupid town and its tin-pot club either. A young woman who has come out to stay with her aunt and uncle, she is willing to make the small sacrifice of a long journey in order to achieve the higher sacrifice of finding a husband.<sup>61</sup> Girls like her were called ‘girls of the fishing-fleet’ or, if things did not go well, ‘returned empties’.<sup>62</sup> At one point it looks as though Elizabeth might make a match with Flory. Having denaturalized himself to the point where almost any vision of Englishness in a cool frock looked beautiful and sounded interesting, the timber man nurses hopes of love and marriage. But they are both caught up in extremely tight racial, class, and gender calculations that centre, for the most part,