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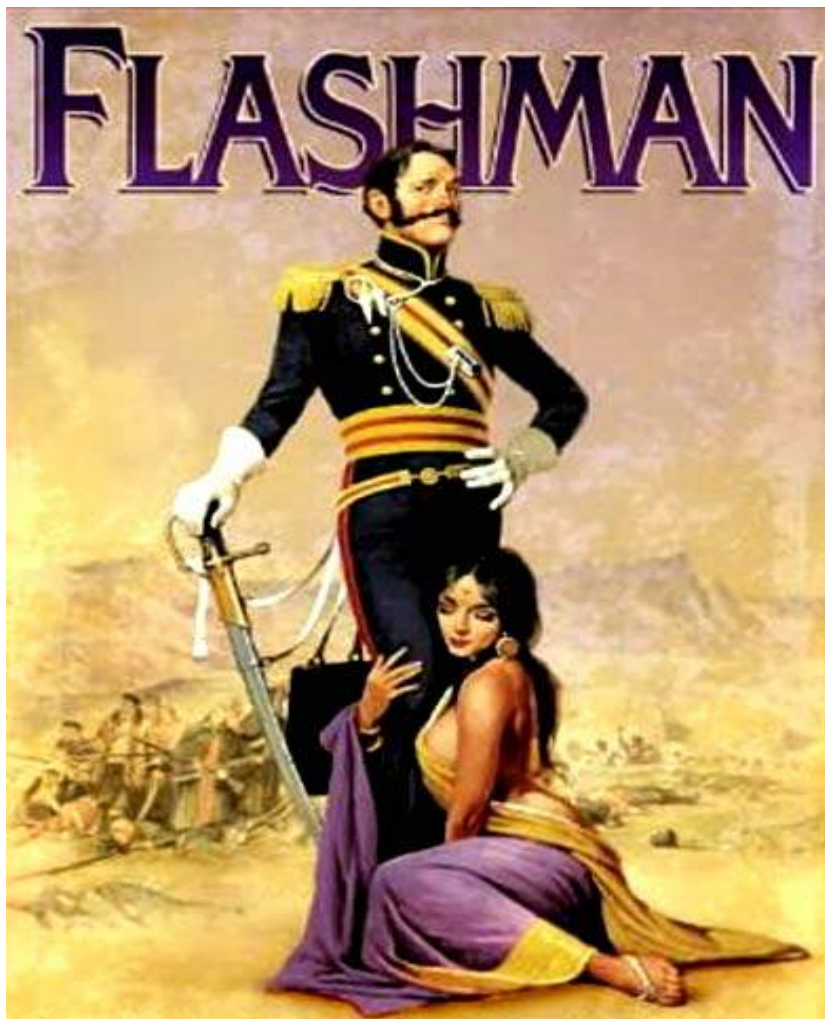
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TITLE

**“Literary representations of the English colonial experience
in the Orient: Ambivalence and the English character.”**



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Cover Image:

This image is taken from the 1969 novel *Flashman*, by George MacDonald Fraser. This was the first of a series of novels concerning the exploits in the Empire of the character Flashman, who was originally the school bully in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, by Thomas Hughes.

Source: <http://ultrabrown.com/posts/the-british-empire-bodice-ripper>

1: Introduction

Ship me somewhere east of Suez, where the
best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a
man can raise a thirst.

Rudyard Kipling, 'Mandalay'

Ever since Europeans began frequenting, and then colonizing, the East, their habitation and travel there has inspired Western authors to put pen to paper. As a result, tales of adventure, quest, heroism, exoticism and sensuality have proceeded to permeate Western culture and have shaped our view of the Orient and its peoples. Probably the largest canon of such writing belongs to the English – hardly surprising given their dominion over so much of Asia for so long – India, the jewel in their Imperial crown, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma to name the main splashes of pink on maps of the East at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the British Empire was at its zenith.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the representation of the English colonial experience in the Orient through the writings of three selected English authors - George Orwell, Graham Greene and W. Somerset Maugham - drawing on their fictional and other works to provide a kaleidoscopic representation of the lives of English colonials. This paper specifically seeks to delve into the actual character of the English, how this character is bred and manifested, and its inherent and insidious impact on the colonized peoples of the Empire, and on the English themselves. The English colonial experience is dogged by ambivalence, contradictions and hypocrisy, and this is reflected in the writing of these three authors.

Ultimately, the underlying thesis to be presented and argued in the current endeavour is that the inherent contradictions in the authors and their work is both inevitable and irresolvable, due to certain traits apparent in the English character, at least in the character of the critically influential classes within England.

Before outlining the structure of the paper a few explanatory comments regarding approach and methodology are in order. I mainly selected Orwell, Greene and Maugham as the decades in which they wrote their colonial material, the 1920's through to the 1950's, were during the demise of the British Empire, when the unquestioned and seemingly ordained superiority of the English of the Victorian and Edwardian ages was being thoroughly and widely challenged, so their work reveals the emerging imperial malaise and therefore is highly relevant to the thesis of this study. Further, the three selected authors, whilst having commonality in their Englishness, have different approaches to writing and reporting, so this provides some interesting contrasts within the chosen material. Finally, and perhaps what is most relevant to the thesis, all three writers were educated in the English public school¹ system and, as will be discussed and argued in detail subsequently, this educational system is the foundation of the aspects of the English character, predominantly the masculine side, that sustained the Empire.

¹ The term 'public school' is used in its British sense, referring to fee-paying schools catering to the upper classes, the otherwise wealthy, and the aspiring middle classes. This is the converse of the Australian and American definitions where 'public' means exactly that.

The literary works selected for detailed examination include one complete novel from each author: Orwell's *Burmese Days*, Greene's *The Quiet American*, and Maugham's *The Painted Veil*. Additionally, in terms of fiction, a number of Maugham's short stories are used. Other primary sources are Orwell's essays, Greene's reportage, and autobiographical material from all three writers. Overall, the selected material covers a wide geographical range of the British Empire in Asia, as well as views of the authors on aspects of Englishness. It needs to be acknowledged that Greene's novel, of course, concerns a French colonial possession, Vietnam, not a British colony. However, the chief protagonist is English, and is thus revelatory of the English character, often in ways different, but sometimes similar, to those of characters portrayed in the British colonies of Orwell and Maugham.

I will commence with brief initial commentary on the history of the British Empire, the canon of colonial literature, and introductory remarks about the three selected authors. I will then review aspects of Englishness, including public schools, the class system, institutions, and dynamics of power. The representation of the imperial empire will be covered in some detail, followed by the highlighting of the inherent conflicts and contradictions in the texts and the authors themselves. I will conclude with a discussion about the irresolvability of the contradictions exposed and the ongoing relevance of this topic to human affairs. As pertinently put by Patrick McCarthy, "the value of colonial writing lies in its awareness of the contradictions of colonialism and in its desperate if unsuccessful bid to resolve them."²

² Patrick McCarthy. "Camus, Orwell and Greene", 231.

Finally, some notes on terminology are needed. Firstly, the term 'Orient' is used in its Asian sense, rather than the broader understanding that may be used in discussing 'Orientalism'; so, the Orient in this paper refers to the Far East, including India, Burma, Malaya and Singapore, China, and Indo-China, as well as to Eastern and Pacific island groups such as Indonesia and Samoa. Secondly, whilst semantic debates may be pursued in relation to the definitions of 'colonial' and 'imperial', this paper is concerned with the British imperial attitudes and the 'national character' which drove them, so 'imperialism' will be the key subject. The paper uses both Edward Said's definition, where "'imperialism' means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory"³, and Stephen Howe's definition, where "imperialism is used to mean the actions and attitudes which create [and] uphold . . . domination by one people or country over others."⁴ The exact nature of the 'colony' in each of the subject texts is of little importance – what is crucial is that they are all 'spaces' subject to imperial rule. Finally, it will be apparent already that this paper uses the term 'English' as opposed to 'British', except when referring to the 'British Empire' in its full title. This is deliberate usage and it is not intended to ignore the role of the Scots, Welsh and Irish (Northern) in the British Empire. Indeed, there are Scottish protagonists in some of the stories studied. However, the essential thesis of this paper concerns the nature of the imperialist character, and this, it is submitted, is very much an English construct. As Kathryn Tidrick puts it, "the ideas by which they were consciously guided as imperialists were English in origin."⁵ Hence, whilst the

³ Edward W. Said. *Culture & Imperialism*, 8.

⁴ Stephen Howe. *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, 30.

⁵ Kathryn Tidrick. *Empire and the English Character*, 1.

Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish may have played their roles in the 'British' Empire, the Empire was very much an English enterprise in terms of its class-driven mentality.

2: The British Empire in the Orient and Colonial Literature

Ask any man what nationality he would prefer to be, and ninety nine out of a hundred will tell you that they would prefer to be Englishmen.

Cecil Rhodes, cited in *The English* by Jeremy Paxman

History's Greatest Empire:

The British Empire lasted for several hundred years and, at its height during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it ruled over about a quarter of the world's population and land mass. It was, as Niall Ferguson states, "the biggest Empire ever, bar none."⁶ The subject of the Empire is vast and varied, but what is of singular interest to this thesis are the attitudinal features of the English that gave rise to, and maintained, the Empire. The fundamental attitude is espoused by leading imperialist figures in the English establishment around the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1899 the English Parliamentarian, J. Lawson Walton, subsequently the British Attorney General, stated, "I regard the possession of empire, with its traditions, responsibilities, and opportunities, as a source of the highest inspiration for the best qualities and energies of our race."⁷ He went on to say "we are Imperialists in response to the compelling influences of our destiny . . . the energy of our race gave us empire . . . the basis of Imperialism is race."⁸ The racial superiority expressed in these words, the inference that the English had greater energy than other races, and that the Empire was their just reward, may seem almost obscene when viewed in the light of contemporary standards. However, such sentiments were the bedrock of the Empire and

⁶ Niall Ferguson. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, xi.

⁷ J. Lawson Walton. "Imperialism", 310.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

were genuinely felt by the English Imperialists. This grandiose national self-image was echoed in 1908 by Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, who said that England was “the core and heart of the Empire . . . whence flows the central light and flame.”⁹ Curzon also described the Empire as a “secular religion, embodying the most sacred duty of the present.”¹⁰ Now we see the divine aspect being added onto the racial arrogance and conviction of destiny. It is little wonder that this imperial sentiment proved so efficient at permeating the English psyche; the combination of the language used with the appeal to national self and pride is powerful in the extreme. Walton identified in English Imperialism “an educational influence and a morally bracing effect on the character of the British people.”¹¹ So, it is clear from the sentiments of such arch-imperialists as Walton and Curzon that the English unarguably had a noble view of themselves and their imperial destiny: their mission to civilize the world.

The Boer War in South Africa from 1899 to 1902, with its uncomfortable revelation that the mighty British military very nearly failed to subdue a collection of 30,000 farmers formed into makeshift fighting units, began to unsettle some imperial attitudes back home in Britain: at least some questioning process was initiated in relation to the sacred cow of Empire and Britain’s imperial destiny. Ferguson says that “what Vietnam was to the United States, the Boer War very nearly was to the British Empire.”¹² The British lost 45,000 men and spent a quarter of a billion pounds.¹³ Of course, this squandering of lives and wealth was soon to be utterly eclipsed in 1914

⁹ Lord Curzon. “The True Imperialism”, 156.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹¹ J. Lawson Walton. “Imperialism”, 306.

¹² Niall Ferguson. *Empire*, 276.

¹³ *Ibid.*

by World War One. By the time this appalling tragedy had run its course in 1918, millions of lives had been lost on both sides and billions of pounds spent. Significantly for the topic under study, the sheer carnage of the trenches – largely the result of outdated, pompous and inhumane mindsets amongst the upper echelons of the ruling classes in the military which led to millions of young men being sent to their deaths – finally spelled the beginning of the end to the largely ubiquitous imperial ideal in England and, arguably to some extent, the hegemony of the upper-classes. The period between the two World Wars thus became the era of imperial decline for the Empire, and some of the literary material to be examined comes from this period. World War Two is, without question, the end point of the British Empire. The fall of Singapore in 1942, apart from the human tragedy that it resulted in, was such a humiliation, so irreconcilable with the English view of themselves and their power, that the Empire could, and would, never be the same again. The two decades following 1945 then saw the dismantling of the Empire and the former colonies in Asia and Africa gaining their independence. Finally, 1997 saw Hong Kong returned to the Chinese so that as the twenty-first century dawned, the former imperial possessions had been reduced to Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Bermuda, a slab of the Antarctic and some miscellaneous small islands around the globe.

As a response to the questioning that had begun as a result of the Boer War, pro-imperial institutions were established whose efforts comprised “attempts to educate the public to understand that the empire was founded on lofty moral principles, and was vital to the maintenance of Britain’s position as a

first-rate political and economic world power.”¹⁴ This type of view was widely held and largely uncontested at the time. What is of immense interest, however, is how the reality of imperial rule measures up to its propaganda and its popular image. I am interested in the chasm between the reality and the image, and how the literature reveals this dichotomy, “the two opposing but eternally co-existing currents of British imperial thought: the desire to be powerful, and the desire to be good.”¹⁵

Seldom is anything in human affairs a simple matrix of black and white. It is open to conclude that ‘empire’ as a concept, the dominion of one group over another, is fundamentally wrong. However, it would be far too simplistic, as well as most unfair, to conclude as a corollary that all the English who ran the Empire were fundamentally bad. It has to be allowed that some of them would certainly have had some noble and decent motivations and intentions, even if subsequent history and sociological study has shown them to be misguided. This, of course, is where the dichotomy arises: noble intentions and decency aside, the reality is that empires can only be obtained by sheer brute force, and then maintained by a combination of imposed ideology backed up by force when required. This sobering fact must be borne in mind when looking at the behaviour of the English in their colonial possessions. The English cannot have a clear conscience when it comes to the methods that were used to pursue their imperial destiny. Leaving aside earlier historical disgraces, such as slavery and the killing of indigenous peoples, particularly in North America and Australia, the first half of the twentieth century contains some awful examples of English brutality. Individual

¹⁴ J. G. Greenlee. “Imperial Studies and the Unity of the Empire”, 321-22.

¹⁵ Kathryn Tidrick. *Empire and the English Character*, 198.

massacres of subject peoples, such as in Ireland in 1916 and at Amritsar in India in 1919, stand as testimony to the all-too-ready means used to run the Empire. Even more damning was the creation and use of internment camps during the Boer War by the English, “who called them ‘concentration camps’ for the first time.”¹⁶ These camps claimed the lives of over 25,000 Boer women and children.¹⁷

The Written Empire:

The genre of colonial literature really took off in the late Victorian era, with the likes of Rudyard Kipling and G. A. Henty. Given that the majority of Britons would never set foot in any part of the overseas Empire, colonial literature became a crucial tool in informing the British public about the Empire and its ethos, thus reinforcing the ideology. Henty, in particular, produced tome after tome of pseudo-historical stories, all glorifying the Empire and transmitting “a conviction that British India had been won and made stable by superior British courage, energy, and moral uprightness.”¹⁸ He “was a firm believer in the uniqueness of the European and particularly of the Anglo-Saxon”¹⁹, and this is the message that his stories provided to the untravelled masses back home. The hero in Henty’s novels was “invariably a ‘typical public-schoolboy’ [having] no real personality because they are an abstraction of the Victorian belief in ‘character’ as the foundation of national strength.”²⁰

Furthering the important link to schooling, the magazines known as the ‘boys’ weeklies’, about which Orwell would later write an essay, proliferated, and

¹⁶ H. G. Adler. “Ideas Toward a Sociology of the Concentration Camp”, 516.

¹⁷ Albert Grundlingh. “The Bitter Legacy of the Boer War”, 22.

¹⁸ Mark Naidis. “G. A. Henty’s Idea of India”, 58.

¹⁹ Robert A. Huttenback. “G. A. Henty & the Vision of Empire”, 50.

²⁰ John Springhall. “The Rise and Fall of Henty’s Empire”, 1106.

provided a whole generation of schoolboys with the glorious and romantic image of the Empire that was desired by the establishment. As Patrick Dunae notes, “adventure stories provided boys not only with escapist fiction, but also with a sense of history and an awareness of their imperial heritage.”²¹ The public schools were a foundation of the imperial attitude, and whilst great writers such as Auden, Wells, Forster and Orwell criticized them, ironically as they all attended such schools, Jeffrey Richards reminds us that in popular culture the public schools “were celebrated lovingly and promoted assiduously for readers who had never been to and would never go to them . . . the same was true of Empire . . . for ordinary people, the Empire was the mythic landscape of romance and adventure.”²²

Jeffrey Meyers notes that the “tropical colonies provide an extraordinary milieu for human experience.”²³ The theme of exoticism is clearly a recurrent theme in colonial literature, and, not accidentally, it is used as a powerful communicative tool for fostering certain ideals about the Empire. It is only when we start to get authors, such as Orwell, questioning the imperial paradigm, that a darker side emerges. Interestingly, though, the one constant throughout the colonial literature, including the three authors studied here, is the Anglocentrism, as well as ‘Englishness’, of the genre. There is plenty of descriptive prose about landscapes, native peoples, and tropical weather, but essentially it focuses “on the drama of oriental life in which the forefront of the stage is monopolized by Westerners . . . the problems of the Westerner in a strange and distant land.”²⁴ Maugham is concerned with the

²¹ Patrick A. Dunae. “Boys’ Literature and the Idea of Empire”, 121.

²² Jeffrey Richards. “Boy’s Own Empire”, 143.

²³ Jeffrey Meyers. *Fiction and the Colonial Experience*, ix.

²⁴ Lily Kong and Victor R. Savage. “The Malay World in Colonial Fiction”, 49.

dramas facing the colonials, and native peoples merely serve as dramatic accessories. Orwell and Greene, in their different ways, make some commentary on the subject races, but still their efforts remain predominantly attached to their European protagonists. Allen Greenberger reminds us that “literature is particularly important in spreading ideas and images about things which are unfamiliar to the general reading public, thus helping to shape opinion and through it policy.”²⁵ This illustrates the crucial nexus between colonial literature and the attitudes which sustain an imperial empire and leads into a discussion about literature and the English psyche.

The Empire in the Mind:

Charles Braden says that “fiction . . . is important as an intercultural agency . . . because so many more people read it than read other kind of literature dealing with other peoples.”²⁶ This pertinently follows the earlier observation that most British never left Britain, and never ventured into their Empire, hence the importance of literary material as a communicative medium between the colonies and the metropole. Said, in discussing Kipling and Joseph Conrad, says that “they brought to a basically insular and provincial British audience the color, the glamour and the romance of the British overseas enterprise.”²⁷ For some, perhaps many, back in England, imperialism became almost a “state religion.”²⁸ The crucial point is that the colonial literature and associated propaganda achieved its aim - to ‘educate’ the British public in the imperial righteousness of the Empire - and thereby ensure a willing supply of volunteers for imperial service. Roy Turnbaugh

²⁵ Allen J. Greenberger. *The British Image of India*, vii.

²⁶ Charles S. Braden. “The Novelist Discovers the Orient”, 166.

²⁷ Edward W. Said. “*Kim*, The Pleasures of Imperialism”, 27.

²⁸ Robert A. Huttenback. “G. A. Henty”, 52.

says that Henty “became something of a publicist for the British Empire, a recruiting officer for a generation of schoolboys”²⁹, and, tellingly, that Henty portrayed the Empire “as a kind of theater for aggression, rather than as a place to settle and spend one’s life.”³⁰ It is as Geoffrey Wagner says, “to be ‘out there’ even as late as the turn of this century was to have shared in a sense of adventure and risk.”³¹

However, at the same time, there is a marked dark side to this imperial ethos, one particularly racial and aggressive. J. A. Mangan says that:

Imperial propaganda in British education in its earlier years is concerned essentially with the growing awareness of empire among public schoolboys and with a persistent attempt to portray their role as predominantly one of martial self-sacrifice.³²

It is important to acknowledge at this point that “concepts of race were closely related in popular literature to the imperative of conflict between cultures, and the evidence of superiority it provided.”³³ In terms of how colonial writing influenced the English psyche, Lily Kong and Victor Savage assert that colonial writers, “by highlighting ethnic characteristics . . . encouraged the formation of often standardized and generalized stereotypical images of eastern peoples. This, in turn, set the tune for the attitudes that the colonizers adopted towards the colonized, and the ensuing relationships between the two groups of people.”³⁴ Despite the historical nature of the writings studied here, the English psyche remains imperially influenced. Salman Rushdie puts it bluntly when he says that “British thought,

²⁹ Roy Turnbaugh. “Images of Empire”, 734.

³⁰ Ibid., 735.

³¹ Geoffrey Wagner. “The Novel of Empire”, 238.

³² J. A. Mangan. “The Grit of our Forefathers”, 116.

³³ John M. Mackenzie. *Propaganda and Empire*, 7.

³⁴ Lily Kong and Victor R. Savage. “The Malay World”, 45.

British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism.”³⁵ This encapsulates why the idea of the topic remains so important.

Said writes that authors are “very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure.”³⁶ This is absolutely the case for Orwell, Greene and Maugham, and it is worth briefly highlighting certain biographical information which links the three authors to some of the principal themes of English attitudes and associated contradictions. Orwell and Maugham were both born outside Britain, Orwell in India, as his father was in the Colonial Service and Maugham in Paris, where his father worked at the British Embassy. Both of them seem, according to their own recollections, to have had unhappy childhoods. Maugham’s parents both died when he was young and he was sent, as a boarder, to an English preparatory and public school, King’s School at Canterbury, which he disliked intensely. Orwell was sent, as a boarder, to a preparatory school, St. Cyprian’s, which he detested. He then went on to public schools, first Wellington and then Eton. Greene, whilst not lamenting his childhood, also went to a public school, Berkhamsted, where his father was the headmaster, and he proceeded to publish some bitter memories of his school days. Further, all three authors were sufficiently ambivalent about being in England that they spent significant parts of their lives away from it, in two cases leaving permanently. Orwell died in London in 1950, but he had essentially exiled himself to the remote Scottish island of Jura for the last two years of his life. Greene left England permanently in 1966, moving to France for many years and then Switzerland where he died

³⁵ Salman Rushdie. “The New Empire within Britain”, 131.

³⁶ Edward W. Said. *Culture & Imperialism*, xxiv.

in 1991. Maugham also moved to France after his divorce, and resided there, barring the interruption of World War Two, until his death in 1965.

3: Englishness

They were extruded from their homes at the age of eight for all-male prep schools that funnelled them into public schools and the socialized and oedipal transferences of power. They learned in school to be boys without women, then to be masters of other boys, and then to be guardians of state and empire.

Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief background framework for the English character, using material from the three authors as well as other commentary and observation. In the imperial context, the key features that must be discussed are the class stratification within English society and the English public school system, used to educate the upper and middle classes. These two fundamental aspects are inextricably intertwined and provide the foundation for the English character and its imperialistic manifestations. Francis Hope observes that “as Orwell knew, one cannot discuss England without discussing education, and one cannot discuss English education without discussing class.”³⁷ Not only Orwell, but Greene and Maugham as well, comment on both these features in their works. In the colonial environment, the recurrent social feature that both arises from, and maintains, the English class system is that of the Club, and this features in the writings of all three authors. These aspects together then lead into the exercise of power over the dominated peoples in the colonies, although this is really just an overseas projection, albeit exaggerated, of class oppression at home in England.

³⁷ Francis Hope. “Schooldays”, 10.

English Social Stratification:

English society is firmly based on a class system split (simplistically) into three strata - upper, middle, and lower (working) classes. The upper and lower classes have tended to be fairly well delineated. It is in the middle class, however, that sub-divisions within the class emerge, so we hear phrases such as 'upper middle class' or 'lower middle class'. Orwell took it to extremes, describing himself as being born into "the lower-upper-middle class"³⁸; irrespective of the semantics, what is clear is that the middle class is a group of somewhat moveable boundaries, even if only so in the psyche of the middle class, and this is vital in the discussion of the Empire and the English character. It is an inherent feature of the middle class, being generally well-educated and accordingly aspirational, that there is a tendency in the class to seek elevation up the social strata. Education plays a huge role in people's self-perception in society, and so the middle class, having obtained public school educations, even if at second- or third-rate public schools, aspire to moving into the upper class, although the internal hierarchy within the public school system will have an impact on this aspiration. Tidrick says that "the empire, more than anywhere else, was the place which provided [the middle classes] the opportunity to prove themselves the equals of the aristocracy, not only in the practical, but also in the inspirational, arts of government."³⁹ Daniel Bivona agrees, saying that the "Empire provided 'plebeian' Europeans with the experience of belonging to a privileged group, an aristocracy of sorts which they could never join at home in England."⁴⁰ Indeed, M. Keith Booker, in discussing *Burmese Days*, makes the salient

³⁸ George Orwell. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 113.

³⁹ Kathryn Tidrick. *Empire and the English Character*, 4.

⁴⁰ Daniel Bivona. *British Imperial Literature*, 182.

point that there is “the suggestion of parallels between the blatantly hierarchical structure of colonial power and the structure of bourgeois class society in England.”⁴¹ A. P. Thornton, in discussing Maugham, says that he relates stories “concerning the manners and customs of inhabitants of suburbia, promoted to membership of the imperial race in the East.”⁴² A look in more detail at both Maugham’s and Orwell’s fiction, reveals plenty of these ‘suburban’ types. The other fascinating phenomenon of the imperial existence is that the overseas colonies become ‘little parts of England’, these artificial microcosms were infatuated with the metropole, yet severed from social and attitudinal change within it. George Woodcock says that “distance from Britain, far from loosening the ties that bound Britons into a rigid world of class distinctions, tended to tighten them.”⁴³ In effect, the English colonials were able to re-imagine their own English society in the colonial environment, and they wanted to keep it that way. In terms of the three authors, Greene has relatively little comment about schools and class-consciousness. Orwell and Maugham, however, do make many direct references to class in their works, although from somewhat different perspectives. One comment Orwell makes which would appear to help to explain the unity of the English when it came to the Empire, and thus its strength and endurance, is this: “In England patriotism takes different forms in different classes, but it runs like a connecting thread through nearly all of them.”⁴⁴ In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he makes the crucial connection between English imperialism and English domestic society; “[the English working class] were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in

⁴¹ M. Keith Booker. *Colonial Power, Colonial Texts*, 153.

⁴² A. P. Thornton. *The Imperial Idea and its Enemies*, 347.

⁴³ George Woodcock. *The British in the Far East*, 186.

⁴⁴ George Orwell. “England Your England”, 65.

Burma.”⁴⁵ And so when one looks at Orwell’s work as a whole, his thesis, that the domestic English class system was simply mirrored in the colonies, is clear.

Maugham also comments on class, but from a rather different perspective; he was comfortable with his own class status and never overtly questioned the classist *status quo*. He discusses, in one of his last memoirs, the upper middle class as being “the class to which, if I may say it without presumption, I myself belong.”⁴⁶ In the same memoir he talks about “pleasant places where there was no tiresome proletariat to be dealt with.”⁴⁷ In contrast to Orwell’s social awareness, this really sums up Maugham’s apparent class attitude which permeates his fiction. For example, in “The Outstation”, Cooper (the colonial) states the following about the First World War: “Well, at all events the war has done one good thing for us . . . It’s smashed up the power of the aristocracy. The Boer War started it, and 1914 put the lid on it.”⁴⁸ This is transparently a case of wishful thinking by Cooper, since, whilst the war certainly had an impact on English society, the class system and the aristocracy persisted, and are still alive and well nearly a hundred years later. Cooper’s words, however, do reinforce the attitudinal changes forced upon the English psyche by the Boer War and World War One. And, of course, Maugham resolves the class struggle here with Cooper dying, so the upper classes may be seen to have a symbolic victory.

⁴⁵ George Orwell. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 138.

⁴⁶ W. Somerset Maugham. “Looking Back: Part III”, 70.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ W. Somerset Maugham. “The Outstation”, 68.

Educating for Empire:

E. M. Forster wrote that “just as the heart of England is the middle classes, so the heart of the middle classes is the public-school system.”⁴⁹ There is a vast array of scholarly literature on English public schools, as well as preparatory schools, their junior version, and their role in the construction of Englishness. Donald Leinster-Mackay comments that:

The English public school and the English preparatory school were both Victorian phenomena . . . [they became] . . . an integrated system of education for English middle- and upper-class boys.⁵⁰

It is crucial to point out that this educational system, whilst Victorian in its significant expansion and adhesion to imperialism, is inherently linked to class, and the two aspects are mutually supportive and reinforcing. This was true when these schools served to staff the Empire, and holds true right into the current century. The principal ‘ideal’ in all of this was, and remains, ‘character’; the schools were designed to encourage and perpetuate the ‘character’ which had become the hallmark of the English upper and middle classes. Class, public schools and ‘character’ made up an insidious triumvirate that fed into English imperialism. There is, of course, a fine line, often crossed by protagonists in the literature studied, between character, snobbery and sheer arrogant superiority, but they all share a common origin: the public school and the hierarchies of the class system. Regenia Gagnier states, “it is this goal of character formation that appears unique to British education among all other Western systems.”⁵¹ Gathorne-Hardy remarks that “the ideals, ideas, taboos and standards of the public schools – that thin wafer of privilege – had become *national* ones, they had sunk deep into the

⁴⁹ E. M. Forster. “Notes on the English Character”, 3-4.

⁵⁰ Donald Leinster-Mackay. “The nineteenth-century English preparatory school”, 57 & 58.

⁵¹ Regenia Gagnier. *Subjectivities*, 183.

unconscious of the nation.”⁵² Finally, R. D. Pearce links the public schools to the spirit that fuelled English imperialism:

It is now widely recognised that the Victorian and Edwardian public schools were vital institutions in the history of modern British imperialism. They helped to create and sustain an imperial consciousness, and they also turned out the men who would man the imperial barricades and staff the imperial civil services.⁵³

The ‘character’ emerging from the public schools was an immature one, as they were not environments conducive to the well-rounded development of young men. However, their purpose was to produce the type of men who could run the Empire. An old Etonian friend of Orwell, the writer Cyril Connolly, discusses this very issue and coins the phrase “The Theory of Permanent Adolescence”⁵⁴. Orwell, Greene and Maugham all went through the English public school system and they all wrote about this system and its effects, not only in their autobiographical works, but also in their fiction. The theme of ‘permanent adolescence’ occurs in the work of all of them. More importantly, they all reminisced negatively about their schooling.

Orwell has plenty to say about his own school days and he clearly understands and links the school and class systems in “Such, Such Were the Joys”, as the following excerpt illustrates:

I think the characteristic faults of the English upper and middle classes may be partly due to the practice, general until recently, of sending children away from the home as young as nine, eight or even seven.⁵⁵

Orwell identifies here the English practice that impedes their young men from growing up, the ‘arrested development’ that leads to ‘permanent adolescence’. He also, in the same essay, states that “life was hierarchical

⁵² Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy. *The Old School Tie*, 219.

⁵³ R. D. Pearce. “The Prep School and Imperialism”, 42.

⁵⁴ Cyril Connolly. “The Fag and the Scholar”, 537.

⁵⁵ George Orwell. “Such, Such Were the Joys”, 344-345.

and whatever happened was right. There were the strong, who deserved to win and always did win, and there were the weak, who deserved to lose and always did lose, everlastingly.”⁵⁶ This is a significantly accurate assessment of a psychologically damaging system, one played out time and again in Orwell’s work. In relation to his own time at Eton, he says in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

When I was fourteen or fifteen I was an odious little snob . . . I suppose there is no place in the world where snobbery is quite so ever-present or where it is cultivated in such refined and subtle forms as in an English public school. Here at least one cannot say that English ‘education’ fails to do its job.⁵⁷

Unarguably, Orwell absolutely understood the purpose and effects of the public school system; its nurturing and perpetuating of the white masculine credo. In *Burmese Days* there are a number of public school references. We are told that Flory “was a liar, and a good footballer, the two things absolutely necessary for success at school”⁵⁸, and that “he went to a cheap, third-rate public school.”⁵⁹ This last quote highlights the hierarchy and snobbery within the public school system, classes inside classes. The incident at the Club between Verrall and Ellis is a perfect example of this class disharmony, only allowed to surface in the space of English privacy.

Maugham’s recollections of his schooldays are sparse but, where they can be found, suggest unhappiness. He comments in “Looking Back”, about finishing at his public school, that he had “the happy result that at the end of that mortifying term I left the King’s School for good.”⁶⁰ The word ‘mortifying’ vividly illustrates Maugham’s feeling for his school. The school theme also

⁵⁶ Ibid., 332.

⁵⁷ George Orwell. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 128.

⁵⁸ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 61.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁰ W. Somerset Maugham. “Looking Back: Part I”, 64.

crops up in *A Writer's Notebook*. In one of his observations of a colonial administrator Maugham says that "he measures everything by the standards of the public schoolboy. He regards the natives as wilful children, unreasonable and only just human."⁶¹ This echoes the concept of perpetual adolescence seen in other works. In Maugham's fiction we also find many references to the English public school system. In "Footprints in the Jungle", Maugham takes up the theme of immaturity. His character Gaze, in talking about Bronson, says, "He was the typical public-school boy. He was about thirty-five when I first knew him, but he had the mind of a boy of eighteen."⁶² In the same story the narrator (Maugham) says of the English colonial men, "they continue to look upon life from the standpoint of the sixth form."⁶³ Perhaps the most explicit portrayal of this theme, and its mechanisms of exclusion, in Maugham's work occurs in "The Outstation". One of the two main protagonists, Cooper, tells us that he had "a fat chance . . . of getting a commission. I was what was called a Colonial. I hadn't been to a public school and I had no influence."⁶⁴ The narrator later tells us that "Cooper . . . had a peculiar dislike of the English. He resented especially the public-school boy since he always feared that he was going to patronise him."⁶⁵ So it would seem that Maugham is quite conversant with the public school impact on the Empire and the English people within it.

Greene, in *A Sort of Life*, leaves no doubt about how he feels. He talks of boarding school as a period of "monotony, humiliation and mental pain."⁶⁶ In

⁶¹ W. Somerset Maugham. *A Writer's Notebook*, 99.

⁶² W. Somerset Maugham. "Footprints in the Jungle", 12.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ W. Somerset Maugham. "The Outstation", 58.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

⁶⁶ Graham Greene. *A Sort of Life*, 64.

the same chapter, his bad memories are most vividly put when he says, in discussing starting a novel about a school, “I couldn’t bear mentally living again for several years in these surroundings. A leper colony in the Congo was preferable.”⁶⁷ Clearly his memories of his schooldays were too difficult to revisit. In *The Old School*, he draws the connection between class and public schools, saying “how class-conscious these schools remain . . . we were not naturally class-conscious; it was from the masters we learnt our snobbery and the means to express it.”⁶⁸ Elsewhere he takes up the concept of immaturity of ex-public school boys when he says of a symbolic State school child, “he may not grow up as a successful colonial administrator in the English tradition, but he will be an adult, which is more than can be said for most of the men we send abroad to rule.”⁶⁹ Whilst the school theme is not obvious in *The Quiet American*, Fowler does remark, “I counted the days of my assignment, like a schoolboy marking off the days of term.”⁷⁰ It can definitely be inferred that Fowler went to an English public school, and is prone to the crisis of masculinity arising from it.

The Club – An English Oasis:

The prevailing physical manifestation of Englishness in the colonies, and the literature, is that of the Club. In *Burmese Days* it is the centre stage for the action and in Maugham’s stories the Club is repeatedly mentioned, so it is worth looking at some of the study that has been done on this most English of institutions. Kelvin Au, in his thesis devoted to this topic, describes the Club as “an inviolable space . . . a symbol of home in an alien land . . . an

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 54 [footnote].

⁶⁸ Graham Greene. “Preface”, 7.

⁶⁹ Graham Greene. “The Last Word”, 256.

⁷⁰ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 24.

idealised representation of the 'home culture'."⁷¹ Mrinalini Sinha also links the Club to the concept of 'home', saying that "the clubs ostensibly offered elite Anglo Indians⁷² the privacy of home"⁷³, whilst Ranajit Guha describes there being, for the English, "refuge in the club."⁷⁴ The Club served two main purposes for the English, both linked inherently to Englishness. The first was to create a 'home', a white, male, upper class environment, a "privileged vehicle for 'Eurocentrism'"⁷⁵ and bastion of "racial purity."⁷⁶ It was therefore seen as an oasis where Englishmen could pretend they were just amongst their own and to a certain extent relive the ambivalent power-plays of their public school days. Edward Ingram comments that Club society "was needed to sustain the self . . . keeping up appearances was the only barrier to despair and chaos"⁷⁷, whilst Woodcock says that "the 'garrison mentality' projects the idea of the need for an unbroken surface, an apparently flawless morale, to be presented not merely to the outside world where the subject races crowd, but also to one's companions."⁷⁸ The second purpose was to provide a clear social demarcation from the native people in the given colony, one which rigidly reinforced the class and race barriers as well as imperial superiority. Anthony Kirk-Greene says the "Club in colonial society was at once the sacred fetish or grave of the expatriate community and the awe-

⁷¹ Kelvin K. W. Au. "Defining Spaces", 7.

⁷² The term 'Anglo-Indian' has two possible meanings, confirmed by the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (5th edition, 2002). Throughout this paper the term is used in the dictionary's second meaning; 'a person of British birth resident, or once long resident, in the Indian subcontinent'. This is in contrast to the more contemporary meaning of a person of mixed British and Indian parentage. It must also be noted that Burma, in the days of Empire, was regarded as part of the imperial Indian subcontinent.

⁷³ Mrinalini Sinha. "Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere", 500.

⁷⁴ Ranajit Guha. "Not at Home in Empire", 483.

⁷⁵ Mrinalini Sinha. "Britishness", 492.

⁷⁶ Agnes Newton Keith. "Home in Borneo", 48.

⁷⁷ Edward Ingram. "The *Raj* as Daydream", 169.

⁷⁸ George Woodcock. "A Distant and a Deadly Shore", 94.

inspiring, not quite comprehensible, bogey of the subject races.”⁷⁹ Sinha supports this view of demarcation⁸⁰ and sums it up thus:

Ultimately the very efficacy of the concept of clubbability depended on serving both as the essence of a unique and homegrown ‘Britishness’ and as a universal goal to which all non-Britons in the colony could aspire . . . [it entailed] the consequent intensification of class hierarchies within the colony.⁸¹

In essence, the Club was the means by which the English projected their Englishness and imperial superiority on to the colony and its subject people; it was about keeping up appearances. What actually went on inside the Club, of course may have been a very different reality. Robert Lee commented that “the Club is another jungle, with its predators and victims, its cruelty hidden behind the veneer of civilization.”⁸² This ‘veneer’ or appearance may not be too substantial once one has crossed the threshold, as evident in Orwell’s account of the Club in *Burmese Days*.

Orwell’s opening descriptions of the Club at Kyauktada graphically encapsulate the Club concept as well as the somewhat sordid reality of it.

He puts it thus:

Beyond that was the European Club, and when one looked at the Club – a dumpy one-storey wooden building – one looked at the real centre of the town. In any town in India the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain. It was doubly so in this case, for it was the proud boast of Kyauktada Club that, almost alone of Clubs in Burma, it had never admitted an Oriental to membership.⁸³

This excerpt serves to demonstrate the inherent classist and racist basis of the Club, its role as the locus of colonial power, as well as the native

⁷⁹ Anthony Kirk-Greene. “Colonial administration and race relations”, 281.

⁸⁰ Mrinalini Sinha. “Britishness”, 504.

⁸¹ Ibid., 512.

⁸² Robert A. Lee. “Symbol and Structure in *Burmese Days*”, 824.

⁸³ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 17.

aspirations to it, but it also demonstrates how misguided this desire is given the actuality of the Club itself. The Club, despite constituting the seat of English power and supposed unity, actually reveals all the tensions between the English protagonists. Au says of the Kyauktada Club that it is the space where “seven people endeavour to form some sense of community as members of the ruling class.”⁸⁴ However, Orwell himself observes that “quarrels were a regular part of the routine of Club life.”⁸⁵ We also witness the rows between Ellis and Flory, as well as the scene where Ellis gets his comeuppance from Verrall after the latter had kicked a native servant. The Club is the site for all of Ellis’s racial ranting, such as this early example: “No natives in this Club! It’s by constantly giving way over small things like that we’ve ruined the Empire . . . The only possible policy is to treat ‘em like the dirt they are.”⁸⁶ The Club is also the stage for the native riot triggered by Ellis’s brutal blinding of the Burmese boy, perhaps an example of the English class tensions being outed on the natives, and the dramatic event which leads to Flory’s one moment of bravery and strength. Orwell’s narrative continues to denigrate the institution with comments such as, “Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs, whisky to right of you, *Pink’un* to left of you, listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody Nationalists should be boiled in oil”⁸⁷ and “it was as though there had been a spell upon them that made all their conversation lapse into banality; gramophone records, dogs, tennis racquets – all that desolating Club-chatter.”⁸⁸ The concept of ‘desolation’ strongly contrasts with the supposed ‘civilization’ of the Club. Nevertheless, in keeping with the

⁸⁴ Kelvin K. W. Au. “Defining Spaces”, 12.

⁸⁵ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

aspirational native stereotype, Orwell clearly paints the picture of U Po Kyin, the local Burmese Magistrate, as being obsessed with the Club, “that remote, mysterious temple, that holy of holies far harder of entry than Nirvana!”⁸⁹ And, in a final irony, U Po Kyin becomes the first native elected to Club membership, despite Ellis’s racist protests; one could interpret this as a victory for liberalism over imperial racism, but, as the sham of Club ‘civilization’ is clear by the end of the novel, the victory is rendered hollow and pointless.

Maugham’s stories also regularly feature the Club, affirming its importance in the colonial setting. Indeed, so integral is the Club to his fiction that Greene in *Ways of Escape* wrote:

I had an idea before I went to Malaya . . . of a group of men, the harsh overseers of great capitalist enterprises, intransigent, unconstructive exploiters of native labour, drinking stengah after stengah in the local club, probably in the Somerset Maugham manner making love to each others’ wives.⁹⁰

Greene’s mention of Maugham in this context emphasizes how influential the literary representation of the Club was in the canon of colonial literature. Maugham’s portrayal of the Club takes various approaches. In *The Painted Veil*, Kitty, contemplating her marital infidelity and the impact it could have on Walter, consoles herself with the thought that “a man always had his club”⁹¹, as if that was the ultimate form of male sanctuary or refuge – an interesting twist to this theme, and one which certainly underscores the masculinity of the Club as an institution. In “The Pool” the image is somewhat more conventionally masculine with Lawson and Chaplin topping “one another’s

⁸⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁹⁰ Graham Greene. *Ways of Escape*, 141-142.

⁹¹ W. Somerset Maugham. *The Painted Veil*, 35.

stories of beanos which had become legendary, stories of 'wet' nights at the English Club, of shooting expeditions where an incredible amount of whisky had been consumed."⁹² An example from his non-fictional work is where he writes of Borneo; "they have a little club which they all go to as evening draws in . . . It is very grubby."⁹³ What is interesting is that, given the ubiquity of the Club as a pivotal facet of colonial literature, many are certainly anything but grand, and the use of the word 'grubby' would tend to show that they could be very far from it. This certainly echoes Orwell's depiction in *Burmese Days*. However, the most memorable and penetrating comment on the English, their Clubs, and what they stand for, is contained in a 1938 conversation recollected by Maugham. The author was in India lunching with the Prince and Princess of Berar. The conversation turned to the Yacht Club in Bombay and the Bengal Club in Calcutta, both English Clubs:

'Do you know the difference between them?' the prince asked.
'No,' I said innocently.
'In the Bengal Club at Calcutta they don't allow dogs or Indians, but in the Yacht Club at Bombay they don't mind dogs; it's only Indians they don't allow.'
I couldn't for the life of me think of an answer to that then, and I haven't thought of one since.⁹⁴

Apart from the fact that it is an Indian pointing out this grotesque example of English racism to an English author, it is salient that natives are relegated below animals. And for Maugham, certainly a man of words, not to be able to come up with a response in the several years before he committed the event to paper really accentuates the impact of what was said.

⁹² W. Somerset Maugham. "The Pool", 95.

⁹³ W. Somerset Maugham. *A Writer's Notebook*, 210.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

4: The Imperialist Empire

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it.

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

The Empire very much had its dark side, the dirty business-end of imperialism, imperial despotism. In many respects the Empire was an outlet for the worst aspects of white masculinity. The reality is that “every colonial situation is . . . by definition one of domination, at its best paternalistic, tyrannical at its worst.”⁹⁵ The representation of dominance over the ‘Other’ is best illustrated by the treatment of natives and Eurasians (or half-castes) in the literature, and examples abound in the work of all three authors, albeit with a mixture of approaches and sensitivities. Whilst the racial difference may be seen as the ‘cover story’ of Empire and dominance, the real story is about power and its dynamics. Abena Busia comments that “imperial and colonial novels inscribe within them several fictions, which are ultimately choreographed around the question of *power* . . . their effect is to encode in the popular mind the superiority of the white male dominant class.”⁹⁶ Therefore the aspects of brutality, superiority, and exploitation are central to the contemplation of the dark side of the colonial experience.

White Supremacy as a Creed:

Frantz Fanon writes that “a colonial country is a racist country . . . It is not possible to enslave men without logically making them inferior through and

⁹⁵ Anthony Kirk-Greene. “Colonial administration”, 284.

⁹⁶ Abena P. A. Busia. “Miscegenation as metonymy”, 362.

through. And racism is only the emotional, affective, sometimes intellectual explanation of this inferiorization.”⁹⁷ Apart from Fanon’s seminal works, the equating of the Empire with racism is widely commented upon in the research literature. Kirk-Greene says that “race relations were nothing more than race rejection,”⁹⁸ and John Gross says that in European imperialism there “is an ineradicable core of racial supremacy, aptly symbolized in the novel, as it so often was in real life, by the bristling exclusiveness of the club.”⁹⁹ This supports the thesis advanced about the importance of the Club in colonial society. It is crucial to look at how the natives are depicted in the literature, and flowing from this English superiority and racism, linking into the thesis about the English character and the role of the Club. The literary works studied contain a veritable array of representations of natives, exotic or alien, submissive or menacing, but always dominated. Sheridan Prasso, analysing gender issues as well as race, writes that Eurocentric depictions “cause Asian women to be perceived in Western culture as gentle geisha or China Dolls – servile, submissive, exotic, sexually available, mysterious, and guiding; or as Dragon Ladies – steely and . . . cold . . . [whereas the Asian men are depicted] as effeminate and emasculated on the one hand, but inscrutable, sneaky, stoic, and sometimes wise on the other.”¹⁰⁰ This exemplifies the vast range of descriptions used, but also shows that none of them really serves to dignify the natives.

Glenn Hooper comments that Maugham’s stories, “in their attention to ethnic and racial tension, provide a significantly graphic portrait of the ideology of

⁹⁷ Frantz Fanon. “Racism and Culture”, 40.

⁹⁸ Anthony Kirk-Greene. “Colonial administration”, 276.

⁹⁹ John Gross. “Imperial Attitudes”, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Sheridan Prasso. *The Asian Mystique*, xiii.

empire.”¹⁰¹ This is echoed by Klaus Jonas when he says that “Maugham shows the prejudice of the English against natives or half-castes, who are usually looked upon as inferiors, pariahs.”¹⁰² Even a cursory examination of Maugham’s fiction reveals examples aplenty. In the short story “Rain”, the following excerpt is epitomic:

The natives, blithe and childlike by reputation, seemed then, with their tattooing and their dyed hair, to have something sinister in their appearance; and when they pattered along at your heels with their naked feet you looked back instinctively. You felt they might at any moment come behind you swiftly and thrust a long knife between your shoulder-blades. You could not tell what dark thoughts lurked behind their wide-set eyes.¹⁰³

In this description Maugham manages to include the theme of the juvenilizing of natives, the aspect of menace with their ‘sinister’ appearance, ‘naked feet’ implying a lack of civilization, the threat of violence and death at their hands, and, in the true spirit of Orientalism, their complete consignment to the ‘Other’ category, with their ‘wide-set’ eyes. Conceptualizing the natives as both childlike and menacing serves to justify the imperial treatment of them; superiority to deal with their supposed immaturity and violence to address the perceived threat from them.

In *The Painted Veil*, the best illustration of the racial theme comes from the narrative about Kitty and her encounters with the Chinese. Maugham tells us early on that “Kitty had never heard the Chinese spoken of as anything but decadent, dirty and unspeakable.”¹⁰⁴ This illustrates the cultural background she comes from, telling us how English society usually describes the Chinese. However, it is when Kitty gets to the orphanage run by the French nuns and

¹⁰¹ Glenn Hooper. “Trading Places”, 69.

¹⁰² Klaus W. Jonas. “Maugham and the East”, 132.

¹⁰³ W. Somerset Maugham. “Rain”, 28-29.

¹⁰⁴ W. Somerset Maugham. *The Painted Veil*, 87.

comes into close contact with the orphaned Chinese children, that Maugham reveals to us the racist revulsion inherent in Kitty's character. The following selection of related quotes displays Kitty's thoughts about the Chinese children:

She shuddered a little, for in their uniform dress, sallow-skinned, stunted, with their flat noses, they looked to her hardly human . . . They looked hardly human; queer animals of an unknown species . . .

For the first few days she had to make something of an effort to overcome the faint distaste she felt for these little girls, in their ugly uniforms, with their stiff black hair, their round yellow faces, and their staring, sloe-black eyes . . .

[She] had stood surrounded by those ugly little things.¹⁰⁵

Just the use of words and phrases such as 'ugly', 'distaste', 'hardly human' and 'queer animals' is more than sufficient to demonstrate unequivocally Kitty's inherent racism, born of her Englishness. Such description would have been effective enough if we had been listening to Kitty's view of adult Chinese, but the fact that Maugham chooses to apply this narrative not just to children, but orphaned ones, provides an immensely powerful boost to this insight into imperial English racism.

Greene is rather more sensitive in his treatment of racial issues, perhaps as he was writing in the 1950s, some 20-30 years after the colonial works of Maugham and Orwell. In *The Quiet American*, notwithstanding the theme of exploitation connected with Fowler, Greene gives us the following observation through Fowler's eyes:

Two Vietnamese couples were dancing, small, neat, aloof, with an air of civilization we couldn't match. I recognized one . . . he was a student of Wordsworth and wrote nature poems. His holidays he spent at Dalat, the nearest he could get to the atmosphere of the English lakes.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 101, 103, & 119.

¹⁰⁶ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 38-39.

This description borders on the romantic and is certainly not racially dismissive of the Vietnamese; it praises them for their 'civilization' which surpasses that of the Europeans, at least in Fowler's view and, therefore, perhaps Greene's. However, unlike Maugham, whilst respectful of the natives, Greene combines with his praise the aspect of the colonial subjects aspiring to the English way; Wordsworth and the English Lake District are transposed onto the colonial. This touches upon the concept of mimicry and the latent menace that poses for the colonials, the "almost but not quite"¹⁰⁷ ambivalent racial status of the natives.

It is, perhaps, in Orwell's work that the theme of the natives and racism is most widely discussed, but also most ambivalently. Douglas Kerr says that Orwell, in *Burmese Days* and "Shooting an Elephant", creates narratives which have some sympathies towards the Burmese, "while at the same time attributing to them qualities of hysteria, dishonesty, fanaticism, vengefulness and immaturity, familiar from the lexicon of 'Orientalism'."¹⁰⁸ Booker says that "the British colonials in *Burmese Days* seem unable to view the Burmese as anything other than embodiments of fictional racial stereotypes. Here, of course, they show a common colonial attitude."¹⁰⁹ In *Burmese Days* derogatory depictions of natives and displays of racism abound. Ellis is the caricature of English racism and he holds his prejudiced court at the Club. Examples of his racist outbursts include "a dear little nigger-boy", "little pot-bellied niggers breathing garlic in your face over the bridge-table", "that pot-bellied, greasy little sod of nigger doctor", and "a set of damn black swine

¹⁰⁷ Homi Bhabha. "Of Mimicry and Man", 131.

¹⁰⁸ Douglas Kerr. "In the Picture", 50.

¹⁰⁹ M. Keith Booker. *Colonial Power*, 78.

who've been slaves since the beginning of history.”¹¹⁰ This is a representation of racism at its most obscene and obvious level, and perhaps is a critique on the author's behalf. Orwell, in his narrative, says of Ellis:

Any hint of friendly feeling towards an Oriental seemed to him a horrible perversity. He was an intelligent man and an able servant of his firm, but he was one of those Englishmen – common, unfortunately – who should never be allowed to set foot in the East.¹¹¹

Whilst Ellis may be the most overtly racist English person in the novel, the exposition of the theme is not limited to him. Elizabeth comments that the natives “have such hideous-shaped heads! Their skulls kind of slope up behind like a tom-cat's . . . I remember reading something in a magazine about the shape of people's heads; it said that a person with a sloping forehead is a *criminal type*.”¹¹² In the same conversation she says to Flory, “Aren't they too simply dreadful? So *coarse-looking*; like some kind of animal. Do you think anyone could think those women attractive?”¹¹³ Flory's response, a fine piece of disingenuousness, is, “Their own men do, I believe.”¹¹⁴ The animal imagery, reflective of that in Maugham, speaks volumes about the racism and superiority of the imperial English; the natives do not even rate a lesser human status, they can only be compared to animals, although Flory is quite happy to bed Ma Hla May. Of course, as soon as Elizabeth appears, the white woman who represents a trophy to be pursued, the native mistress has no further use. In a final twist of the racist knife, Orwell actually has an animal's behaviour hint at the theme of racism. We are told that Flory's dog, Flo, “always barked at strange Orientals, but

¹¹⁰ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 22, 23 & 24.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 113.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

she liked the smell of a European.”¹¹⁵ To make even the pet dog ‘racist’ stresses Orwell’s preoccupation with racism and his trying to come to terms with it, overshadowed as his efforts are, at least in part, by ambivalence.

The Problem of Miscegenation:

It is to be expected that, in an environment of imperial power and domination over weaker subjects, sexual relations would occur and, inevitably, children would be born out of these inter-racial liaisons. Miscegenation, whilst seemingly a frequent occurrence in the Empire was, on the one hand, a manifestation of white male power, exploiting the native female but, on the other, a source of anxiety as half-caste children increased the level of menace felt in the colonies with “racial fusion [threatening] to bring about the decline of European civilizations and empires”¹¹⁶. Susanne Howe writes that “the half-caste or Eurasian . . . has always been a difficult and uncomfortable by-product of empire.”¹¹⁷ It is notable that Eurasians figure in the works of all three authors, underpinning the significance of their existence in the Empire. Howe goes on to say that, because they are too hard to come to terms with, “for Somerset Maugham, the Anglo-Malay alliances . . . must of necessity be developed in a furtive and sultry moral atmosphere that leads to violent and tragic endings”¹¹⁸. This can also be said of Flory in *Burmese Days*, but to remain for the moment with Maugham, his work abounds with Eurasians and their attendant issues. Two of Maugham’s short stories centre on the issue of miscegenation, “The Pool” and “The Yellow Streak”. The most striking exposition of the issue is the attitude of Lawson in “The Pool”. Lawson has

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹¹⁶ Robert J. C. Young. *Colonial Desire*, 115.

¹¹⁷ Susanne Howe. *Novels of Empire*, 59.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 60.

married a native girl, Ethel, and has had children with her. However, his Anglocentrism is revealed when his first child is born: “It was when Lawson first held the child in his arms that a sudden pang shot through his heart. He had not expected it to be so dark . . . there was no reason really why it should not look just like an English baby.”¹¹⁹ The difference between his desire for the native woman and his reaction at the colour of their offspring displays the double standard in the English character; the exotic native woman is desirable, but the obvious result of the union is repugnant as it represents a dilution of whiteness. The other, and ironic, Eurasian aspect to this story is that Lawson, upon returning to the island, slides into alcoholism and degradation, and loses the prestigious role of English colonial. Maugham writes that “the half-castes treated Lawson quite differently now. His marriage had made him one of themselves and they called him Bertie”¹²⁰, and that he “resented bitterly the thought of being under the orders of a half-caste.”¹²¹ Given that he has fathered half-caste children, the situation he finds himself in is an ironic and powerful reminder of the contradiction in the imperial English character.

In “The Yellow Streak”, the protagonist Izzart is actually Eurasian, although the other English do not know it, and Izzart is desperate to be the genuine Englishman, as the following conversation involving him, Campion and Hutchison shows:

‘By God, Izzart, you’re looking green about the gills . . . I never saw such a filthy colour.’
Izzart flushed. His swarthinness was always a sensitive point with him. But he forced himself to give a cheery laugh.

¹¹⁹ W. Somerset Maugham. “The Pool”, 111.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 109.

¹²¹ Ibid., 121.

'You see, I had a Spanish grandmother . . . and when I'm under the weather it always comes out. I remember at Harrow I fought a boy and licked him, because he called me a damned half-caste.'
'You are dark . . . Do Malays ever ask you if you have any native blood in you?'
'Yes, damn their impudence'.¹²²

It is revealed that Izzart even managed to hide his ethnicity at his public school in England, and it is clear that he has completely taken on, to an arrogant extreme, the ethos of the English ruling class, as a form of anxious self-defence. Izzart's public school Englishness has become his psychic refuge from his anxiety about his mixed race status. Greene regularly raises the theme of the Eurasian, or half-caste. In *The Quiet American*, the French character, Captain Trouin, talks to Fowler of the *métisse*, saying, "There is a girl who was involved by her parents – what is her future when this port falls? France is only half her home."¹²³ Greene revisits the theme in his non-fiction as well. In "A Few Pipes", he talks about Mr X, a Eurasian: "Soon his employers would be packing up in Laos, he would go to France, he would have no more opium – all the ease of life would vanish with the boredom, but he was incapable of considering his future."¹²⁴ The comment about opium is interesting, given Greene's extensive use of it and this reflection in Fowler's character; for Greene, opium seems to have been very much an integral element to the Oriental experience. In "Son of the Rice Paddies" Greene describes Colonel Leroy as "half Vietnamese and half French – a man who belonged to two worlds."¹²⁵ It is clear that Greene recognizes the plight of the half-caste, the product of imperial domination, as having a highly uncertain place in the world. Orwell also raises the theme in *Burmese Days*,

¹²² W. Somerset Maugham. "The Yellow Streak", 224.

¹²³ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 151.

¹²⁴ Graham Greene. "A Few Pipes", 20.

¹²⁵ Graham Greene. "Son of the Rice Paddies", 295.

most notably in this exchange between Elizabeth (first) and Flory (responding) about half-castes:

‘They looked awfully degenerate types, didn’t they? So thin and weedy and cringing; and they haven’t got at all honest faces. I suppose these Eurasians are very degenerate? I’ve heard that half-castes always inherit what’s worst in both races. Is that true?’
‘But our attitude towards them is rather beastly . . . when all’s said and done, we’re responsible for their existence’.¹²⁶

At least in Orwell, whilst Elizabeth portrays the typical English attitude, we do see some acknowledgement of responsibility in the words of Flory. Of course, this needs to be tempered by the fact that Flory dispenses with his own half-caste children when it suits him for his English purpose, namely to marry a good English girl: ‘official’ family life can only be with a white woman in order to maintain the racial purity and therefore supremacy of the English.

Violent and Cruel Urges:

It is somewhat refreshing to see a rare example of candour and honesty about the Empire from a British parliamentarian in 1899, at the height of Britain’s imperial zeal. Robert Wallace, M.P., commented, “I am afraid our ancestors brought other and less admirable qualities to bear on the formation of the Empire. There was the initial and irremediable injustice of depriving the subjugated peoples of their freedom, and our past record is not unstained by tyranny, cruelty, and fraud.”¹²⁷ In the texts studied here, Orwell certainly depicts forms of cruelty, but it is absent from Maugham’s work and essentially missing from Greene’s, discounting his descriptions of the war in French Indochina.

¹²⁶ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 117.

¹²⁷ Robert Wallace. “The Seamy Side of ‘Imperialism’”, 786.

Burmese Days is replete with brutality inflicted upon the native Burmese by the English. Ellis, of course, being the character drawn to display the most ardent racism, not only discusses inflicting violence upon the natives, but he actually physically blinds a Burmese boy; the heinous act which leads to the riot. Ironically, the riot proves to be Flory's moment of heroism, but the moment is only fleeting as humiliation and suicide are his destiny. Verrall kicks the native servant in the Club and then there is the argument between Verrall and Ellis about exactly who has the right to kick the servant; Orwell using farce to comment upon the racism of his protagonists. Westfield, the policeman, says, "would you believe it, I've never fired my gun at a fellow yet, not even a dacoit. Eleven years of it, not counting the War, and never killed a man. Depressing."¹²⁸ Evidently the colonial police were a far cry from the traditional English 'Bobby', or at least the British public perception of their genteel policemen, whatever the reality may have been. Orwell, of course, was in the position to know this, given his service as a colonial police officer. Booker says that "Ellis, with his fantasies of the flogging of natives, may not mark a deviation from the democratic tradition of England so much as an unveiling of the dark core of that tradition."¹²⁹ This, I would suggest, holds equally valid for the other protagonists as well. To emphasize this point, female protagonists, whilst capable of the most blatant racism, can also subscribe to brutality. In *Burmese Days* we hear Mrs Lackersteen say to her husband, "Tom, that wretch of a rickshaw-man is pretending to be ill again. Really, I think you ought to give him a good thrashing and bring him to his senses."¹³⁰ The effect of having a female character request violence upon a

¹²⁸ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 107.

¹²⁹ M. Keith Booker. *Colonial Power*, 119.

¹³⁰ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 27.

native in such a matter of fact way really drives home the prominent feature that brutality plays in the colonies. Orwell's essays also provide some enlightening material on this topic and the following are two particularly germane examples. Writing as Eric Blair in 1929 in an essay on Burma, he says that "the government of all the Indian provinces under the control of the British Empire is of necessity despotic, because only the threat of force can subdue a population of several million subjects. But this despotism is latent. It hides behind a mask of democracy."¹³¹ This is a most succinct description of the essence of the Empire, and shows quite explicitly the real nature of the Empire that Orwell is trying to expose. Then, in "Shooting an Elephant", Orwell writes:

With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny . . . upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.¹³²

This is revelatory of the contradictions Orwell could see in the imperial experience, as there is a clear acknowledgement of the despotism of imperialism, and then a murderous sentiment towards the natives. How much these 'feelings' were held by Orwell himself, as opposed to his merely reflecting imperial thought, is open to speculation, but he does make the ambivalent nature of the colonial relationship very clear.

Use, Abuse and Possession:

The Empire, at its heart, was about exploitation, the use of power: Britain used her power to exploit her colonies for her own material benefit. Orwell

¹³¹ George Orwell. "How a Nation is Exploited", 3-4.

¹³² George Orwell. "Shooting an Elephant", 32.

opined that “the huge British and French empires [are] in essence nothing but mechanisms for exploiting cheap coloured labour – under the heading of democracies!”¹³³ Of Burma, specifically, he said, “If we are honest, it is true that the British are robbing and pilfering Burma quite shamelessly”¹³⁴, a shame perhaps reflected in Flory. The commercial basis of the imperial exploitation does not really, with the exception of some of Orwell’s essays, feature as an aspect of the colonial writings of these authors. Certainly some of the fictional characters are involved in trade, production and export, but the mercantile foundation of the Empire is essentially left to inference. The reason, I would venture, is that it is not the sort of subject matter that lends itself to appealing fictionalization. Sexual relations, on the other hand, are most definitely the stuff of gripping storytelling and the works being studied here abound with them. It is also the most overt way that the aspects of imperial exploitation and power, racism and sexism, are evident in the texts; the degree to which the authors variously intended the exposition is open to debate.

In all three authors’ work, it is the interaction between English (or Scottish) male protagonists and native female characters that exposes the inherent exploitative nature of the imperial relationship, and, significantly, stresses the overriding white masculinity of Empire. In commenting on *The Quiet American*, Geoffrey Jacques says that Phuong, the principal female Vietnamese character, “is the silent, exotic object of colonialist fantasy . . . an object of desire for the competing claims of her foreign would-be political

¹³³ George Orwell. “Not Counting Niggers”, 396.

¹³⁴ George Orwell. “How a Nation is Exploited”, 6.

masters, in much the same way as her country was.”¹³⁵ In Greene’s text the exploitation of Phuong is not even veiled. It can be argued, perhaps, that Fowler does have some genuine love for Phuong; after all he does want to spend the rest of his life with her, or maybe a combination of Phuong and Vietnam, somewhere other than England. This also really supports a reading of the text as showing that Phuong, apart from being an individual character, is a metaphor for her country. Possible love aside, the following quote regarding Fowler dealing with Pyle spells out the base exploitation at play:

Suddenly I couldn’t bear his boyishness any more. I said, ‘I don’t care that for her interests. You can have her interests. I only want her body. I want her in bed with me. I’d rather ruin her and sleep with her, than . . . look after her damned interests . . . Like any other woman she’d rather have a good . . . ’ the crash of a mortar saved Boston ears from the Anglo-Saxon word.¹³⁶

Fowler’s unashamed declaration that his interest in Phuong is purely carnal and that he’d be prepared to ‘ruin’ her is a shocking revelation. Apart from being such a clear admission of exploitation, and an illustration of the primal male competition between Fowler and Pyle for a woman as a desirable object to possess, it also serves to lessen whatever empathy a reader may have with Fowler and what he stands for. This is significant as there are certainly aspects of Fowler which can be viewed as admirable and, just as there are clearly aspects of Greene in Fowler, so it is interesting to wonder how much of Greene is contained in Fowler’s words. The theme of male exploitation is further mirrored in the words of the American journalist, Granger, when he says to Fowler, “It’s only a damned colonial war anyway. Get me another drink. And then let’s go and find a girl. You’ve got a piece of

¹³⁵ Geoffrey Jacques. “Film Reviews: *The Quiet American*”, 46.

¹³⁶ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 58.

tail. I want a piece of tail too'.¹³⁷ Whilst no doubt a realistic rendition of the type of language used in the environment Greene was reporting from (and no doubt still prevalent in masculine parlance), the reduction of the Vietnamese female to a piece of anatomy, and not even a human one, is both stark and sordid. In *Burmese Days*, Flory's sexual use of Ma Hla May is transparent, and she ends up being the trigger for his downfall and suicide, although Orwell's likely meaning at the end is to comment on Flory's inability to fit the required, or pukka sahib¹³⁸, mould, rather than any condemnation of sexual usage. This failure by Orwell to take the opportunity to strongly condemn this sexual exploitation perhaps illustrates one of Orwell's blind spots in relation to imperialism and is reflective of his greater concern with the effects of imperialism on the English rather than on the natives. The exploitation is, however, evident from the start of their relationship as we are told that "[Flory] had bought [Ma Hla May] from her parents two years ago, for three hundred rupees."¹³⁹ Flory blatantly uses her for his sexual gratification throughout the story, and endeavours to dispose of her, the native sexual object, when there is promise of romance and marriage with Elizabeth, the proper English woman. Maugham's male characters, such as Waddington, who do not marry "their Oriental women...do not suffer the same fate as Lawson in "The Pool"; their Oriental women are in the proper relationship to Western men, as mistress. Like their countries they are colonized."¹⁴⁰ Waddington seems in the text to have found his contentment, and he clearly does not display any overt exploitation of his Chinese mistress; his devotion to her is stated. Nevertheless, the 'mistress' basis of the relationship not only

¹³⁷ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 35.

¹³⁸ The 'pukka sahib' concept is discussed in the next chapter. Also see Glossary.

¹³⁹ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ Jane O'Halloran. "At the Far Edge of Their Firelight", 98.

means that Waddington is an English outcast in perpetuity, but it is also Maugham illustrating the English attitude towards marriage with the natives. In contrast to Waddington, Lawson, who does marry his native woman, ends up destitute and outcast, and then suicides. Taking up this apparent double standard, Ronald Hyam says of the Empire that “sexual opportunities were seized with imperious confidence . . . Britain spread venereal diseases around the globe along with its race-courses and botanical gardens, steam engines and law-books. [However] the British had another export . . . their official prudery. Practice and theory diverged.”¹⁴¹ Mark Berger criticizes Hyam for failing “to link his discussion of sex and empire with any analysis of the power relations in the various situations he describes.”¹⁴² And of course Berger is correct – the sexual exploitation of native women in most cases was simply an blatant exercise of power over those who were weaker for the gratification of the stronger. It can also be read as a masculine metaphor for the subordination and exploitation of the subject races and countries.

¹⁴¹ Ronald Hyam. “Empire and Sexual Opportunity”, 35.

¹⁴² Mark T. Berger. “Imperialism and Sexual Exploitation”, 84.

5: Inherent Contradictions

Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

There are many contradictions inherent in the construction of Empire, often manifested in double standards and hypocrisy. Such aspects of the English character are clearly illustrated in the works of the three authors under review, through the representation of their fictional protagonists and their actions. It is my contention that all three authors have invested a certain amount of themselves and their attributes as Englishmen from middle class public school backgrounds in their work and their fictional characters. Usually the English who went out to run the Empire in the Orient conducted themselves according to what became known as the pukka sahib code¹⁴³, a standard of self-imposed behaviours designed to keep up the appearance of imperial mastery and English superiority, regardless of the reality. Bivona states that “all Britons, whether officially titled or not, are and must act like rulers in the colonies . . . and must submit themselves to . . . the ‘pukka sahib’s code’”¹⁴⁴, as Flory elaborates on in *Burmese Days*. Steven Patterson says that “mastery was the lodestone of imperial ideology in the Raj, and one could never hope to rule others while lacking self-mastery.”¹⁴⁵ What is quite clear is that the English had an over-riding sense of discipline and self-discipline, in order to maintain appearances in the colonies. What is most significant, however, is that this very code, placing as it did ‘appearances’ at the zenith of

¹⁴³ See Glossary for a definition. Orwell uses the phrase regularly in *Burmese Days*. Maugham and Greene do not use the phrase, but the same English behavioural imperatives can be inferred in many of their writings.

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Bivona. *British Imperial Literature*, 180.

¹⁴⁵ Steven Patterson. “The Imperial Idea”, paragraph 7.

importance, consequently allowed and excused various behaviours which, if viewed objectively, would seem reprehensible. The most obvious example of this dark undercurrent of English behaviour is the relationship with native women. “The sexual double standard granted European men sexual access to indigenous women as concubines and prostitutes”¹⁴⁶, yet at the same time marrying a native woman was definitely against the code, as was showing off one’s native mistress, or any half-caste offspring from the relationship – the taboo of miscegenation. What is most noticeable from the colonial literature studied is that, whilst English men frequently have liaisons (and even children) with native women, English women are never seen to have relations with native men, although English, or European, women are not universally made out to be morally upstanding in their general behaviour. For example, Kitty Fane (English) in *The Painted Veil*, Darya (Russian) in “Neil MacAdam”, and Vigot’s wife (French) in *The Quiet American* are all sexually involved outside their marriages, but always with European men, never natives. It seems, I suggest, that the colonial white men can indulge their carnal desires with the native women but it is a complete taboo for the colonial women to sexually interact with the native men; sheer hypocrisy, both English and masculine, at its very best.

Orwell, Flory and *Burmese Days*:

There is no doubt that *Burmese Days* is a negative portrayal of the Empire, with Orwell using his protagonists to illustrate the range of imperial attitudes and the English character; indeed the colonial community in Kyauktada is used to present a microcosm of the Empire, with all its contradictions and

¹⁴⁶ Nupur Chaudhuri & Margaret Strobel. *Western Women and Imperialism*, 12.

hypocrisy. The theme of ambivalence is personified by the main character, Flory, with his love-hate relationship with Burma and its people and his muted contempt for his English peers. However, because of his exploitative relationship with his native mistress, Ma Hla May, he himself is not free from such hypocrisy. There is irony in this given that Flory is the one Englishman in the novel who recognizes the English exploitation of Burma and its people, and yet he is “caught in a relationship of exploitation and abuse with Ma Hla May.”¹⁴⁷ This provides another example of the native female, like Phuong, becoming a metaphor for her colonized and exploited country. It is this relationship of Flory’s with Ma Hla May which actually provides so much of the insight into the hypocrisy of the English in the imperial setting. I agree with Kerr when he says that “Flory is destroyed, not because he has kept a local mistress, but because he has not kept her invisible.”¹⁴⁸ So when Ma Hla May bursts into the church service and humiliates Flory, as deserved as that may be, the pukka sahib code has been broken, and Flory’s demise is inevitable, although he chooses suicide rather than becoming an exiled loner like Fowler or Waddington. Busia comments that, “white men are given more liberty in their sexual behaviour, and within certain limits their sexual mores are not questioned. They are only questioned when they begin to disrupt the British social order.”¹⁴⁹ This is exactly the case with Flory and the inherent hypocrisy of the wider colonial community is revealed when one compares his situation to that of Mr Lackersteen, who drunkenly debauches himself with native women frequently, but since this is never outed publicly and is kept under wraps by his knowing English wife, the code is maintained. Even

¹⁴⁷ Daphne Patai. *The Orwell Mystique*, 42.

¹⁴⁸ Douglas Kerr. “Orwell, *Animals and the East*”, 249.

¹⁴⁹ Abena P. A. Busia. “Miscegenation as metonymy”, 367.

Lackersteen's attempted rape of Elizabeth does not breach the code, because it is behind the scenes. James Connors says that:

[Flory] knows that the pukka sahib code is sheer nonsense: yet he chooses to live in secret rebellion rather than provoke the wrath of the local European club members . . . Flory and Orwell insist on the moral degeneration which accompanies such hypocrisy.¹⁵⁰

Orwell's inbuilt commentary is illustrated by the despicable behaviour of Mr Lackersteen and the connivance of Mrs Lackersteen in ensuring the code is maintained, epitomizing the moral descent. Flory in his own words to his one confidante, ironically the Indian Dr Veraswami, reveals that he is fully aware of his predicament: "You've got to be a pukka sahib or die, in this country. In fifteen years I've never talked honestly to anyone except you."¹⁵¹ In another conversation he says to Veraswami that it is "a joy to be here after that bloody Club . . . Such a glorious holiday from *them* . . . from my beloved fellow Empire-builders. British prestige, the white man's burden, the pukka sahib . . . Such a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while."¹⁵² Flory's contempt for the other English is emphasized by the sarcastic use of the adjective 'beloved' in relation to his fellow public school Englishmen, and then the reference to 'the stink of it', implying a debased moral quagmire. The sad irony here is that Flory's verbal rebellion is simply met by Veraswami's sycophantic praise for the very imperialism from which Flory wants to escape.

It would be a stretch to assert that Flory represents Orwell, although clearly Flory's character is certainly used to verbalize much of what Orwell is saying in his critique of imperialism. There is much debate in the literature and

¹⁵⁰ James Connors. "Do It To Julia", 466.

¹⁵¹ George Orwell. *Burmese Days*, 41.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

commentators vary in their assessment of just how much of Orwell is to be seen in Flory. J. R. Hammond says that “Flory embodies many of Orwell’s opinions and attitudes”¹⁵³, whilst Donald Crompton even asserts that Flory “is an intense and highly-coloured projection of the author himself.”¹⁵⁴ Christopher Hollis talks of “a certain similarity”¹⁵⁵, whilst Stephen Keck takes an interesting stance, speculating that there are two Orwells in *Burmese Days*; the “first is Maxwell [the policeman who is killed], who represents Blair’s direct, immediate experience of Burma; the second, is indeed Flory, as the protagonist of the novel suggests what Blair might have become had he not returned to Britain.”¹⁵⁶ These are all arguable points with some merit. However, what is significant for this paper is that both Flory and Orwell display considerable ambivalence in their attitudes about the Empire and the imperial situation. Flory, in his talks with Veraswami, constantly rails against imperialism, and yet the tragic ending for Flory as well as the demise of Veraswami, if read in a parabolic sense, states unequivocally that there is no reward for worthiness and, in fact, the more unworthy a person is, the more successful they will be. The pukka sahib code, and the English character inherent in it, ensures that hypocrisy and reprehensible acts will be perpetuated and protected. The ambivalence prominent in Flory’s character, combined with the end results for the various protagonists, I therefore suggest, underscores Orwell’s own ambivalence. Some commentators have gone as far as to suggest that Flory contains element of an apology for imperialism, and I think there is some merit to this view.¹⁵⁷ A different ending

¹⁵³ J. R. Hammond. *A George Orwell Companion*, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Donald Crompton. “False Maps of the world”, 152.

¹⁵⁵ Christopher Hollis. *A Study of George Orwell*, 35.

¹⁵⁶ Stephen L. Keck. “Text and Context”, 34.

¹⁵⁷ Patrick Reilly. *George Orwell: The Age’s Adversary*, 117.; Terry Eagleton. “Orwell and the Lower-Middle-Class Novel”, 111.

to the novel with Flory alive and happy with his native woman, albeit 'exiled' from the English, would provide some cause for optimism. Alternatively, Flory could have died defending the Club in the riot, leaving him a degree of heroism. As it is, his suicide and Ma Hla May's destiny in the brothel provide the bleakest of moral outcomes, although it could be argued that Orwell used these endings to emphasize his critique calling for accountability for the imperial enterprise.

Some of Orwell's other writings also illuminate his ambivalence and inherent contradictions. Just as Flory criticizes imperialism in the novel, Orwell does so directly in his essays. In "Shooting an Elephant" he remarks on "the futility of the white man's dominion in the East . . . when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys."¹⁵⁸ He also recognizes and explicitly comments on the English and their "world-famous hypocrisy – their double-faced attitude towards the Empire."¹⁵⁹ So Orwell does see the damage that imperialism has done to the English, and he seemingly damns it for this effect, but the natives are not seen on the same level. I have already cited some of his remarks about the Burmese people, and the fact that the only native who prospers in *Burmese Days* is a villain, I suggest, supports my assertion that Orwell views the natives as being of lesser import than the English.

Maugham, Waddington and *The Painted Veil*:

¹⁵⁸ George Orwell. "Shooting an Elephant", 36.

¹⁵⁹ George Orwell. "England Your England", 58.

Of all Maugham's colonial protagonists, it is perhaps Waddington in *The Painted Veil* who best personifies the inherent contradictions in the English character and the possibility of resistance to the stereotype. Other main characters in this novel, such as Kitty Fane and Charlie Townsend, whilst certainly displaying double standards and hypocrisy, remain products of their middle class English upbringing. Waddington, however, somewhat like Fowler in Greene's *The Quiet American*, does not cave in to the pukka sahib code, nor does he refuse it through suicide like Flory in *Burmese Days*. Waddington seeks his own peace and happiness outside of the code's behavioural imperatives; herein lies the contradiction - in his rebellion. The narrator says that Waddington "had lived for many years in outports, often with no man of his own colour to talk to, and his personality had developed in eccentric freedom."¹⁶⁰ What is implicit here is the notion that it is possible for an Englishman to move beyond the grounding of the typical English male character, to escape the atmosphere of 'permanent adolescence', if he can manage to escape the confines of English Club society and other Englishmen. This suggestion is supported by Kitty's observation that Waddington "perhaps unconsciously . . . had adopted the Chinese view that the Europeans were barbarians and their life a folly."¹⁶¹ In a perhaps ironic twist, one of the French nuns at the orphanage says to Kitty, of Waddington, that "he had a heart quite French and a wit so that you could hardly believe he was English"¹⁶²; the irony arising from Maugham's affinity with France, being born there and then living there permanently when he exiled himself from England. Waddington, like Fowler, has decided that happiness lies in

¹⁶⁰ W. Somerset Maugham. *The Painted Veil*, 87.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 124.

being with a native woman and staying in the Orient permanently, the antithesis of the typical English colonial. Acknowledging the inescapable pukka sahib code, he says to Kitty about his relationship with the Chinese woman, a Manchu Princess, that “it’s not a thing to advertise. I do not know that it would greatly add to my chances of promotion in the service.”¹⁶³ Thus Waddington steps outside the English view of such relationships to find love, and swaps an existence within the English code for one in the realm of Oriental exoticism. Robert Calder says “in spite of the detrimental effect the liaison has had on his career . . . [Waddington] loves her very deeply.”¹⁶⁴ And Waddington affirms his undying commitment when he says to Kitty, “When I retire I shall take a little Chinese house in Peking and spend the rest of my days there.”¹⁶⁵ So the moral of this tale is that Waddington will probably end up happy, but not in an English setting, having shed his English character and choosing to live in permanent exile.

Maugham was often at pains to stress that he was just an ‘observer’, a reporter of what he saw, rather than a commentator on it. Richard Cordell comments that Maugham “is not actively concerned over other people’s conduct, over good and evil. He is content to be an observer and report; often to try to explain behaviour, rarely to judge it.”¹⁶⁶ This, I would suggest, is arguable, given that it is hard not to form judgements about Maugham’s characters through the power of his prose. I submit that this is often how authors seek to judge their protagonists. Cordell proceeds, contrary to his own assertion, to say that “Waddington . . . probably speaks for the

¹⁶³ Ibid., 129.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Lorin Calder. *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom*, 155.

¹⁶⁵ W. Somerset Maugham. *The Painted Veil*, 130.

¹⁶⁶ Richard Cordell. “Teller of Tales”, 170.

author.”¹⁶⁷ Given the commentary that Waddington provides, it is difficult to conclude that Maugham is not injecting himself into the narrative and making comments on his characters. This view is supported by Kong and Savage who say that there “is ample testimony that [Maugham was] expressing [his] personal sentiments through [his] characters and novels”¹⁶⁸ and Jonas who says that “there are a number of characters in Maugham’s narratives who [act as] representatives of the author’s own ideas [including] Waddington.”¹⁶⁹ By the end of the novel, I would argue that the only sympathetic English character left alive is Waddington for whom the consequence of not conforming is his self-imposed exile from the English colonial community. Leslie Marchand says that Maugham was fascinated “by the curious mixture and adjustment where indulgences might be neatly rationalized and yet be the cause of social ostracism; where intolerance and snobbery persist even against a background that so easily reveals them to be ridiculous.”¹⁷⁰ This is exactly the inherent contradiction that this thesis is concerned with, and we see very much of it in Maugham himself. He clearly had reservations about the typical English colonials and about England itself; he left permanently in the 1920s to settle in the south of France. However, he could not completely dispense with his middle class background either. In *The Summing Up* he writes this: “Nor has the squalid life had any attraction for me. I was not born in squalid circumstances. As soon as I could afford it I bought a house in Mayfair.”¹⁷¹ It is a matter of record that he enjoyed a most wealthy and comfortable lifestyle on the French Riviera until he died, so the trappings of his English class background were never dispensed with, even though he

¹⁶⁷ Richard Cordell. *Somerset Maugham*, 122.

¹⁶⁸ Lily Kong & Victor R. Savage. “The Malay World”, 43.

¹⁶⁹ Klaus W. Jonas. “Maugham and the East”, 121.

¹⁷⁰ Leslie A Marchand. “The Exoticism of Somerset Maugham”, 60.

¹⁷¹ W. Somerset Maugham. *The Summing Up*, 115.

chose not to live amongst his countrymen. Other comments in his writings also support this ambivalence in his character. Maugham says that Kipling “was identified with an imperialism which was obnoxious to many sensible persons . . . When one travelled in the East it was astonishing how often one came across men who had modelled themselves on the creatures of his invention.”¹⁷² His observation is interesting both because it illustrates the circular nature of the English character – Englishmen in the East may well have been influenced by Kipling’s works, but then Kipling no doubt drew much of his inspiration from what he observed in the East – and because it clearly reveals that Maugham despised traditional imperialism. Then on the other hand, in an almost apologist stance, Maugham falls back on the typical English view that Empire was a beneficial thing for the colonized peoples when he says that “the British gave them justice, provided them with hospitals and schools, and encouraged their industries.”¹⁷³

Greene, Fowler and *The Quiet American*:

Fowler, Greene’s English protagonist in *The Quiet American*, is a man riddled with contradictions. Whilst coming from the typical English background and therefore having at least started out with the public school English character, of all the protagonists in the literature studied, he is probably the one who has become farthest removed from his Englishness. Fowler’s relationship with Phuong is one of the most overt contradictions in the man. J. M. Rawa says that “Fowler represents the old colonial paradigm. He confesses that he exploits Phuong [but at the same time] he loves Indo-China and Phuong in

¹⁷² W. Somerset Maugham. “The Short Story”, 132.

¹⁷³ W. Somerset Maugham. “Preface” to *Maugham’s Malaysian Stories*, xix.

his own flawed way.”¹⁷⁴ In fact, his actions in the story are essentially driven by his love, albeit flawed, for Phuong, and the male competition between him and Pyle for her. I suggest that his desire to possess Phuong underpins Fowler’s motivation for becoming ‘involved’, or *engagé*, as much as his cumulative disdain for what the Americans, represented by Pyle, were doing in Vietnam. Fowler is significantly different from many other fictional characters in the colonies is that he does not hold the natives and the colonial country in disdain, he reserves that for the Americans. John Lehmann describes him as a “cynical but fundamentally humane Englishman.”¹⁷⁵ I think this is a fair assessment of the character of Fowler; certainly there is nothing in what he says about Vietnam or its people, or in the actions he takes, that even remotely hints at the ingrained racism that most colonial characters exhibit. The other aspect of Fowler that sets him apart from so many of his contemporaries is his desire to remain in Vietnam for the rest of his days, as he himself says, “Oh, they could have home – I only wanted my room in the rue Catinat.”¹⁷⁶ A few pages later his sentiment is reinforced when he writes in a letter to his wife, Helen, back in England, “I am coming back to England next April to take the job of foreign editor. You can imagine I am not very happy about it. England is to me the scene of my failure.”¹⁷⁷ The ‘failure’ refers to his marriage and it seems a significant part of his desire to remain in the Orient is tied up with his failure to accept the conventional English masculinity: thus escape to the East is salvation for him as a man. Apart from the fact that Greene was very familiar with Indo-China from his four tours there as a journalist, I think his choice of placing Fowler in

¹⁷⁴ J. M. Rawa. *The Imperial Quest*, 117 & 121.

¹⁷⁵ John Lehmann. “The Blundering, Ineffectual American”, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 66.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

a French colony, rather than, say, Malaya, as part of the British Empire, is quite deliberate. This, I would argue, is precisely so that Fowler can escape all the other English characters typical of English colonial outposts. His 'defection', as it were, to the French Empire completes Greene's rejection of England and the English character. The closest characters to the English in the novel are the Americans, and Fowler's contempt for them is made clear; his affinity is with both the French and the Vietnamese; the colonizer and the colonized.

So how much of Greene, the writer, is actually injected into Fowler, the character? Clive Christie writes that "although Greene has warned his readers not to confuse his own personality and experiences with that of [Fowler], the exotic perceptions of Greene and of his literary creation are surely very close."¹⁷⁸ I would agree with this position, as the parallels between Fowler and Greene abound, and the inherent contradictions are similarly mirrored. There are significant overlaps between Greene's life and journalistic writing and Fowler's existence in the novel. Fowler's *bête noire* is his marriage, his masculine failure, left behind in England from which he cannot escape as his wife, Helen, refuses to grant him a divorce, at least until near the end of the story. Greene left his wife, too, and moved overseas, however, he remained legally married to her until his death, as their Catholicism precluded a divorce. Like Fowler, Greene never returned to live in England once he had left, spending most of the rest of his life in France. Whilst Greene may have wanted to distance himself from Fowler, he wrote that "perhaps there is more direct *reportage* in *The Quiet American* than in

¹⁷⁸ Clive Christie. 'The Quiet American' and 'The Ugly American', 26.

any other novel I have written.”¹⁷⁹ Judith Adamson supports this when she comments that “Greene the reporter and Greene the novelist are the same man, and what he saw forced him to become involved.”¹⁸⁰ So, here again, the parallel between Greene and Fowler is emphasized. Other examples are the scene in the novel where Fowler is offered a prostitute by the French officer at the opium house after the bombing raid¹⁸¹, no doubt reflective of Greene’s own recollection, in his memoir, as a journalist of being offered a girl at an opium house by the French Police Commissioner¹⁸². Finally, and importantly, there is the constant and heavy use of opium by both Fowler and Greene. Fowler comments that “I could smell the opium. There is no smell like it.”¹⁸³ He then says to Phuong, about opium, “when you left me . . . it was lucky I had this to fall back on. What a fuss we Europeans make about nothing.”¹⁸⁴ It is interesting, firstly, that he classes himself as a European, rather than an Englishman, completely at odds with the normal English practice of differentiating themselves from Continental Europe. Secondly, it is noteworthy that he makes a comment sanctioning the use of opium, contrary to the accepted Western stance at that time and continuing now; perhaps this was indeed Greene speaking through his character. In Greene’s journalistic pieces from Indo-China he is quite open about his opium use, for example when he reminisces that “his opium was the best I had smoked since I was in Hanoi last.”¹⁸⁵ And then in his article entitled “A Few Pipes”, Greene writes that “when I slept again I had a strange complete

¹⁷⁹ Graham Greene. *Way of Escape*, 164-165.

¹⁸⁰ Judith Adamson. “Introduction”, xvi.

¹⁸¹ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 151. It should be noted that Fowler’s sortie with the French air force is a carbon copy, actually *verbatim*, of Greene’s aerial expedition as a journalist.

¹⁸² Graham Greene. *Ways of Escape*, 175.

¹⁸³ Graham Greene. *The Quiet American*, 11.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸⁵ Graham Greene. “Before the Attack”, 178.

dream such as I have experienced only after opium. I was coming down the steps of a club in St James's Street and on the steps I met the Devil who was wearing a tweed motoring coat and a deerstalker cap."¹⁸⁶ The dream certainly is redolent of a drug-induced fantasy, but I speculate as to whether or not there is a subconscious element here in relation to Greene's actual view of England; a fashionable London club with the Devil dressed in such an English fashion. What is clear is that there is a significant overlap between Greene and Fowler and both represent the inherent contradictions in the English character.

¹⁸⁶ Graham Greene. "A Few Pipes", 24.

6: Irresolvability & Colonial Legacy

We have to see that the spirit of the South Atlantic – the real spirit of Britain – is kindled not only by war but can now be fired by peace. We have the first prerequisite. We know we can do it – we haven't lost the ability. That is the Falklands Factor.

Margaret Thatcher, Speech in Cheltenham, 1982

English Character and the Irresolvability of the Contradictions:

The contradictions inherent in the English character and exercised in the Empire are clear, I submit, and it is my belief that they cannot be resolved whilst the existing paradigm of English character remains in place. Homi Bhabha talks about the English being “the father and the oppressor; just and unjust; moderate and rapacious; vigorous and despotic [and] these instances of contradictory belief . . . raise questions about the symbolic space of colonial authority.”¹⁸⁷ These contradictions are clear in the literature being studied, but it is vital to link them back to the English character as it is in the domestic space of the metropole. I have dealt with the class system already, but this is a keystone to the issue of irresolvability and lives on today in a form of colonial legacy. Stephen Ingle writes that “the determining element of the imperialist model was that it was quite impossible for the exploited ever fully to join the exploiters, whatever their achievements.”¹⁸⁸ Much the same, then, as the English class system back home.

Patai mentions “Orwell’s ambivalent characterization of Flory, who is unable to break with the class he attacks.”¹⁸⁹ And this is exactly the class fracture

¹⁸⁷ Homi K. Bhabha. “Sly Civility”, 75.

¹⁸⁸ Stephen Ingle. *The Social and Political Thought of George Orwell*, 39.

¹⁸⁹ Daphne Patai. *The Orwell Mystique*, 29.

that Orwell is unable to make; the innate class hold is far too strong. *Burmese Days* does not provide any resolution to the imperial contradictions in the English character, if, indeed, they can be can actually be found anywhere. Meyers says, “Flory’s suicide is a way of concluding the novel, but it is an essentially weak device that resolves neither the themes of the book nor the problems inherent in the colonial experience.”¹⁹⁰ I would not agree with its being a ‘weak device’, rather I think it is incredibly powerful, albeit tragic in the extreme. I would, however, agree that it does not provide any satisfactory resolution, but this may well be outside the realms of possibility anyway. Nowhere else in Orwell’s canon of work can be found a satisfactory resolution to the contradictions either. Orwell spent the last two years of his life on a remote Scottish island, Jura. Whilst this self-imposed exile did result in some great literary output, including *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, given his tuberculosis it also probably killed him. And, to his last, he exhibited contradiction; having so roundly lambasted the public school system, he put his son down for Eton; thus the cycle of class contradiction was to be continued.¹⁹¹

Hooper says that Maugham seems to ask if “it is possible to overcome one’s social, national and . . . racial inheritances, even when the ties of loyalty and persuasion might appear to be very obviously absent; or whether it really is an impossible task: whether the inhibitions of ‘place’ are forever there.”¹⁹² This, I suggest, is an accurate summation of the problem facing the English in the imperial setting, one which they deal with by their ambivalence and

¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey Meyers. *A Reader’s Guide to George Orwell*, 71.

¹⁹¹ Orwell’s son, Richard, who reached public school age after his father’s death, did not end up actually going to Eton.

¹⁹² Glenn Hooper. “Trading Places”, 75.

hypocrisy. As with Flory, Maugham's protagonists also display the impossibilities of resolution. In *The Painted Veil* there are only two protagonists for whom it is possible to find a degree of empathy; Walter Fane dies of cholera attempting to do genuine good for the native population, whilst Waddington, in order to find happiness, ends up in self-imposed exile for life. The English characters who display loyalty to the pukka sahib code continue in their Anglocentric lives, as they do in *Burmese Days*. The situation as represented in Maugham's short stories is not improved, as the fate of characters such as Lawson and Cooper illustrates. The writer himself left England and resided in France thereafter, but it is notable that he requested his ashes be buried at King's School in Canterbury, England, the school he had attended and hated so much.

Greene's contradictions are clearly unresolved as well. His protagonist, Fowler, addresses the contradictions, like Waddington, by becoming a self-imposed exile, apart from other Englishmen, yet happy with his native mistress. Certainly this is a much happier ending, in human terms, than that of Flory. Perhaps Greene is suggesting that the only answer to the contradiction is to step outside the construct of English masculinity, permanently; the path which Fowler chooses, as does Waddington. Yet Greene, too, had his contradictions and ambivalence about the colonial enterprise. Christie says that Greene's writings show:

His sympathy for, and his attempt to evoke the atmosphere of the dying days of French Indochina . . . The street life of French Saigon, the cafes, the vingt-et-un and the vermouth cassis, all seemed to have appealed to Greene in the same way that they had to Somerset Maugham in an earlier age.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Clive Christie. *British Literary Travellers*, 722.

Upon close reading of *The Quiet American*, as well as Greene's journalistic pieces from Indo-China, one can see they are imbued with a degree of nostalgia. The fond memories aside, Greene, too, voted with his feet and left England permanently for France, and then Switzerland for the last years of his life.

Nostalgia and the Future:

Whilst the British Empire no longer exists, England still does and the English people still have national characteristics. My thesis has been that the imperial English character is laden with inherent contradictions and these have been irresolvable. Whilst the literary works studied are now historical pieces, the issue of the imperial English character cannot be archived; I submit that the imperial traits exist to this day and still have an impact for many people around the globe. Thus the issue of unresolved contradictions is still highly relevant.

The legacy of Empire is a significant sociological phenomenon, both for the English and for their former colonial subjects. From an English perspective the Empire was 'lost', so the legacy for them is having to accept and adjust to their new status in the world. Jeffrey McIntire-Strasburg says that "despite the decolonization of much of the Orient, the ideological structures that allowed for colonization still exist within Western language and thought."¹⁹⁴ This is a crucial point as the adjustment for the English, as with any former colonial nation, is going to hinge on their thought processes: the English character therefore has to evolve from its imperial mindset. I maintain that, as a feature of ambivalence, Orwell, Greene and Maugham each displayed

¹⁹⁴ Jeffrey O. McIntire-Strasburg. "India Changed Him", 95.

aspects of their character which took the paternalistic view of Empire, that the natives benefited from English imperialism. Said issues a reminder that “there are British intellectuals . . . who believe that giving up the Empire . . . was bad for Britain and bad for ‘the natives’ who have declined in all sorts of ways since their abandonment by the white man.”¹⁹⁵ As long as this fantasy of paternalistic benevolence persists, the Western world will continue to treat former colonial countries as second-class citizens; imperialism has simply evolved into nationalistic racism. Rushdie discusses contemporary British racism at length and sums up the situation thus:

Four hundred years of conquest and looting, four centuries of being told you are superior to the Fuzzy-Wuzzies and the wogs, leave their stain. This stain has seeped into every part of the culture, the language and daily life; and nothing much has been done to wash it out.¹⁹⁶

What Rushdie identifies is the incredibly powerful and lingering legacy of the Empire and the monumental effort needed by the English to overcome it. It would seem that sufficient effort has yet to be seen. For the former colonized peoples the legacy is equally as problematic, albeit in different manifestations. S. P. Mohanty, writing about the legacy of Indian colonization, asserts that “the imperial history that we inherit . . . has determined the ways in which group identities, even to the present day, are perceived and recreated in the context of an unequal division of material resources, and questions of meanings and values.”¹⁹⁷ The problem that he is pointing out is that being colonized for many decades means that the behaviour of the colonizer results in an internalization, for the natives, of the sense of inferiority, and the continued embedding of the hierarchies of power. So for both sides of the

¹⁹⁵ Edward W. Said. “*Kim*, The Pleasures of Imperialism”, 31.

¹⁹⁶ Salman Rushdie. “The New Empire within Britain”, 130.

¹⁹⁷ S. P. Mohanty. “Kipling’s children and the colour line”, 21.

imperial equation, there are crucial problems to be faced in the present and into the future.

A significant and powerful hindrance to the imperial English character changing is that of nostalgia. I suggest that the nostalgia for Empire and colonial things, often termed 'raj revival'¹⁹⁸, shows that a fondness for the imperial English character is still alive and well. Whilst nostalgia may be viewed by some as benign daydreaming about the past, and in many human contexts this is indeed valid, when it comes to imperialism it is a toxic thought-process that prevents social advance. Renato Rosaldo says that "a mood of nostalgia makes racial domination appear innocent and pure."¹⁹⁹ This is a crucial observation, because nostalgia by definition is about remembering the past through rose-coloured glasses, so all the offensive aspects of imperialism are sanitized from the contemporary mindset, the blatant racism of the Empire being chief amongst them. William Bissell says that nostalgia "does not flower in just any soil . . . the present must be compared to other moments and marked as a moment of decline – as in the fall of empires, for example, or national eclipse, or a loss of power and position by a particular social group."²⁰⁰ I submit the English, especially the upper and middle classes, have had to face such factors of loss of power, so it is no wonder nostalgia looms large in the national psyche and that it is a major element in the perpetuation of the English character.

¹⁹⁸ Nupur Chaudhuri & Margaret Strobel. *Western Women and Imperialism*, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Renato Rosaldo. "Imperialist Nostalgia", 107.

²⁰⁰ William Cunningham Bissell. "Engaging Colonial Nostalgia", 221.

I fully concur with Said when he asserts that the bearing of the past “upon cultural attitudes in the present”²⁰¹ is actually more important than the history. The decades since the end of the Empire have provided fresh evidence at regular intervals that the imperial English character is still a dominant paradigm for Britain. Externally, the Falklands War in 1982 and the military involvement in the Middle East over the last two decades illustrate the ongoing will to exercise imperial power, to show the world that the former glory has not faded. Domestically, there was a great reluctance to allow former colonial subjects to come to live in England. This reluctance was most famously and virulently espoused in Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968, and has constantly been followed by serious racial violence, showing that the racism inherent to the imperial character has not significantly, if at all, mellowed. The English class system with all its inequities is still an ingrained feature of British society, a form of “domestic colonialism”²⁰², and, most tellingly, the public school system underpinning this imperial English character is thriving. Peter Middleton writing in 1998 says of the public school system:

These schools and their traditions still retain enormous ideological influence over the understanding and recognition of gender and class . . . [they] still shape character and expectation differently from other sectors of secondary education, so that the entire educational system, and British society, remain deeply fractured by the exclusive schooling purchased by the upper and middle classes.²⁰³

I submit that as long as the English class and public school systems remain immutable, the contradictions inherent to the English character, exposed in the imperial attitude but equally at play domestically, will persist. Given the

²⁰¹ Edward W. Said. *Culture & Imperialism*, 18.

²⁰² Christopher Lane. *The Ruling Passion*, 233.

²⁰³ Peter Middleton. “The Recognition of British Public-School Masculinities”, 239.

human impact of the manifestation of this imperial English character – socially, racially and militarily – the issue remains as relevant as ever.

7: Conclusion

There is in all nationally defined cultures, I believe, an aspiration to sovereignty, to sway, and to dominance.

Edward W. Said, *Culture & Imperialism*

For it is not true that there are some good colonists and others who are wicked. There are colonists and that is it.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*

I have endeavoured to provide a brief review of the colonial literature of Orwell, Greene and Maugham and thereby examine the imperial English character and its inherent contradictions as represented by the three authors. The British Empire was, in global social terms, an incredible and lastingly influential historical occurrence. It spawned a whole genre of English literature and became a defining characteristic of the English as a people. The English class system and the public schools which underpin it are, as I have argued in detail, the bedrock of this imperial English character.

Notwithstanding the noble and humanitarian motivations of some in the British Empire, the overwhelming imperial urge was the exercise of power over weaker peoples in order to benefit the English, both materially and psychologically: commerce thrived and racial superiority was affirmed. Racism and brutality were at the forefront of the imperial English character, whilst exploitation, particularly sexual, was rampant, although true to the inherent hypocrisy, miscegenation, whilst frequent, was a taboo.

Orwell, Greene and Maugham provide some fascinating and varied portrayals of the colonial experience of the Orient. Apart from the internal conflicts and ambivalence represented by their main protagonists, all three authors display a number of inherent contradictions themselves. I have highlighted some pertinent examples for all three, especially to illustrate the link between them as writers and their fictional characters.

As a consequence, I submit that the contradictions so evident in the imperial experience are actually irresolvable, and hence the three authors, both within their own lives and within their narratives, are unable to satisfy the natural human desire for resolution. At the end of the day, it is exactly as penned by D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke; “a British critic has to face the problem of liberating himself from the imperial culture to which he belongs.”²⁰⁴ However, ‘problem’ aside, this proposition is not to be regarded as of merely historical literary interest. I have endeavoured to show that there is a significant legacy of the British Empire, not only for the former colonial subjects but, importantly, for the English themselves. The Empire has gone, but all the facets of English society that gave rise to the imperial English character remain firmly in place; the class system, the public schools, and the associated superiority and racism. And colonial nostalgia is a potent force which supports this paradigm. Accordingly, the issues raised in this paper are not simply historical anecdotes. Rather, they are contemporary issues of serious relevance to the conduct of human affairs in the modern world. As Said says, “the meaning of the imperial past . . . has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of

²⁰⁴ D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke. *Images of the Raj*, 3

culture, ideology, and policy still exercises tremendous force.”²⁰⁵ The Western concept of the ‘Other’ is still as potent, and toxic, as it was in the days of Empire: one only need take a look at the West’s approach to Islam in the last two decades as a perfect example. Fanon says that “racism is a plague of humanity. But we must not content ourselves with such a phrase. We must tirelessly look for the repercussions of racism at all levels of sociability.”²⁰⁶ In this quote lies the heart of this paper: whilst the British Empire is gone, within the English psyche the imperialist urge and its attendant racism are alive and well, and these vile sentiments have to be eliminated for the benefit of people across the globe.

²⁰⁵ Edward W. Said. *Culture & Imperialism*, 11.

²⁰⁶ Frantz Fanon. “Racism and Culture”, 36.

8: Glossary

The colonial works studied in this paper contain a range of vocabulary particular to their contexts, as well as a number of words taken from local language, dialect and usage in the colonies. This glossary aims to provide a reference point for the colonial terminology which would be unlikely to be familiar to the modern Western reader.

Despite best research efforts, three words remain without confirmed definition, and one word remains unclear. These four words have therefore had their meaning inferred from the context in which they are used by the authors.²⁰⁷

It should also be noted that many spelling variants exist in the colonial lexicon, so these are indicated wherever they have been found. In some instances, the spelling version appearing in the primary texts is not the leading version found in the sources consulted.

The numbers in brackets after each definition (e.g. [1]) refer to the source of the definition. The sources are cited at the end of the glossary list.

| <u>Word/Phrase:</u> | <u>Meaning:</u> |
|----------------------------|---|
| amah: | a nurse or maidservant, esp. one of Chinese origin. [1] |
| Annamite: | a person from Annam, a province of Vietnam. [1] |
| attap: | palm fronds used for thatching; a thatch made from these. [3] |
| ayah: | a maidservant, nursemaid, or governess, esp. one of Indian or Malay origin. [1] |
| badmash: | a rascal, hooligan. [2] & [3] |
| bahinchut: | younger sister-fucker. [2] |
| baju: | a short loose jacket worn in Malaysia and Indonesia. [3] |
| ba le-de?: | what is it? [2] |
| bat: | talk; the colloquial language of a foreign country. [2]; [3] |
| beano: | (British slang) a celebration, party, or other enjoyable time. [1] |
| betel: | an Asian climbing plant, of which the leaves and nuts are chewed. [1] |

²⁰⁷ The four words are: 'gonyin', 'stengah-shifter', 'suku', and 'talab'.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| blimp: | a person, esp. a military officer, who is stupidly complacent and reactionary. [1] |
| bo-kadaw: | a white man's wife. [2] |
| brinjal: | an eggplant/aubergine. [3] (see also prinjal) |
| burra sahib: | a high-ranking sahib . [3] |
| calcaire: | (French) limestone. [10] |
| canna: | (also canna lily) a tropical flower. [3] |
| Caodaism: | a syncretistic religion of South East Asia. [3] |
| capon: | a fowl fattened for eating. [1] |
| chalo: | go on; be quick. [2] |
| chaprassi: | a messenger; an attendant. [2]; [3] |
| charpoy: | (or charpai) a bedstead of woven webbing or hemp stretched on a wooden frame on four legs, common in India. [1] |
| chetty: | a trader. [2] & [3] |
| chik-chak: | (or chichak) a house-lizard or gecko. [9] |
| chokra: | a boy or youngster, esp. one employed as a servant. [4] |
| coolie: | (or cooly) a cheaply hired unskilled Oriental labourer. [1] |
| dacoit: | a member of a gang of armed robbers. [1] |
| dah: | a machete, long knife. [2] |
| dak bungalow: | a rest house for travellers. [2] & [3] |
| dhoti: | (or dhooti , dhuti) a long loincloth worn by men in India. [1] |
| dirzi: | a tailor. [2] |
| dudh-wallah: | a milk-seller. [5] |
| durwan: | a doorkeeper. [2] |
| Dyak: | (or Dayak) a member of a Malaysian people of the interior of Borneo. [1] |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| gaung-baung: | a man's hat. [2] |
| gharry: | (or gharri) a horse-drawn vehicle available for hire. [1] |
| ghat: | stairs or a passage leading down to a river; a place of cremation. [1] |
| gonyin²⁰⁸: | No definition found. It is clear from its usage that it refers to a plant of some sort. |
| havildar: | a non-commissioned officer in the Indian army, equivalent in rank to sergeant. [1] |
| hey haung galay: | hey kid. [2] |
| hukm ne aya: | I have had no orders. [2] |
| idher ao: | come here. [2] |
| ingyi: | a woman's blouse. [2] |
| jaldi: | quick, hurry. [2] |
| kampong: | a village (in Malaysia). [1] |
| kris: | a Malaysian and Indonesian stabbing or slashing knife with a scalloped edge. [1] |
| lakh: | (or lac) the number 100,000, esp. when referring to this sum of rupees. [1] |
| lalang: | a coarse weedy Malaysian grass. [1] |
| lascar: | a sailor from the East Indies. [1] |
| lathi: | a long heavy wooden stick used as a weapon in India, esp. by the police. [1] |
| longyi: | a sarong . [2] |
| machan: | a raised platform used in tiger hunting. [1] |
| mahout: | an elephant driver or keeper. [1] |
| mahseer: | a river fish. [2] & [3] |
| maidan: | an open space used for meetings, sport, etc. [1] |
| Malacca: | a town in Malaysia; also used to describe an item coming from this town or area, e.g. Malacca cane. [3] |

²⁰⁸ This word is used by Orwell in *Burmese Days*.

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| ma lay: | young woman. [2] |
| mali: | a gardener. [2] |
| mamootie: | a spade. [2] |
| mem: | an abbreviation for memsahib . [3] |
| memsahib: | a term of respect used of a European married woman. [1] |
| métisse: | a person of mixed parentage. [1] |
| min gyi: | a minister. [2] |
| mohur: | a former Indian gold coin worth 15 rupees. [1] |
| must: | (or musth) a state of frenzied sexual excitement in the males of certain large mammals, esp. elephants. [1] |
| myaype: | peanuts. [2] |
| nipah: | (or nipa) a type of palm tree. [1] |
| padang: | a playing field. [1] |
| pagri: | a turban. [2] |
| pahit: | (from gin pahit) a drink of gin and bitters. [3] |
| parang: | a short stout straight-edged knife used by the Dyaks of Borneo. [1] |
| paso: | a skirt. [2] |
| peepul: | (or pipal) an Indian moraceous tree, regarded as sacred by Buddhists. [1] |
| pice: | a former Indian coin worth one sixty-fourth of a rupee. [1] |
| pike-san, pay-like: | give me the money. [2] |
| pongee: | a thin plain-weave silk fabric from China or India, left in its natural colour. [1] |
| prahu: | (or proa) a Malay boat capable of sailing with either end first. [3] |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| prinjal ²⁰⁹ : | See brinjal . This version is an incorrect spelling. |
| pukka : | (or pucka) properly or perfectly done, constructed, etc. [1] |
| pukka sahib : | genuine; proper master. [1]; [2] |
| punkah : | (or punka) a fan made of a palm leaf or leaves. [1] |
| pwe : | an all-night festival of acting, dancing and singing. [2] |
| Quatre Vingt-et-un : | (or 421 ; or quatre-cent vingt-et-un) a French game played with 3 dice; a dice game in casinos. [8]; [10] |
| rattan : | (or ratan) any of several types of climbing plants having tough stems used for wickerwork and canes; a stick made from one of these stems. [1] |
| rysttafel : | (or rijsttafel) the Dutch colonial feast, literally 'rice table', adapted from the Indonesian feast <i>nasi padang</i> . [6] |
| sahib : | (or saheb) a form of address or title placed after a man's name or designation, used as a mark of respect. [1] |
| sahibdom : | (or sahibhood) the quality or condition of being a sahib . [3] |
| sahiblog : | white people, collectively. [2] & [3] |
| salaam : | an Oriental salutation; the act of giving such a salutation. [4] |
| sambhur : | (or sambur) a large deer native to SE Asia. [4] |
| sampan : | a small boat, usually with a stern-oar. [3] |
| sanyasin : | (or sannyasi) a wandering Hindu fakir. [3] |
| sarong : | a draped skirtlike garment worn by men and women in the Malay Archipelago, Sri Lanka, the Pacific Islands. [1] |
| saya gyi : | master. [2] |
| seis : | see syce . [4] |
| sepoy : | an Indian soldier in the service of the British. [1] |

²⁰⁹ In the Penguin edition of *Burmese Days*, 'prinjal' appears, whereas earlier editions show 'brinjal'. This is clearly a typographical error in the Penguin edition

| | |
|---|---|
| shabash: | well done; bravo. [2] & [3] |
| shiko: | (or shikho) the posture of prostration traditionally adopted by the Burmese in the presence of a superior; the act of effecting this posture. [3] |
| shok de: | untrustworthy. [2] |
| songkok: | a kind of skullcap worn by Malay men. [3] |
| stengah: | (or stinger) a whiskey and soda with crushed ice. [1] |
| stengah-shifter ²¹⁰ : | No definition found. It is clear from its usage that it refers to some form of jacket worn by men. |
| suku ²¹¹ : | (In Malay) a quarter. [9] This is unclear, however, as the word is used in the context of drinking. Perhaps it is terminology for a measure of liquor. |
| syce: | (or seis, sais) a servant who attends horses. [4] |
| talab ²¹² : | No definition found. From its usage it seems to mean a payment or allowance of some sort. |
| terai: | a felt hat with a wide brim worn in subtropical regions. [1] |
| thakin: | lord or master. [2] |
| thanaka: | a yellowish-white cosmetic made from the bark of the thanaka tree (in Burma). [6] |
| thathanabaing: | a Buddhist bishop; the chief Buddhist dignitary. [2]; [3] |
| thugyi-min: | (or thugyi) a village headsman. [2] & [3] |
| tiffin: | a light meal, esp. one taken at midday. [1] |
| topi: | (or topee) another name for a pith helmet. [1] |
| tuan: | a form of address used as a mark of respect. [1] |
| tuktoo: | a gecko lizard. [2] |
| vermouth cassis: | a cocktail made with dry vermouth, crème de cassis and soda water – of French origin. [7] |

²¹⁰ This word is used by Maugham in “The Vessel of Wrath”. In another reprint edition the word appears without the hyphen.

²¹¹ This word is used by Maugham in “Footprints in the Jungle”.

²¹² This word is used by Orwell in *Burmese Days*.

wallah: (or **walla**) a person involved with or in charge of a specified thing or task. [1] & [3] Usually in combination, e.g. 'book-wallah', 'punkah-wallah', etc.

weiksa: a magician. [2]

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