

George Orwell and the Threshold of Poverty

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Abstract in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven tar for seg George Orwell's fremstilling av fattigdom på 1930-tallet I bøkene *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, samt essayene 'How the Poor Die' og 'Common Lodging Houses'. Målet er å se tekstene i lys av ideen om *grensen*, tatt fra Giorgio Agamben og hans bok *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, hvor han tar utgangspunkt i en gammel romerisk figur kalt *homo sacer*; en kriminell som ble erklært lovløs og da kunne bli drept av hvem som helst uten at drapsmannen ble straffet, men som noe paradoksalt *ikke* kunne bli ofret i en religiøs kontekst. Denne figuren var altså både ekskludert og inkludert i loven på en og samme tid, og var på en grense mellom et menneske og et dyr. Denne figuren er sentral i oppgaven for å utforske kompleksitetene i Orwell's versjon av fattigdom, og hvordan de fattige finner seg på en uklar grense mellom det menneskelige og det dyriske, mellom borger og lovløs, og mellom en aktiv deltager i samfunnet og en parasitt-aktiv tilværelse. Det vil også bli sett på hvordan fattigdom i seg selv danner en unntakstilstand, også inspirert av Agamben, hvor de som finner seg i denne tilstanden blir sett på som unntak fra normene og reglene, og eventuelle behandlinger av dem som strider med det normale kan dermed bli legitimert. Andre teorister som Walter Benjamin er også sentrale, for å skape en bedre forståelse av 30-tallets økonomi og dens mentalitet, da sistnevnte er viktig for forstå de fattiges eksklusjon fra samfunnet.

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Introduction

In the essay *Why I Write* (1946) George Orwell reflects that everything he has written since 1936 has in one way or another been *against* totalitarianism and *for* social democracy (Elephant, 7). Thus, much of his work is in one way or another political, and Orwell is indeed known for being a political writer with a perceptive insight into modern totalitarianism, not least as a consequence of his success with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Thus it is not surprising that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term 'Orwellian' as: 'Characteristic or suggestive of the writings of George Orwell, esp. of the totalitarian state depicted in his dystopian account of the future, *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949)'. One of his perhaps lesser known political topics, however, is *poverty*. This was a state Orwell himself experienced as a *plongeur* in Paris, and in his life among the tramps around London, which is perhaps why he decided to give the poor a voice through his writing, preeminently in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936).

By describing the horrific, dehumanizing conditions of poverty, Orwell's texts seek to illustrate what it indeed is like to be poor. His characters, such as Gordon in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and Dorothy in *A Clergyman's Daughter* witness and feel the unfairness, the helplessness, the desperation and the despair that come with poverty. It is not merely the lack of money; it is about having your physical and mental needs neglected, and having no rights, being an outcast of society and an unwanted burden to the state. In short, Orwell's poor end up as less than human. Living on the threshold of humanity in the sense that they are subject to the law of the state which they inhabit, while deprived of the rights of ordinary citizens functioning within the economy of production and consumption, their existence is

closer to the animalistic, focused on staying alive. Excluded from the social sphere, they are described by Orwell himself as caring and hard working individuals, but at the same time emerge from the texts as a separate race, as insects, beasts and demons. This is what this thesis intends to explore; the complexities, contradictions, and threshold existences of poverty conveyed in the novels *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) and *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), the memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and the essays 'How the Poor Die' (1946) and 'Common Lodging Houses' (1932).

Far from rejecting the dominant critical focus on *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-four*, I would still insist that there is more to Orwell than a spokesman against totalitarianism. Orwell criticism over the past decades seems to be divided on the question of the lasting value and contribution of the various parts of Orwell's writing, and Gordon B. Beadle writes in his essay '*George Orwell's Literary Studies of Poverty in England*' that 'The dehumanizing effects of poverty and the multiple consequences of economic injustice are the primary or secondary themes of nearly all of [Orwell's] books and occupy a sizeable portion of the substance of his political journalism' (Beadle 1978, 188). At the same time, two of Orwell's novels dealing with economic deprivation in England, namely *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, are written off as his 'most mediocre works of fiction' (Beadle 1978, 188), a view which might account for the lack of attention these works have received. Furthermore, as pointed out in Lorraine Saunders' *Unsung Artistry of George Orwell* (2003), some critics, such as Geoffrey Wheatcroft, claim that Orwell's writings are merely 'projections of his own self-pity', while his 'posthumous reputation is close to being literary fraud' (Wheatcroft 2003, 10-11). From an opposite perspective, John Carey argues that Orwell wrote the most 'vibrant, surprising prose of the twentieth century' and that the secret of Orwell's style lies in its 'invisibility' (Carey 2003, 35-36), an argument that Ricardo

Quintana accepts, when he argues in his essay ‘George Orwell: The Satiric Resolution’, that while Orwell’s writing is not distinguished, it still has some depth and multivalence. In his view there are ‘more intentions here [in *A Clergyman’s Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*], the process of writing has proceeded along more lines of interest, than simple autobiography could offer’ (Quintana 1961, 32). The present thesis too examines the impression of multivalence and depth created by Orwell’s writing; suggesting that Orwell’s depiction of poverty display a complex and dark reality, with poverty rooted in a variety of factors. Whereas critics such as Lorraine Saunders is concerned with the use of free discourse in Orwell’s texts and how the voice in the narrative floats between the narrator and the characters, and other critics such as Craig L. Carr, in *Orwell, Politics and Power* is concerned with how Orwell’s experiences with poverty shaped him as a socialist, this thesis seeks to expand on Orwell’s depiction of poverty and how it illuminates shades of gray; that being poor is not the same as being an animal, and yet it is. They are human beings in a tragic situation; a situation which is created by a range of factors, from the government and fellow citizens, to the very laws of nature.

Orwell was aware that the authorities, as well as ‘liberal’ and ‘humane’ people, tolerated the horrible living conditions of poverty because of an impression the poor as repulsive, abject and less than human (Beadle 1978, 191). Thus, he paints a picture of poverty that is complex and ambivalent, with ordinary human beings stuck in animalistic existences and neglected by society. He also explores the notion that poverty could function as a positive force in terms of personal growth and social change. Orwell’s first published book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* gives a perceptive insight into the conditions of the poor and the challenges they face, while *A Clergyman’s Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* feature main characters who belong to the downwardly mobile lower-middle class. The lower-middle class may be

understood as a liminal state in itself, a kind of genteel poverty. As Orwell portrays the lower middle class, it is driven by the fear of shame, agonized by the struggle to maintain appearances on a low income, as exemplified through Dorothy and her distress from being unable to pay the debts she and her father owe, or by how Gordon Comstock turns the collar on his shirt inside out in order to hide the torn places. As Rita Felski argues in her essay ‘*Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class*’, this permanent anxiety about money and keeping up appearances illuminates a mentality which is ‘the ultimate example of psychic self-regulation, of a class that has built the bars of its prison’ (Felski 2000, 36). This notion of the jailer paradoxically being its own potential liberator conjures a liminal state in which it is hard to separate the two. I will argue that in both of Orwell’s novels, poverty is illustrated as a necessary evil which leads out of this prison and the threshold state of the lower middle class, and, in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, as a liberation from one’s own consciousness. Moreover, by being placed with one foot in the world of the consumer and the other in the world of poverty, the characters become familiar. The reader can more easily imagine him or herself in the shoes of the character, and the story makes a greater emotional impact.

As Orwell was a political figure, and poverty is a political topic, the political point of view he writes from needs to be made clear in order to appreciate the objectives of his writing.

Orwell’s fourth book on poverty, specifically the working conditions of the miners in Northern England, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), is one of his more explicitly political works¹. In the second part of the book, Orwell states that the journey he took through the poverty-ridden slums of Northern England in order to write the book made him a socialist, as

¹*Wigan Pier* is not included in this thesis as it is concerned more with labour conditions than poverty itself, and thus has limited relevance in addition to being more political.

the present conditions were simply intolerable (*Wigan Pier*, 113). Furthermore, he argues that a socialist government is what is needed for the situation to improve, and explicitly states that he is arguing *for* socialism (*Wigan Pier*, 160). The book itself was written for the left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz, and was later included in his Left Book Club series (*Wigan Pier*, v). However, in the very same book Orwell asserts that ‘economic injustice will stop the moment we want it to stop, and no sooner, and if we genuinely want it to stop the method adapted hardly matters’ (*Wigan Pier*, 128-29). In this sense, Orwell embraced socialism as an ideal rather than a doctrine, as Craig L. Carr explains in *Orwell, Politics and Power*, and much of his ‘literary venom’ was aimed at the socialists who moved away from the simple ideal in the heart of socialism and rather in the direction of orthodoxy (Carr 2010, 38). Orwell’s view on the proletariat and its potential is also slightly unclear. According to Carr, he did for some time believe, with something of a Marxist optimism, that the poor would recognize their plight. Recognition leads to enlightenment, and ‘all enlightenment leads naturally to political empowerment’ (Carr 2010, 41). However, as Carr also points out, one should not fail to consider the powerlessness and the incapability of political consciousness of many of Orwell’s poor characters, such as the tramps: ‘...mostly, they are the most pathetic and most crippled element of the poor that Orwell tells us about. Orwell’s tramps are mere shells of what were once human beings’ (Carr 2010, 41). There are also characters such as Dorothy, who while working as a hop-picker has no political power, even challenging the idea of the empowered labourer. All in all, the texts this thesis will focus on are not substantially concerned with the potential power of the poor, and thus are not political in that sense.

While some of the texts studied in this thesis might appear to be critical of capitalism, it is important to note that once more the target of critique is really the people behind the money, as much as the system itself. This is illustrated by Dorothy’s job as a teacher at a private

school in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, where the parents who pay for the tuition are the ones who decide what is taught at the school, as it is the tuition fees that matters the most to the head mistress and she will make sure the children are taught what the parents want them to be taught. In 'How the Poor Die', the treatment of the poor is horrible because the staff gives them horrible treatment, one can hardly be critical of the fact that they are given free medical attention by itself. While this certainly underlines that a system motivated by profit has its flaws, it is not the root of the issue. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Gordon is indeed attempting to protest modern capitalism with his poverty, but the problem seems to be more with the system taken to its extremes - its inhumane, profit-driven mentality - rather than the system per se.

Despite his belief in socialism, I would argue, Orwell's criticism of society is above all a moral form of criticism: his target is really human nature and his objective to advocate a Dickensian 'change of heart', as Beadle also proposes (Beadle 1978, 193). It is this moralist Orwell the thesis is concerned with, especially the method used to bring about a change of heart in the reader; *how* poverty is presented as a painful, liminal state of existence. This thesis intends to do this through analysing the situations of the poor characters and their environment in light of theories such as Agamben's notion of the *homo sacer* and the threshold, which will help us view poverty in relation to power, and the divided state of being at once excluded and included as a citizen.

Theories and chapter topics

Agamben's theory of the *homo sacer* requires further clarification, especially as the notion of the threshold is vital to the thesis throughout. The *homo sacer* (sacred man) is an old Roman

figure that presents a challenge to the nature of law and power. Under the Roman Empire, someone who committed a certain kind of crime would be deemed lawless, have his rights as a citizen revoked and be thrown out of society, becoming the *homo sacer*. Consequently, the *homo sacer* could be killed by anyone without the killer being subject to punishment. As the criminal was now deemed sacred, however, he could not be sacrificed in a religious ceremony.

Thus he was also paradoxically subject to laws and thus to the rule of the state, both excluded and included. With the term 'sovereign power', Agamben refers to a state which acts *without* consideration to the law it has itself created, and thus is a sort of ultimate authoritative power; above the law. Furthermore, as the *homo sacer* exemplifies, the state may decide over life and death, which illustrates a sovereign and unchallenged power over its citizens. As an example, Agamben uses present day USA and its infamous treatment of terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay. For a modern nation to strip a person of rights in this manner, Agamben argues, it requires a 'state of exception'; an event out of the ordinary to legitimize the treatment, for example the US hiding behind the threat of terrorism to legitimize the use of Guantanamo Bay.

In terms of applying the notion of the state of exception to Orwell's works, the financial crisis of the 1930s, the decade when Orwell wrote on poverty, immediately springs to mind as a time when the situation of the poor would be even more precarious and exposed than usual. Yet the crisis is never brought up as an important topic or a direct reason for poverty in any of the works this thesis includes, and nothing suggests that the poor were worse off in this specific decade. However, perhaps poverty itself, regardless of its historical context, qualifies as an exceptional state of existence, in which the poor are placed outside the system of the

law. It must be recognized that poverty is not directly forced on Orwell's characters by the state, as is the lawlessness of the *homo sacer*, nor do Orwell's characters require the intervention of the state to escape poverty, as the *homo sacer* requires the state to give him back his rights as a citizen. Nevertheless, the most devastating cases of poverty could have been *prevented* by the state through intervention and financial aid, and so it is legitimate to hold the state somewhat responsible and consider it an agent of power in this context. Furthermore, the poverty-stricken characters in Orwell's narratives tend to receive different treatment from the state than those who are better off, implying an inequality in rights due to poverty and class background. Orwell also claims towards the end of *Down and Out in Paris and London* that a tramp is an Englishman out of work, '*forced by law to live as a vagabond*' (emphasis added) (*Down and Out*, 218).

Agamben's theory will be further introduced and discussed in the first chapter of the thesis, where I will explore the thresholds of poverty in relation to power, as well as the state of exception. For this topic, I will look at the prison-like descriptions of lodging houses for the poor in the essay '*Common Lodging Houses*', the dehumanizing treatment of the poor in hospitals, depicted in the essay '*How the Poor Die*', and lastly Dorothy Hare's journey through poverty in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. The latter will also be discussed in relation to other authoritative powers than the state, such as labour power and the power of the mind, as Dorothy's amnesia and her consequent experiences with poverty alter her perception of reality. All of the narratives give examples of a liminal state between citizen and lawless, worthy and unworthy; an animalistic and a human existence. All the while the state is involved, be it through intervention or by lack of intervention. It is these contradictory states

of citizen and outlaw, animal and human, the first chapter intends to illuminate.

The second chapter also deals with the thresholds of poverty, but not so much with the power of the state. Rather, it explores the experience of being poor while still being part of a capitalist society, its social sphere, and its sexual logic. Firstly, the chapter will discuss the situation of the poet Gordon Comstock of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and his choice of descending into poverty rather than being part of a super-capitalist advertising company. Torn between the social sphere of consumer culture and his own poverty, as well as living in a world where even the fluttering leaves in the wind sound like the jingle of an American cereal, Gordon Comstock struggles to maintain his mental health, his social network, as well as his own convictions regarding the path he has chosen. This novel will be viewed in the light of some thoughts by Walter Benjamin on the capitalism of the 1930s as a 'poverty of experience', which he argues is a positive force; inhumane and profit-driven, it is also a chance to start over without honoring the past. Gordon Comstock's refusal to join this new capitalism is also tied to a nostalgia for the past, and thus he struggles to adapt to the advantages of the decade promoted by Benjamin. The goal of his poverty-project is unclear, and his feelings regarding capitalism ambivalent and contradictory, as he appears to be unconsciously embracing the very culture and social norms he claims to protest. From the ever influential *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith's notion of the beggar as a social parasite who only takes and does not give, violating the norms of the Keynesian economics of the decade, will also be evoked to shed light on Gordon Comstock's fear of patronage, as well as his fear of leaving behind the social sphere of the lower-middle class. Adam Smith's notion of the parasite will also be relevant to the second part of the chapter, as the poverty described in *Down and Out in Paris and London* features tramps who are seemingly left with no choice but to lead parasitic lives but nonetheless held responsible for being parasites. The poverty

pictured in the narrative will also be discussed in relation to sexuality, as the tramps in the narrative are unable to obtain sexual relations with women. Turning to homosexuality and rape to fulfill their desires, they find themselves on a sexual border, not participating in the 'normal' sexual sphere, yet not living in celibacy.

Chapter 1 - The sovereign and the poor

First the doctor produced from his black bag a dozen small glasses like wine glasses, then the student burned a match inside each glass to exhaust the air, then the glass was popped on to the man's back or chest and the vacuum drew up a huge yellow blister. Only after some moments did I realize what they were doing to him. It was something called cupping, a treatment which you can read about in old medical text-books but which till then I had vaguely thought of as one of those things they do to horses (*Elephant*, 278).

In this excerpt from Orwell's essay *How the Poor Die*, we witness through the essayist the treatment of a patient at the *Hôpital X* in Paris; one of many hospitals for those too poor to be treated in their own home. It illuminates a shade of gray, or what may be thought of as a threshold state, where the members of a state are included as members, yet precariously so. For instance, they are liable to treatment if they turn ill, yet, as this excerpt demonstrates, the treatment they receive is far from human; they find themselves functioning as test-subjects for medical students, thus not regarded as regular citizens. As a related example, there is Dorothy from *A Clergyman's Daughter*, who after suffering from amnesia finds herself 'down and out' in London and, as a result of poverty is forced to go hop-picking in Kent with a tramp named Noddy. While in poverty, Dorothy's days are ridden with hunger and cold. Given the animalistic, harsh living conditions and poverty, she and her fellows are subject to not being citizens of a state at all. However, should they be suspected of criminal behaviour, the state is quick to react with its police force. Thus, these characters are subject to the law of the state, but at the same time excluded and left to care for themselves. In the essay *Common Lodging Houses*, we meet tramps who are forced to submit to the strict regime of the lodging houses if

they wish to sleep under a roof and have access to food. Lastly, poverty also challenges Dorothy's consciousness and forces her to rebuild her perception of reality after experiencing a dreamlike existence. Thus poverty in her case acts as a positive force, freeing her from what the narrative presents as the sovereign power of religion. This offers another perspective on poverty, and its more productive potential.

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben and his discussion of the term *homo sacer*, as briefly discussed in the introductory chapter, illustrates a situation similar to that of Orwell's characters who find themselves neglected as citizens. The original term *homo sacer* (or 'sacred man' or 'bare life') is a term from old Roman law used for criminals who are subject to the law of the state (as they cannot be sacrificed) but paradoxically they not members of it (as they are outlawed). Orwell's characters cannot, as far as we know, be killed without there being consequences for the killer, nor are they directly outlawed by the state. However, they are ignored by the state due to their poverty, and thus in all practicality not truly a part of it, yet they can be arrested or admitted into hospitals. In this chapter, I will attempt to view the situation of Orwell's poor characters in the light of Agamben's discussion of the *homo sacer* and sovereign power, by exploring how they are stuck on a threshold between a human and an animalistic or biological and non-political existence by being ignored by their state, thus deprived of human rights and, in that sense, dehumanized, but at the same time subject to rules of the very state that ignores them. I will also draw upon Karl Marx to discuss the potential power of the poor illustrated in the narrative, as well as Havelock Ellis's essay on the logic of dreams to better understand Dorothy's ambivalent state between dream and reality after waking up from her amnesia, and the power of her subconscious.

An example of sovereign-like power over the poor is found in *Common Lodging Houses* where the text explains how ‘This kind of petty tyranny can, in fact, only be defended on the theory that a man poor enough to live in a common lodging house thereby forfeits some of his rights as a citizen’ (*Dispossessed*, 55). The lodging house is described as tyrannic, as ‘practically everything is against the law in a common lodging house’, in addition the lodgers are ‘entirely cut off from female society’, and some lodging houses are ‘habitually raided by slumming parties who march into the kitchen uninvited and hold lengthy religious services’ (*Dispossessed*, 55). The lodgers have no power to eject these slumming parties. Thus, these lodgers are seemingly subjecting to a totalitarian-like regime in order to get a roof over their heads. The narrator points out that they could go to a Salvation Army shelter where the quality is somewhat higher, but these are far more disciplinary: ‘Common lodging houses where one gets both liberty and a decent bed does not exist’ (*Dispossessed*, 54) the narrator explains. Thus, freedom is the cost for humane living conditions.

Being deprived of one’s rights as a citizen if ones wishes to stay in a lodging house, suggests that poverty and lack of rights go hand in hand, as the narrative in *Down and Out in Paris and London* suggests. In fact, the narrator observes, tramps may be ‘prosecuted for almost anything; but the authorities generally save the trouble of a prosecution by turning disobedient men out of doors’ (*Down and Out*, 164). The claim that they may be prosecuted for almost *anything* points to their exceptional state, and the punishment by eviction is symbolic, in view of the *homo sacer*. The authorities do not necessarily prosecute the tramps, they merely throw them out, as if they were lawless and not worthy of being included in the regular justice system.

Nonetheless, just as the *homo sacer* is still part of the justice system as he has a law which applies to him, the tramps are also subject to the law as they too may be prosecuted for breaking it. In fact additional laws apply to them, as the narrator underlines when he says that everything is against the law in lodging houses. The narrator describes how the tramps are treated like cattle by the porter when led into a 'spike' (the casual ward of a workhouse), and at some spikes the officials would steal your money (*Down and Out*, 153). Again we see the poor in a liminal state, as the tramps on the one hand are treated like cows and the officials, representatives of the state, stealing their money. On the other hand, the tramps are given a minimum of care, perhaps in the name of what Agamben calls the 'sacredness of life'. Agamben's point, however, is that what is 'invoked today as an absolute fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment' (Agamben 1998, 17). While the 'sacredness of life' is defined today as something to uphold, a fundamental human right, in Roman times it signified someone completely without rights. If abandoned by the state, the powerlessness ensuing from being deprived of citizenship would be come to light. This sacredness, by the modern interpretation, can be unearthed from Orwell's literary world; it seems to be why the poor characters are treated the least bit humanely, and how they end up on a threshold. If you look beyond this remnant of sacredness, they are dehumanized and seemingly considered lawless. Their position is well illustrated by Agamben's comparison of the *homo sacer* to the mythological 'werewolf':

The life of the bandit, like that of the sacred man, is not a piece of animal nature without any relation to the law and the city. It is, rather, a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man ... The life of the bandit is the life of the werewolf, who is precisely

neither man nor beast, who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither (Agamben 1998, 105).

Much like the werewolf described in this quote, Orwell's poor characters live almost animalistic existences, always looking for the next meal and living practically without rights. Yet, as we have just discussed, they must still follow the law of the regular citizens and thus they are recognized as human beings. In essence, their existence is both human and animal, yet paradoxically it is neither. The comparison to something as animalistic as a creature half wolf and half man helps underline the pseudo-natural state the poor happen to find themselves in. Like a lone wolf, they are the weaker; excluded from their 'pack', and easy prey for whoever would have an interest in them. Still, they also adapt to their situation, and in a world where everyone has to make it on their own, 'the survival of the fittest' seems to be the rule.

Those who are not 'the fittest', rather the weakest, are central to the essay *How the Poor Die*. The *Hôpital X* is a hospital for those who cannot afford to be treated at home, or in other words, poor people. The essayist goes on to describe how he and the other patients are basically treated like animals or machines. After having nearly tortured a patient with 'cupping', the doctor and the student approach Orwell's character/narrator to do the same to him. He protests, however these 'got no more response than if I had been an animal' (Elephant, 278). Thus, the patient has little say in the matter, and so the hospital (which is public, and thus represents the authorities) is seemingly acting like a sovereign power over its patients. This is further illustrated when, after this procedure, the essayist lies down 'humiliated, disgusted and frightened', before two 'slatternly nurses' put a poultice on him 'as tight as a straight jacket' while some men gather around his bed with 'half sympathetic

grins(my italics) (Elephant, 279). The medical students at the hospital have a ‘seeming lack of perception that the patients were human beings’ and there is even one student who, when it is his turn, appears like ‘a boy who has at last got his hands on some expensive piece of machinery’ (Elephant, 280).

The grins alone suggest that the staff does not consider the treatment to be merely for the purpose of making the patient better. A piece of machinery is something that is inanimate and unfeeling, which itself implies a dehumanization when the term is applied to a patient, but it is also something that is most likely a piece of property, something you may treat in whatever way you like with no consequences other than that you may break it; the machinery has no say, much like the patients of this essay. The owner is the sovereign power over his or her property, which in this case is the state. Another example of this is when the essayist explains that as a non-paying patient, one is primarily a ‘specimen’ (Elephant, 280) and that people are dying ‘like animals, with nobody standing by, nobody interested, the death not even noticed till the morning’ (Elephant, 284). This lack of interest in the patients illuminates their dehumanized existence. Nobody cares about their deaths as they are seemingly considered material for the purpose of medical studies and research, and the sovereign power, here represented by the hospital, may do whatever they wish to their property. When the essayist states that they could not have done these things to a paying patient, it is hard to argue with the fact that poverty is the decisive reason for this dehumanizing treatment.

Orwell’s patients fit the description of the ‘VPs’ (*Versuchspersonen*), patients used for experiments with mortal risks in the name of science. Agamben describes a number of such experiments performed by Nazi doctors and even in the US, where the VPs for these horrible

experiments would be criminals. These patients, like Orwell's patients at the *Hôpital X*, can die without there being consequences for the hospital staff, and indeed this seems to be the purpose as the narrator calls it 'a place of filth, torture and death, a sort of antechamber to the tomb' (287). The patients are lacking the rights and expectations that would usually go with human existence, as this hospital is more or less equal to a death sentence and exclusion from the civil society. However, they are also alive, and so they are 'situated in a limit zone between life and death, inside and outside' in which they are 'no longer anything but bare life' (Agamben 1998, 159). Orwell's essayist explains how 'in general, you got very little treatment at all, either good or bad, unless you were ill in some interesting and instructive way' (279), and that dead patients are seemingly better than living patients, as 'well within living memory it used to be believed in London that in some of the big hospitals patients were killed off to get dissections subjects' (287). The essayist admits that this is a rumour, yet some of the men in the hospital would probably find this 'credible' (287). If this rumour turned out to be true, as the narrator implies that it might actually be, the patients are already dead in the eyes of the hospital staff, and thus they are occupying a space between life and death.

Agamben discusses how death can be politicized when, for instance, a brain dead patient is declared dead and taken off life support, as the brain is an organ which cannot be transplanted, even though the body is still breathing. As an embodiment of the *homo sacer*, brain dead (or 'comatose') patients could then be 'killed' without this being homicide (Agamben 1998, 162 - 164). He refers to an article by W. Gaylin who introduces the idea of the 'neomorts', bodies kept alive for the sake of transplants: 'They would be warm, pulsating and urinating' (Gayling, cited in Agamben 1998, 164). The patients described by the narrator in *How the Poor Die* are not in a state of coma, but their descriptions, at least that of a patient named 'Numéro 57' with his silence and his colourless gaze, make them sound as if they are

not far from a similar condition. Nor are they being kept alive for the sake of transplants, yet they can seemingly die for whatever reasons without it being homicide, and this happens in the name of medical studies, which seem to be the purpose of patients' stay at the hospital. Thus, the narrator illustrates a situation where the lives and deaths of the patients are politicized, as their deaths are accepted by the state as they benefit medicine. In an extreme case, the narrator claims to have witnessed two students 'kill a sixteen-year-old boy, or nearly kill him (he appeared to be dying when I left the hospital, but he may have recovered later) by mischievous experiment which they probably could not have tried on a paying patient' (287). The narrator then implies that it is poverty, and the dehumanized existence that follows from it, which legitimizes the treatment of this patient.

The patient called 'Numéro 57' is a 'subject of medical lecture' and would 'lie with his colourless eyes gazing at nothing, while the doctor showed him off like a piece of antique china' (Elephant, 283). By being introduced as and referred to as a number instead of by his proper name, he is already materialised and placed in a border zone before we know that he is used as a medical subject. The death of this patient happens over night, and the narrator seems to be critical of how the nurses were indifferent and 'went about their work' when learning of his death (Elephant, 283), implying that he was of no emotional value to them, thus merely an object.

Dorothy in *A Clergyman's Daughter* also has experiences with the state practicing sovereign power over the poor. When Dorothy and Noddy work as hop-pickers, some constables descend upon them one night, and Dorothy witnesses Noddy 'in the grip of an enormous policeman, while another policeman was holding two frightened youths by the arm. One of

them, a wretched child hardly sixteen years old, was crying bitterly.’ (124). The reason for Noddy’s arrest is that a pile of apples and some bloody chicken feathers have been discovered in his hut. As Dorothy watches Noddy being led away, it is ‘the last she ever saw of him’ (125), making the entire incident sound more like an abduction than a lawful arrest. As the police seemingly have no warrants, this also appears to be an ‘off the record’ arrest. While the poor are apparently powerless, they do, according to Marx, possess potential power. Marx explained that ‘By working, [the seller of labour power] becomes actually, what he was before only potentially, labour power in action..’(Marx 2001, 256). Dorothy and Noddy are capable of production and do so when picking hops, however they are also merely a ‘reserve army’ for the capital, as underlined by the fact that hop picking is seasonal work: the capital uses the work force and then puts it on hold, but in this case *without* taking responsibility for it, thus avoiding dead weight. They are in a dual state where they possess power yet cannot practice it. When Dorothy and Noddy are picking hops, they do imply that they have some power, by breaking certain rules set by the farmers (such as making illegal fires to cook dinner). This passage however, shows that the power belongs to the farmer; or the capital:

It was also common knowledge that towards the end of the season, when all the pickers had a fair sum owing to them and would not want to sacrifice it by throwing up their jobs, the farmer would reduce the rate of payment from twopence a bushel to a penny halfpenny. Strikes were practically impossible. The pickers had no union, and the foremen of the sets, instead of being paid twopence a bushel like the others, were paid a weekly wage which stopped automatically if there was a strike; so naturally they would raise Heaven and earth to prevent one (118).

Just as capital's expansive power emerges together with labor power in context of the depression, they also decline together. As the demand for labour is less than the supply, the power rests with the employers. The narrator states that strikes were *practically* impossible, thus they do not even have power when they should be able to exercise it. Furthermore, the other poor Dorothy meets seem not even to be looking for any sort of employment, implying that they are not even part of the capital's reserve army. In this sense they are powerless even in principle, yet as Dorothy's experience with hop-picking illustrates, the worker's power cannot be exercised, and thus is not real: a pseudo-power. The narrator also explains that the farmers were not to blame for this, but rather the low price on hops, rooting the problem in the uncontrollable force of capitalism itself. Nonetheless, the state of poverty appears to be an area where the norm does not apply; where one is arrested without evidence and where the labourers are deprived of their supposed power. Through the 'State of Exception', Agamben can help us shed light on how this is possible.

In *PolitischeTheologie*, Carl Schmitt states that 'Every general rule demands a regular everyday frame of life to which it can be factually applied and which is submitted to its regulations', but that 'there is no rule applicable to chaos' (Schmitt, cited in Agamben 1998, 16). Agamben then explains that 'Through the state of exception, the sovereign "creates and guarantees the situation" that the law needs for its own validity' (Agamben 1998, 17). Thus, a sovereign state may itself create a situation where it can disregard laws and hide behind an event out of the ordinary to legitimize this, such as a threat. Examples from history could be the Nazi State and their treatment of the Jews, or present day USA and their infamous treatment of the terrorist suspects at Guantanamo Bay, where the US hides behind the threat of terrorism (chaos) to legitimize their actions. In both cases, the state is stripping people of their rights, and turning them into *homo sacer*. In one way they are no longer defined as

regular human beings as they are deprived of certain rights, yet paradoxically they are subject to human law as they can be detained by the state and its laws. The economic and political crises of the 1930s comes to mind as an example of a 'state of exception' which may have left traces in Orwell's works as he wrote on poverty during the period, yet the particular crisis of the 30's is never brought up as an important factor in Orwell's stories. Orwell does, however, create a mood and a situation in his texts that could indeed resemble a state of exception on its own.

Throughout the essay, *How the Poor Die* sounds like nothing less than a nightmare. It starts off with our febrile narrator having to fill out forms he cannot understand, before the hospital staff takes his clothes away and give him nothing but a linen nightshirt and a dressing gown, leaving him freezing. He is then taken through a 'long, rather low, ill-lit room, full of murmuring voices and with three rows of beds surprisingly close together. There was a foul smell, faecal yet sweetish' (Elephant, 277-278). These nightmare-like images suggest something out of the ordinary, something exceptional, and this is made explicit as: '...its gloom and bareness, its sickly smell and, above all, something in its mental atmosphere stand out in my memory as *exceptional*' (my italics)(Elephant, 285). Thus, poverty itself, in Orwell's essay is, a state of exception. Exceptional conditions are also traceable in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. When Noddy and Dorothy start their careers as hop-pickers in Kent, it is described how there are vast numbers of special constables around, which are 'sworn in every autumn - a sort of militia to deal with the marauding tribes of hop-pickers' (124). The need for extra constables illustrates that this is indeed an exceptional time, and again it is caused by the presence of poverty (out of fear of theft). Later on her journey, Dorothy attempts to spend a night sleeping outdoors in Trafalgar Square with some other roofless people:

...the temperature is now not above freezing point, and the wind is blowing more cuttingly.

The people wriggle their wind-nipped faces into the heap like sucking pigs struggling for their mother's teats. One's interludes of sleep shrink to a few seconds, and one's dreams grow more monstrous, troubling and undreamlike. There are times when the nine people are talking almost normally, times when they can even laugh at their situation, and times when they press themselves together in a kind of frenzy, with deep groans of pain (177).

While sleeping outdoors in nearly freezing temperatures is inhumane enough, this quote illustrates the animalistic behaviour one is forced into by poverty, as they 'heap like sucking pigs' for warmth. Deprived of sleep, given to desperate mood swings where they even laugh at the situation (perhaps in an attempt to distance themselves from their suffering) they are seemingly headed for complete exhaustion and madness. The topic of the sovereign power also becomes applicable, as the constables who patrol the square keep waking up the homeless sleepers, making them stand up. One constable merely states that 'We got our orders to carry out' (166), but will not offer the poor any help. Somewhat ironically, he furthermore points out to Dorothy that she is not wearing an overcoat, and, while stating that she is 'white as death', asks 'Don't you know better than to let yourself sprawl around in the cold like that?' (176). Having no problem controlling the homeless and depriving them of their sleep, the constable distances himself from their situation, rooting Dorothy's misery in lack of personal responsibility. Agamben explains that the ban of the *homo sacer* is essentially 'the power of delivering something over to itself', i.e. giving something its independence and responsibility for itself, but at the mercy of the one who abandons this responsibility - 'removed and at the same time captured' (Agamben 1998, 110). Indeed,

Dorothy is a free individual in the sense that she has responsibility over herself, but it is not necessarily a positive version of freedom. Rather, it is the freedom of an animal, in the wild, pseudo-nature of the city, but paradoxically under the authority of those who run the city. In this sense, the nature-like state functions as a state of exception, where the inhabitants can be treated like animals within the very borders of the city.

Agamben's werewolf is able to transform himself back into a human and thus escape nature, but it happens on the bed of the sovereign. There werewolf licks the legs and the feet of the king who is out hunting, and the king, amazed at the beast's intelligence and humanity, decides to bring the werewolf to live with him (Agamben 1998, 108). The sovereign is then both the tyrant (who hunts) and the redeemer, and the path back to humanity goes through worshipping the sovereign. Upon being told that Dorothy is a 'lady born and bred' (176), the constable in the square quickly changes his tune, and offers to help her get a bed and some food, as 'Anyone can see with half an eye as you're a cut above these others here' (176), which implies that her social status enables her to reclaim her rights as a citizen; to be redeemed. Dorothy, however, perhaps not wishing to 'lick the feet' of the sovereign, declines. As soon as the constable realises Dorothy has not been born into poverty, she is at once, in his view, included as a citizen with more rights than the others in the square. This implies that Dorothy has had her rights as a citizen from birth; it is not something she has earned. As Agamben points out, this implies that *birth* immediately becomes *nation* (and rights), and thus there is no interval of separation between the two. Except, in the narrative of Dorothy, there is, and the interval of separation seems to be a passage where it is decided which social class one belongs to. We are not told of the backgrounds of the others in the square, however their accent suggests that they are working-class, as exemplified by a MrsMcElliot: 'De poor kid, she ain't used to roughin' it de way us others are' (176). Thus, birth in poverty does not

become birth in nation, and poverty is a state of exception in which one is subject to a sovereign power.

Much like the homeless attempts to distance themselves from their suffering, Dorothy's consciousness seemingly undergoes a similar movement, separating itself from reality: After some time 'down and out' and picking hops, Dorothy suddenly has a realisation. She explains how suddenly it

seemed to her that she was no longer the same person that she had been an hour ago. Within her and without, everything had changed. It was as though a bubble in her brain had burst, setting free thoughts, feelings, fears of which she had forgotten the existence. All the dreamlike apathy of the past weeks was shattered. For it was precisely as in a dream that she had been living - it is the especial condition of a dream that one accepts everything, questions nothing... (Clergyman, 126).

Dorothy thus confesses to having lived in a dreamlike, and somewhat unconscious existence while in poverty, in which only her physical being has been present in the real world, while her mind has been somewhere else, in a 'dreamlike apathy', placing her in a space between two worlds.

Havelock Ellis, drawing on Freud, writes in *The Logic of Dreams* that 'the confusion of ideas and images which may be regarded as the most constant feature of dream mechanism is nothing but a process of reasoning, a perpetual effort to argue out harmoniously the absurdly

limited and incongruous data presented to sleeping consciousness' (Ellis 1910, 379), and that it is futile to deny the facts presented to us in the dream. Ellis also argues that the dream tends to come with a sort of apathy in relation to what is happening, as it is only a dream; we know it is not reality. Dorothy's dream has allowed her to settle with the exceptional living conditions of poverty, which implies that her fall into poverty was at first too much for her rational mind to handle. Her physical being could not be distanced from the conditions of poverty, but her consciousness could, and perhaps only in an unconscious state was she able to process the newfound 'data' presented to her, as well as accept them. Ellis states further that 'Every dream is made up of action and reaction between a pseudo universe and a freely responding individual' (Ellis 1910, 381), as the imagery is taken from real life but is processed by the unconscious. When she wakes up in London from her amnesia, and her journey through poverty officially starts, Dorothy awakes 'out of a black, dreamless sleep with the sense of being drawn upwards through enormous and gradually lightening abysses...to a species of consciousness'. Now, she sees 'as an animal sees, without speculation and almost without consciousness' (Clergyman, 85). At this point, Dorothy's mind seemingly has no previously obtained images to process. This conjures an ambivalent state where her unconscious takes over as it is constantly being fed new absurd data it struggles to process and, as in our dreaming life Ellis claims, our minds are marked 'by more or less freedom and audacity' (Ellis 1910, 381). However, during sleep, Ellis explains, only our *spontaneous* attention is persistent, not our voluntary attention (which we have acquired through evolution), and the first is common to animals and children (Ellis 1910, 385). By being drawn through 'enormous' and 'lightening abysses' to a 'species of consciousness', Dorothy appears to have had her consciousness elevated to another, almost spiritual world, whereas her body is left in the real world, seeing 'as an animal sees', perhaps implying the

activity of her unconscious. The 'black, dreamless sleep' could also resemble death, and in a way her life starts over from this point.

Before Dorothy's journey through poverty, her physical being is in control, whereas afterwards her conscious is, until they are finally united as her 'bubble' bursts. Ellis suggests that the subconscious plays with the conscious, or 'God or Nature playing with Man' even (the spiritual versus the physical), offering problems and 'bidding it guess the solution' (Ellis 1910, 383). Dorothy's unconscious being has seemingly not truly given her any problems to solve, merely the problem that she was not facing reality. This problem however, might very well be what Dorothy's consciousness is offered, as it is restored its power and she awakes from her unconscious state, body and mind reunited.

It is in fact this extreme separation of herself, the spiritual and the physical, which forces Dorothy to reunite the two worlds. The text, in light of Dorothy's previous life as merely a helping hand at the local church, presents poverty as dehumanizing and dreadful, as Dorothy realises her own body is moving around like an animal and needs to be taken control of, yet it is also presented as something which may put your life into context and make the reader consider current conditions. However, the cold sometimes 'penetrated into your deepest dreams' (97), implying that when conditions are hard enough, the inhumane existence of poverty also attempts to seize control of your unconscious. Ellis concludes that while we can perceive while dreaming, we cannot apperceive, and thus the real issue must be solved while conscious. Furthermore, other characters, such as Noddy, who has no previous life which can pull him out, are stuck in poverty, and thus stuck in the dual state between the two worlds of body and mind.

After having regained control of her own consciousness and being, Dorothy is rescued from poverty, and she attempts a career as a teacher at a fourth rate private school. Here, she also meets resistance from the forces of capital. Dorothy is rescued from poverty by her cousin, Sir Thomas, who feared that the rumours surrounding her escape might affect him too, as they share the same surname. Sir Thomas' solicitor finds Dorothy a job as a school mistress, as 'of all jobs, that was the easiest to get' (196). The reason for the school to hire a completely unqualified stranger as a teacher, turns out to be a bribe of five pounds. The ideology of the school is made clear by the principal Mrs. Creevy: '...the fees *are* what matter, aren't they?' (201), implying that the education is shaped by those who pay; the parents. Dorothy discovers what sort of pupils this school produces:

Moreover, not only did they know nothing, but they were so unused to being questioned that it was often difficult to get answers out of them all. It was obvious that whatever they knew they had learned in an entirely mechanical matter, and they could only gape in a sort of dull bewilderment when asked to think for themselves (209)

As the children are seemingly machines which can be programmed to think whatever, the text implies a vicious circle. These children will grow up to be ignorant and know nothing of the world due to their poor education, and as they grow up they will perhaps send their children to similar schools, and so it goes on. The narrator points out that in more than nine out of ten cases, the schools can teach whatever they want with only the parents inspecting them - 'the blind leading the blind' (241).

Dorothy decides to ‘make every effort to turn [the school] from a place of bondage into a place human and decent’ (214), but her efforts are futile as she meets resistance from the parents as well as the head mistress. Though this is a private school, unregulated by government, there is still a sovereign power present: the sovereign power of practically unregulated capitalism, where the consumer is the one who seemingly decides, and where the least competent and able consumers are packed off with the shoddy goods. In the supposedly democratic nation Dorothy belongs to, you are not truly a citizen with a vote unless you have money to spend. While Dorothy is working as a teacher and sticking to her own program, she intends to teach the children how to think independently; something she herself has learnt through poverty. For as Dorothy wakes up from the dream she has been living in after her amnesia, she is not only waking up to face reality, but as revealed later on, she has lost her faith (228). As previously discussed, Dorothy used to discipline herself if she found she was not paying attention to the Rector’s sermons, implying an almost extreme devotion to her religion. She explains that ‘Everything that I’d believed in till then - everything - seemed suddenly meaningless and almost silly. God - what I’d meant by God - immortal life, heaven and hell, everything’ (273).

Reflecting upon the matter, she finds that her poverty of faith is irrelevant, as ‘faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable’ (295). The difference is that she now does it out of free will, not out of fear of a greater, supernatural sovereign power. If the poverty of faith is seen as a metaphor for real poverty, this implies that labour and production in themselves are what create fulfillment for the individual and is thus the path to humanity, not the product it results in itself, as shown

when Dorothy looks back on her hop-picking days, and finds that she was ‘...happy, with an unreasonable happiness’ (113).

In conclusion, Orwell’s narratives paint an image of poverty as a state in which one is stuck between being viewed as a human and something animalistic and ‘soulless’. The patients at the *Hôpital X* are used as experimental subjects, or machinery even, but with the right of a citizen to be admitted into a hospital. The tramps in *Down and Out* are given a roof over their head, but being treated like ‘cattle’ and in general as something less worthy; nearly like prisoners, implying that poverty is a violation against the law. Dorothy finds herself living in a wild, nature-like situation, but as it is the pseudo-nature in the midst of the city, she is also judged by the laws of the city. However, her literal poverty leads to the poverty of faith, which ends up freeing her from the sovereignty of religion. Thus, the threshold of poverty she experiences is not necessarily only an evil, rather it expresses shades of gray, and illuminates a positive force hidden within the term poverty, something which will be explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 2 - Orwell and the social threshold of poverty

The previous chapter sought to illustrate the threshold states of poverty which were conjured in relation to power, be that the power of the mind, of the labourer or of the government. This chapter too intends to deal with power, but not a sovereign power in the same sense. The present chapter will explore the influence of a capitalist economy, how it shapes society and culture in terms of social norms, the mentality of work, and the perception of different members of the community. The threshold is still an important topos, as the space of the limit will be explored also in this chapter, however in this part the threshold signifies the state of being embedded in a capitalist consumer mentality, while stuck in a parasitic existence, unable to fulfill the contract of consumption and mutual exchange, as a consequence of poverty.

Firstly, I will explore the situation of Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, who finds himself being ‘in the money-world, but not of it’ (56). Fearing that his job as a well-paid copywriter at an advertising company will lead to him also being of the money world, and thus transform his mind into something completely dehumanized and profit driven, Gordon decides to quit his job and descend into poverty in order to devote himself to writing. As he refuses to leave behind his social life and lower middle-class habits however, he is stuck in a devastating place between the desires and norms of his class, and the reality of poverty. This novel will be mainly read in the light of two different perspectives on poverty: Firstly, Walter Benjamin’s theory regarding the capitalism of the 1930s as a poverty of human experience; a culture which values mass production and technology while not considering or paying respect to the past. Despite its lack of humanity, this can be thought of as something

positive, as it allows the public to ignore the past and use the present as a blank slate, and choose whichever direction they want for the future. My argument in the chapter is thus that the capitalist society Gordon finds himself in, and its poverty of experience, is presented through the narrative as something that can be used as a positive force as Benjamin argues. However, I also want to argue that the lack of human compassion and the dominating exchange economy lead to the sort of destructive divided state Gordon experiences. Secondly, I will use Adam Smith's theory of the beggar as a social parasite, where the beggar figures as one who receives without giving, violating the contract of exchange, and consequently perceived as an animalistic being. With this theory, the chapter seeks to illustrate the complexities of the parasite, and how Gordon sometimes finds himself in a shade of gray, being a parasite without being aware of it, yet how the mere notion of being one makes him paranoid. This theory is also relevant to the discussion of Orwell's memoirs explored this chapter; *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Here, the narrative presents the tramps the narrator encounters in England as people forced to live parasitic existences. Further, the threshold of sexuality will be explored in the light of Michael Tratner's theory on the discursive convergences between economy and sexuality in the early 20th century; promoting the view that one should expend sexual desires for the benefit of healthy, productive bodies, much like one should be an active consumer and take up loans to stimulate desire-based consumption. In Orwell's narratives, however, the poor, cut off from women, need to find alternative ways to deal with their desires, which again leads to other challenges.

In Walter Benjamin's essay *The Poverty of Experience*, Benjamin argues that the post-war period was a time which represented a drastic change in humanity. He speaks of an era that values mass production and technology while neglecting experience and culture - our human heritage, and thus humanism. This results in a 'barbarism'; 'a poverty of human experience in

general' which means we start from scratch (Benjamin 1933, 731 - 732). Poverty is then, though inhumane, also a positive notion, in which cultures and societies can start over, untainted by the past. Benjamin uses the example of a modernist building; a glass house, in comparison to a bourgeois room from the 1880s: The bourgeois room, representing the past, is already fully and completely furnished, and there is nowhere for anyone else to make a change to the interior; the only option is to adapt to it. Nonetheless, the interior also 'radiates coziness' (Benjamin 1933, 734), and thus has a touch of humanity. The glass house however, cold and uncozy, is a place upon which nothing can leave a permanent imprint, everything can be changed, and will always be a place of opportunity. In the decade of the 30s where inflation and war is lurking in the shadows, as Benjamin states, this is the sort of culture needed; a glass culture where one can think in completely new directions without paying respect to the past. Gordon Comstock of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* initially appears to be well settled in the new barbarian reality. He works in the accounts department for an advertisement company named the New Albion which was 'one of those publicity firms which have sprung up everywhere since the War - the fungi, as you might say, that sprout from a decaying capitalism' (54), at the same time he is also a poet. These two worlds are, at first, on collision course, and he is picked on by his co-workers for writing poetry in his spare time. His co-workers are of the 'hard-boiled, Americanised, go-getting type - the type to whom nothing in the world is sacred, except money' (55).

When Gordon's boss learns of his poetry however, he is promoted to the promising position as copywriter, and Gordon is able to turn his poetic talent to good use. Gordon then starts from scratch in a company which embodies this new sort of completely profit-driven capitalism, thus participating in Benjamin's 'barbarism' and in the capitalist society. This creates an ironic situation: Poetry, a part of the old human culture which is no longer of much

value according to Benjamin, is the very culture that is proving profitable for The New Albion. Gordon's poetic talent lends itself to commodification and is appropriated by the logic and language of the market.

Choosing a different route from that proposed by Benjamin, Gordon takes a self-inflicted fall into poverty to protest the 'money god', as he has named it. He seeks to be an outsider, not driven by profit, and like artists before him, to suffer for his art. His first experience with poverty is that it does not damage him physically, rather it leads to 'mental deadness, spiritual squalor - they seem to descend upon you inescapably when your income drops below a certain point' (62). Yet he also feels himself maturing, and more akin to his poverty-ridden relatives: 'A few more years and he would be just like that, just like that!' (62). By heading for poverty in order to avoid becoming a capitalist stereotype like his money-chasing co-workers however, he is himself becoming the stereotype of the 'suffering artist' rather than someone new and unique. By feeling himself growing more 'akin' to his struggling lower-middle class relatives, this also suggests a continuity, which will not lead him into something new. During his dive through poverty, Gordon only produces one poem:

Sharply the menacing wind sweeps over

the bending poplars, newly bare,

And the dark ribbons of the chimneys

Veer downward; flicked by whips of air,

Torn posters flutter; coldly sound

The boom of trams and the rattle of hooves,

And the clerks who hurry to the station

Look, shuddering, over the eastern rooves,

Thinking, each one, 'Here comes the winter!

Please God I keep my job this year!'

And bleakly, as the cold strikes through

Their entrails like an icy spear,

They think of rent, rates, season tickets,

Insurance, coal, the skivvy's wages,

Boots, school-bills and the next instalment

Upon the two twin beds from Drage's.

For if in careless summer days

In groves of Ashtaroth we whored,

Repentant now, when winds blow cold,

We kneel before our rightful lord;

The lord of all, the money-god,

Who rules us blood and hand and brain,

Who gives the roof that stops the wind,

And, giving, takes away again;

*Who spies with jealous, watchful care
Our thoughts, our dreams, our secret ways,
Who picks our words and cuts our clothes,
And maps the pattern of our days;*

*Who chills our anger, curbs our hope,
And buys our lives and pays with toys,
Who claims as tribute broken faith,
Accepted insults, muted joys;*

*Who binds with chains the poet's wit,
The navy's strength, the soldier's pride,
And lays the sleek, estranging shield
Between the lover and his bride.(168)*

It is a relatively straightforward poem, the 'menacing winds' being a metaphor for hard financial times which people tend to forget about during 'careless summer days' when times are good, and the 'torn posters' implying advertising companies out of business. Thus, the poem aims to underline the instability of being a part of the capitalist system, as well as how people allow their lives to be run in accordance with this system, or the 'money-god', rather than controlling their own lives. While starting off as something general, the poem also ends on a personal note for Gordon, with the demand for popularized poetry, and the 'shield' between two lovers indicating his financial situation which prevents him from being intimate

with his girlfriend Rosemary, in fear of having children. It is also a poem which seems nostalgic in its tendency to criticize only what is new, implying the clichè that things were better before.

It is *poverty* which seemingly turns Gordon's life into the cold, desolate image created by the menacing winds and the torn posters. It is poverty which obsesses his mind with unfulfilled desires and makes him spend his 'summer days' carelessly, as exemplified towards the end of the novel. His own thoughts and the pattern of his days also revolve around his financial concerns, and it is in fact poverty which is 'the shield' between him and Rosemary. Gordon's perception of poverty however, is contradictory and even misguided. Attempting to exploit his self-imposed state of poverty for the experience and material needed for a poem, while he fails to see the true face of poverty revealed among the members of his family, and that he himself is indeed heading down the same path as a consequence of his 'project'.

All in all, Gordon's poverty seems not to bear many fruits, and he refuses to take advantage of the 'blank slates'; the 'barbarism' the 1930s would have to offer. This is perhaps due to his insistence on following the course of his family in an age when, as Benjamin explains to us, our past experiences are of little use. His family has always been poor, however they were middle-middle class, focused on appearing as genteel without actually having the money to do so. Then there's Gordon sister Julia, from whom Gordon tends to borrow money, who is frustrated that Gordon too 'sins' against money, a view it is not difficult to share. Gordon's problem is that he clings to the same world and age his family lived in. Benjamin used the example of the bourgeois interior, and 'bourgeois' may be defined as something similar to the middle class, not working class nor gentry, but somewhere in the middle, thus this space is

hard to specifically define (Brown 2008, 4). The natural thing to do for Gordon is to adapt to the bourgeois interior which has been furnished by his family and the past, but it is also the bourgeois lifestyle he attempts to protest, but seemingly cannot. His sister Julia has adapted to this interior however, as displayed through her attempt to save everything she's got to maintain her social status. Gordon's failure to give up on his cultural heritage is made explicit in how he insists on maintaining a fancy social life which demands an income while at the same time living in the world of poverty. When he finally gets a poem published in an American magazine, he ignores the fact that he is recognized as a writer and is only excited about the paycheck, for which he will take his friends out to dinner. Furthermore, Gordon is seemingly critical of his sister's life, portraying it as the 'typical life of the penniless, unmarried woman' who accepts her life, 'hardly realising that it could have been different' (62), while at the same time showing little understanding of her despair over Gordon's wish to live in poverty. Gordon also has an 'Uncle Walter' whom he doubts has ever 'made any kind of stab at life' (63). At the end of the chapter dealing with Gordon's family, his disappointment in his family (the part which is still alive) is summed up by the narrator:

None of them had ever been out of England, fought in a war, been in prison, ridden a horse, travelled in an aeroplane, got married or given birth to a child. There seemed no reason why they should not continue in the same style until they died. Year in, year out, *nothing ever happened* in the Comstock family (66).

Even though Gordon is so desperate for change that prison or war sound like good ideas, he still fails to realise that he is heading in the very same direction, and that his job at the New Albion was in fact a 'new happening', and a chance for a new direction, untainted by the past,

which would open up for many of the activities he blames his family for never pursuing. In this sense, his protest is not only against modern capitalism. It is also an attempt to break with his class affiliation as middle-middle class, which Gordon refers to as the ‘most dismal of all classes’, ‘the landless gentry’ (39), and the notion that he should save every penny to be able to maintain it. By displaying a hunger for luxuries and dinners however, Gordon shows that he has troubles letting go of his social status.

The expression ‘landless gentry’ implies a clash between two worlds; a world without wealth and a world where it is important to appear wealthy. The latter is very important to Gordon, and it is also a source of great frustration to him. As he himself claims, ‘all human relationships must be purchased with money’ (14), and his deepest fear is to become a social parasite. Adam Smith writes of beggars as social parasites, and argues how beggars are the only people who do not participate in the circulation of exchange and barter. According to Smith, there is ‘a certain propensity in human nature [which is] to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another’ and it is this ‘propensity’ which distinguishes humans from animals (Smith 2010, 26). Smith furthermore explains that ‘When an animal wants to obtain something either of a man or of another animal, it has no other means of persuasion but to gain the favour of those whose services it requires’. Humans however, unlike animals, cannot constantly expect the benevolence of others. They must ‘interest [another person’s] self-love in his favour’ (Smith 2010, 26), i.e. they must seek patronage if they do not wish to be independent, which is animalistic behaviour. Thus, Smith dehumanizes the beggar and puts him on the level of the animal. Such mutualism, especially the consumer side, was naturally in focus in the 1930s as a result of the stock market crash (Armstrong 2005, 82). Mutualism may be defined as ‘The action or practice of a group of people in cooperating towards a common goal and for the common good’ (OED). The theories of Maynard Keynes were

central to the economic policies of the time, and the fundamental idea of his theories was that one should spend money to get the wheels of the economy going. Furthermore, the economy was driven by desire rather than need. (Armstrong 2005, 3-4). Thus, working for the common goal is then equivalent to spending money. Not spending money is then not only the same as not contributing for the common good, but if one is even receiving patronage or welfare, one is also seizing money which could potentially have gone into the economy, where it is needed. However, receiving money does enable you to spend - even only a little, and thus patronage should perhaps be viewed differently if spending is the goal.

This historical context sheds light on Gordon's fear of accepting gifts from others in an economy where one is supposed to exchange rather than merely receive or give, but it does not illuminate his place on a threshold where he wishes to participate as a consumer without actually making the money necessary to do so. This mentality is first shown when he gets ready for a dinner party at a friend's house:

It had taken him an hour or two or more to get himself ready. Social life is so complicated when your income is two quid a week. He had a painful shave in cold water immediately after dinner. He had put on his best suit - three years old but just passable when he remembered to press the trousers under his mattress. He had turned his collar inside out and tied his tie so that the torn place didn't show (68).

He goes to great lengths to pose as someone with a disposable income, yet these very lengths show that he is indeed not. His suit is 'just passable' but has hidden torn places, which illustrates how he is almost genteel, but still is not. It is also difficult to imagine what sort of economy and culture Gordon really wants: He rejects patronage as he will not receive gifts. He does not want to write poetry for the purpose of earning money yet he *does* want to live in comfort and expects his poetry to provide him with the means to do so. Gordon also tends to insist on buying dinner for his friends, meaning he does not actually reject the idea of a patron/parasite relationship - it is merely that he wants to be the patron *himself*. The dinner party is hosted by Paul Doring, who is a literary critic, and he hosts them occasionally. Doring always explains to his other guests that Gordon is the poet who has written the poetry collection *Mice*. Thus, Gordon's status as a poet is a flattering presence for Doring at the party, and as a result Gordon is eligible for Doring's patronage. Nevertheless, Gordon's disappointment is considerable when he discovers that the dinner party is cancelled without anyone having given him notice:

It was not merely that he was cheated of an evening spent in human company, though that was much. It was the feeling of helplessness, of insignificance, of being set aside, ignored - a creature not worth worrying about (74).

Though it is never made explicit that his poverty is the reason for his lack of notice, Gordon believes that it is: 'That's how people treat you when you've no money! Just wantonly, cold-bloodedly insult you. It was likely enough, indeed, that the Dorings had honestly forgotten, meaning no harm; it was even possible that he himself had mistaken the date. But no! He

wouldn't think of it' (75). A more likely reason is the fact that no one at the party knows who he is, and he finds himself outside the conversations. Thus, his status as a poet is no longer worth anything, and he has nothing to offer the host in return for his patronage.

While this event to an extent confirms Smith's argument that the poor are viewed as parasites and explains Gordon's unwanted presence at the dinner party, it still all happens inside Gordon's head. It is the beggar who views *himself* as a parasite, not explicitly anyone else, as also illuminated by Gordon's failure to realise that he is forcing the role of the parasite upon his friends when paying for their dinners. He suffers from a sort of paranoia, and this seems to be an important characteristic of Gordon: his mind is full of unreasonable convictions. As briefly discussed in the introductory chapter, the middle-middle class builds its own prisons with their extreme psychic self regulations, and have 'completely internalized the strictures of authority', as Felski explains (2000, 36). Rosemary will not sleep with him as they cannot afford the risk of having a baby; however when Gordon describes Rosemary to his friend Ravelston, he 'built up a picture of her as a callous creature who was amused by him yet half despised him, who played with him and kept him at arm's length, and who would nevertheless fall into his arms if he only had a little more money' (104). When Ravelston then suggests that she surely must care for Gordon and that money is not everything, Gordon is 'pricked' by his conscience, but goes on to state that a whole man's personality is 'bound up with his income', and explains how it is impossible to take a girl out on a date without money (105). Thus, the self-regulation of his class is still with Gordon despite his attempt to break from it, in fact it seems to become more and more predominant. When Rosemary and Gordon later have a discussion about this, Rosemary 'burst out laughing' as she thinks Gordon's thoughts on women and money were such 'palpable nonsense that it did not even exasperate her' (127).

Rosemary's response underlines that Gordon has his own convictions, but they are not necessarily rooted in reality. Furthermore, as he claims that money is what keeps him from Rosemary, he reveals that he thinks of her as a prostitute: If he can provide her with money, she will sleep with him. While Gordon appeared critical of his 'cynical' co-workers at the New Albion, who thought that 'The public are swine; advertising is the rattling of a stick inside a swill-bucket' (55), he himself thinks of money as his own swill-bucket, and Rosemary is the 'swine' who will come running for it. His own mind is that of a consumer's, and this illuminates how Gordon fails to reflect on his own thoughts and opinions regarding poverty, and that they may in fact be out of touch with reality.

Gordon also has a somewhat pretentious attitude which does not seem completely justified. When his friend Ravelston informs Gordon that he wishes to print Gordon's poem about a dying prostitute in his magazine, Gordon laughs a laugh of 'gratified conceit', but manages to pass it off as sarcasm: 'Aha! A dying prostitute! That's rather what you might call one of my subjects. I'll do you one about an aspidistra next time' (87). He is posing as an artist who does not care about the money, only about his art. However, his gratification upon learning of an upcoming payment reveals that poverty has in fact made him more of a sellout than a genuine artist, as desperate for money as his former, Americanised co-workers. By accepting a payment he deems undeserved, Gordon is also to some degree accepting Ravelston's patronage, though this patronage is by itself posing as employment. It is questionable how Gordon finds *this* sort of patronage acceptable whilst finding it impossible to merely receive money. His self-discipline seems to also work to other way around, as he can convince himself that something he realises is undeserved is, in fact, deserved.

Ravelston, the publisher of *Antichrist*, is to some extent the opposite of Gordon. He is a self-proclaimed socialist who rather enjoys life, and he is rich. His wealth, however, is what clashes with his political views. While Gordon is poor and seems to believe in independence and personal responsibility, Ravelston is rich and believes in state intervention and social welfare. He too is on a threshold, but on the opposite side of Gordon's, as he has the theoretical knowledge but not the practical knowledge. However, they do seemingly have a similar understanding of how the world works. During a discussion of the state of the world, Gordon reveals that his protest against 'the money-god' and his poverty has not improved his life: 'This life we live nowadays! It's not life, it's stagnation, death-in-life. Look at all these bloody houses, and the meaningless people inside of them! Sometimes I think we're all corpses. Just rotting upright' (94). Ravelston argues that this is all a temporary phenomena as 'capitalism is in it's last phase' and doubts that it is 'worth worrying about' (93). By referring to the dreadful conditions of poverty as a theoretical phase, and by displaying a lack of concern, Ravelston reveals his ignorance regarding the reality of the matter, which is confirmed by Gordon as he states that they are 'Dead people in a dead world' (92):

Ravelston murmured agreement, with a curious air of guilt. And now they were off upon their favourite subject - Gordon's favourite subject, anyway; the futility, the bloodiness, the deathliness of modern life. They never met without talking for at least half an hour in this vein. But it always made Ravelston feel uncomfortable. In a way, of course, he knew - it was precisely this that *Antichrist* existed to point out - that life under a decaying capitalism is deathly and meaningless. But this knowledge was only theoretical. You can't really *feel* that kind of thing when your income is eight hundred a year (92).

This discussion between the two illuminates the dehumanizing effect of poverty under the current state of capitalism, as well as their divided positions on the matter. The one who has the experience and understanding of poverty is too busy pretending not to, and the one who wants to help, and also has the means to do so, is too ignorant. The situation is ironic, as clearly it should be Gordon fighting for better conditions for the poor. Perhaps as a comment on Marxist theory, it is implied that the poor are too hungry to bother with politics, and rather it is merely a kind heart towards the poor that is important, like Ravelston's. Even though Ravelston is his close friend, Gordon is too frightened of the thought of becoming a social parasite to accept any sort of help from him. 'Charity kills friendship' (238), he reckons. His worst nightmare becomes reality, as his frustrations over his own poverty culminate into a disastrous night out, where Gordon hits a police officer in the face, and Ravelston has to bail him out. This event all starts with Gordon's payment of fifty dollars for the poem published in an American magazine, and Gordon's idea to take Rosemary and Ravelston out to dinner. The mere fact that he is excited of getting his poem published in an *American* magazine and is paid in *dollars* implies a sort of double 'sell out': Firstly, Gordon only cares about the fact that he is *paid* for his poetry, and secondly, the magazine paying him belongs to a nation which is perhaps the ultimate embodiment of capitalism.

Gordon ends up squandering his money, and has far too much to drink. In a desperate attempt to get Rosemary to sleep with him, he drives her away, but Gordon's obsession with unfulfilled desire has gotten the better of him, and he stays out. During it all, while seemingly on the search for pure fun and pleasure, Gordon reveals his inner thoughts:

Gordon wondered whether he was in joy or in agony. That burning, bursting feeling was dreadful. The sober half of him was not dead yet. Sober half still knew with ice-cold clarity what he had done and what he was doing. He had committed follies for which tomorrow he would feel like killing himself ... Drunken half was still clamouring for a bit of fun. And drunken half was the stronger (187).

No longer used to having money, Gordon has no idea of how to handle them. Thus, his poverty has not distanced his mind from the spending mentality, it has only made him more obsessed with it. With his morals and responsibility being washed away by alcohol, it seems even *he* has made it back into the money world, no better than his money-obsessed former co-workers. Perhaps what kept him from actually being one of them while working at the New Albion was his sufficient income, providing him with enough money to actually not having to worry about it. Nevertheless, Gordon wakes up in prison after punching a police officer. Ravelston bails him out and takes him into his home, placing Gordon in a situation he does not wish to be in:

The feeling of his dependant position, of being in the way, unwanted, a nuisance, was with him night and day. At meals he would scarcely eat, he would not smoke Ravelston's cigarettes, but bought himself cigarettes out of his few remaining shillings (221).

It is hard to argue against the fact that Gordon is indeed a parasite while he lives off Ravelston, even though it is not his intention. Over a very short period of time, Gordon manages to travel from the world of the big spender to the world of the charity case. However, even when Gordon has no choice but to be a parasite, he tries his best not to be. Ravelston's wife, Hermione, does not share Ravelston's generosity, and accuses Gordon of being 'another of these good-for-nothing young writing gentlemen who sponged on poor MrRavelston' (222). Her character then suggests that even though Adam Smith's theory is not necessarily grounded in reality (as Gordon proves by avoiding the parasitical existence by all means necessary, even when he has the option of sponging on his wealthy friend), the theory still applies if one only looks at the surface of it all. If they are viewed as parasites, this is what defines them. In the eyes of those who lack an understanding of what it is like to be poor, of those who fail to see that poverty may very well be a result of of misfortune rather than laziness, Smith's arguments make perfect sense. In a vicious circle, the text implies that those who have the means to make a change for the poor lack the motivation to do so, due to the parasitical existence of the beggar which cannot be helped.

Rosemary is the third corner of the character triangle. She is the voice of reason, and puts up with Gordon despite all his unreasonable convictions and ideologies. At first, she is perhaps involuntarily responsible for many of Gordon's frustrations, as he feels obliged to pay for her dinners and she does not want to sleep with him in fear of becoming pregnant. During one of their many discussions on sex, Rosemary disarms Gordon with her laugh:

[Rosemary] was really extraordinarily good natured. Besides, what he was saying was such palpable nonsense that it did not even exasperate her. Gordon's diatribes against women were in reality a kind of perverse joke; indeed, the whole sex-war is at bottom only a joke. For some reason it is great fun to pose as a feminist or an anti-feminist according to your sex. As they walked on they began a violent argument upon the eternal and idiotic question of Man versus Woman (127).

Rosemary has a way of making Gordon reflect upon his own thoughts, and she has a soothing effect on him, being a voice of reason, as when she suggests that 'life is worth living, isn't it, Gordon?' and Gordon admits 'Sometimes' (128), which does not seem to be his attitude most of the time. Furthermore, she is ahead of her time in terms of gender roles, and wants to take Gordon out to dinner. He refuses, as 'The feeling that people - even Rosemary - must despise him for his poverty was too strong to overcome' (131), even though he realises that his behaviour is irrational. While Rosemary manages to pull Gordon down to earth and away from his unreasonable convictions, poverty and the fear of humiliation drags him back to the opposite side, and Gordon's mind is torn between Rosemary's humanizing, reasonable world and poverty's fear-driven, unreasonable world.

The contrast between these two worlds is well illustrated by their trip to the countryside. They have all day together, finding themselves '...extravagantly happy. As they walked on they fell into absurd enthusiasm over everything they saw...' (141). The mood takes a turn for the worse when they suddenly find themselves very hungry, and all the pubs are closed. They can only find a hotel called 'The Ravenscroft Hotel'; a 'vulgar pretentious place' which looks 'frightfully expensive' (145). The very name, 'Ravenscroft', implies something feeding on

your misfortune, ravens being typical scavengers. It is the sort of place which will serve you 'beastly cold beef that tastes as if it has been saved up from last year. And they charge you the earth for it' (146). Expensive, cold dinners and saved up food implies a focus on efficiency and profit, spending as little time and effort as possible on a product while overcharging it. Furthermore, a cold dinner conjures images of a meal in which there is not put much care. It is cold and dead, a product, nothing more, fitting for this new cold age of capitalism.

Even the waiter at the hotel appears to be a product. The narrator accuses him of being an Englishman who had 'assumed a foreign accent because this was proper in a waiter' (148), implying that there is a blueprint for what waiters should be like, and thus they can be mass-produced as a certain product. His dress clothes are of 'excellent cut' and his face 'smooth', 'well-featured' and 'sallow' (147), conjuring images of a doll's almost too-perfect face, but with an irregular skin colour, suggesting that it is perhaps a worn product. His well-groomed appearance and lack of kindness and compassion implies a culture where only the superficial is what matters, it is what sells, and where 'humanity' in the emotional sense must step aside. They end up ordering the cold beef, along with a bottle of wine, and Gordon spends the rest of his money. This scenario exemplifies a capitalist economy in which the consumer is not 'always right' but rather exploited and sold short.

Even though Gordon appears not to notice it himself, this trip to the countryside has shown the best way to denounce 'the money god'. He and Rosemary were nearly euphoric while just being out in the open, with only themselves and their conversations, while the hotel, functioning as a representative of the modern, cynical capitalism, is the complete opposite. After the dinner, money again crashes with human relations, as Gordon and Rosemary are on

the verge of sleeping together, before Rosemary comes to her senses. Gordon's disappointment turns to anger:

Money again, you see! he said. Even in the most secret action of your life you don't escape it; you've still got to spoil everything with filthy cold-blooded precautions for money's sake.

Money, money, money! Even in the bridal bed, the finger of the money-god intruding (157).

In this scenario, even Rosemary must admit that money is the reason, as having a baby would be too expensive and a pregnancy would probably get her fired. The contrast between the imagery of before and after the question of money is almost extreme, starting with Rosemary laying naked, 'her hands behind her head, her eyes shut, smiling slightly, as though she had considered everything and were at peace in her mind' (155), ending with a 'grotesque' scene, 'the naked woman lying in the grass, the dressed man standing moodily by with his hands in his pockets. She'd catch her death of cold in another moment, lying there like that. The whole thing was absurd and indecent' (158). Despite their ability to be happy together when money is not in the picture, this illuminates the threshold they are at, where all it takes is a touch from 'the money god' to fall into the misery of poverty. Furthermore, 'the money god' has turned human life into a product, as Gordon and Rosemary's biggest worry of having a baby is not whether or not they will be good parents or even if they want a baby or not, it is that they cannot afford it. Even human life is affected by a mutualist mentality. Though Rosemary too is on a threshold as she is truly *in* the money world but not *of* it, by having a job but not being a money chaser or a big spender, she has found a way to mostly hold her ground, not tipping to either side. Her method is revealed as she confronts both Gordon and Ravelston following Gordon's arrest. She firstly deals with Gordon, insisting that he is letting himself

‘go to pieces’, that he does not ‘*want* to make an effort. You want to sink - just *sink*’, and Gordon admits that he would ‘sooner sink than rise’ (218). It is perhaps this that is the explanation to Gordon’s unreasonable convictions and behaviour - a wish to be victimized by the brutal world of the decaying capitalism, and be a living example of its inhumanity. However, this inhumanity has taken its toll on him:

The dreadful thing was that her tears, instead of distressing him, merely bored him. It was as though he could not care, and yet at the very centre there was an inner heart that cared because he could not care. If only she would leave him alone! Alone, alone! From the nagging consciousness of his failure, as she said, down, down into quiet worlds where money and effort and moral obligation did not exist (218).

According to Gordon, his sinking further into the misery of poverty and solitude will also lead to him distancing himself from his own consciousness and humanity, a process he has already started as shown by his inability to show emotion when Rosemary is crying. Gordon originally wanted out of the modern money world as he found it cold, dead and brutal, yet he is now discovering that merely going for the complete opposite of money, poverty, will lead him in the same direction. As he later states, ‘To abjure money is to abjure life’ (266). Rosemary’s frustration over Gordon’s refusal to work is grounded in this misunderstanding, as she has found a middle ground by having a job while managing not to let money being a controlling factor in her life. While Gordon has basically *capitulated* to ‘the money god’ rather than taking advantage of its blank slates, Rosemary has taken control *of* the money god. Rosemary also confronts Ravelston regarding the matter, as he claims Gordon is ‘in principle’

right to stay unemployed: 'Capitalism's corrupt and we ought to stay outside it - that's his idea. It's not practicable, but in a way it's sound' (219). Rosemary, however, explains to him that 'We can't afford principles, people like us. *That's* what Gordon doesn't seem to understand' (220). Thus, the text underlines that even principles cost money, and in this harsh reality, one has to make compromises.

Gordon is forced to give up on his principles and start working in the bookshop again, but everything changes when Rosemary shows up and tells him she is pregnant. They decide to marry, and Gordon returns to the New Albion, and back to the world he once renounced. The return to the 'money world' restores his vitality, and seemingly his belief in humanity: Babies 'did not mean any longer a mere abstract disaster, they meant a bud of flesh, a bit of himself, down there in her belly, alive and growing' (253). Now having an income again, he no longer has to dedicate so much of his thought to money, and thus he stops seeing everything in terms of it. By claiming that he will 'sell his soul so utterly that he would forget it had ever been his' (266), it is difficult to know whether this consciousness over his decision implies that he will *not* sell his soul, or if he simply has not learnt that there is in fact a middle ground.

Nevertheless, as he imagines himself going back to the New Albion, he would 'be as though born anew' (266), taking advantage of the blank slates of Benjamin's 'barbarism'. Indeed, he goes from having close to nothing to having a good job, a wife and a child on the way. It is truly a brand new start, and seemingly uncoloured by the past, underlined by how Gordon at the end throws his unfinished collection of poems, 'London Pleasures', down the drain.

As Gordon decides to go for a new life, he starts reflecting upon the seasons, and perhaps in a reference to his poem on the ‘menacing winds’ and ‘careless summers’ of capitalism, decides that

What difference does spring or winter or any other time of the year make to the average civilised person nowadays? In a town like London the most striking seasonal change, apart from the mere change of temperature, is in the things you see lying about on the pavement (248).

Somewhat ironic, even the seasons are now recognisable from the litter (of consumption) seen on the pavement; they too are appropriated by capitalism. This merging between capitalism and nature also suggests a reality where capitalism is in the nature of things. This is perhaps already implied early on in the story, where Gordon’s compares the leaves on the ground with the rustling of an American breakfast cereal (67). With this in mind, Gordon was perhaps always merged with the capitalist way of thought too, as displayed through his disapproving view on parasitic behaviour and patronage, his desire for money and luxuries, his awareness of the cost of human life and his dream of taking his family’s name in a new direction. By attempting to neglect this part of himself, he found himself in a destructive contradiction, torn between his desires offered to him in capitalism, and his reality in poverty. As the narrative then suggests, the poverty of money is not the poverty to seek if one wishes to protest the capitalist system. Rather, it is to seek the poverty of experience and benefit from a new start, and perhaps influence it as best one can. As Walter Benjamin explains, holding on to things from the past is the monopoly of the powerful few. It is a necessary evil that this new world has lost its humanity.

Parasites and Sexuality in *Down and Out in Paris and London*

To Gordon, poverty was not devastating. He tasted its devastation, feeling his own consciousness withering and sinking deeper into it. While crossing this threshold, however, he pulled himself up, and thus was never exposed to its deepest miseries. As Rosemary threatened to leave him, and his friendship with Ravelston dying from what Gordon claimed was his parasitical existence, it is not hard to picture what his future would perhaps have been had he not sought employment. His return to the 'money world' was only possible due to his maintained connections and his history. Other of Orwell's characters are not equally lucky, such as those we find in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, namely the English tramps.

'...there exists in our minds a sort of ideal or typical tramp - a repulsive, rather dangerous creature, who would die rather than work or wash, and wants nothing but to beg, drink and rob hen-houses' (*Down and Out*, 216). The narrator encounters the stereotype of the typical tramp, which resembles Adam Smith's parasitical beggar. It is this creature Gordon Comstock feared becoming, and almost did. The tramps the narrator describes in *Down and Out* fit this description to a certain extent, as they do not work and do receive (though little of it) welfare whilst staying at casual wards. However, the narrator argues that 'tramps tramp' because there is a law 'compelling [them] to do so' (217), not because they truly want to. While the narrator seeks to create an understanding of the situation of the tramps, he succeeds in disproving that the mentality of the tramps is that of a parasite, along with Smith's point that 'a beggar chooses to depend' (Smith, 2010), underlining that the parasitical behaviour, even where it is present, is not voluntary. The tramp is then pictured as a creature with the mentality of a conscious human being, trapped in the body of a parasite, stuck on a threshold between an

animalistic world and a human world. Nevertheless, the narrator confesses he does not believe it 'absolutely unfounded' that some tramps may be 'impudent social parasites' (218), and that they are not normal human beings, again not able to completely disagree with Smith's accusation.

The tramp's place on a threshold between mentality and behaviour is also shown by the narrator's attempt to argue against the tramp as a 'throw-back to the nomadic stage of humanity' (217). Their reason for wandering around is that they are vagrants, and the casual wards will only accept them one night at a time. Again, the narrative illustrates that the behaviour is not out of free will, rather it is out of lack of other options. The nomad comparison, however, explains the seemingly popular perception of the poor as less worthy, as being a 'throw-back' to an earlier stage of humanity implying something less evolved than a modern human being, or even a reversion of evolution.

Where the narrator perhaps best defends the behaviour of the beggar, is in the beggar's way of survival. Adam Smith accuses the beggar of breaking with the principle of exchange, not giving anything back. However, the narrator of *Down and Out* claims that the beggar does pay; in *suffering*: 'A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless of course - but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless' before concluding that the beggar is 'a parasite, but a fairly harmless parasite' (185); a parasite with a human mind even. In this sense, the beggar does give something in exchange, and fulfills the contract of exchange. However, one might ask who would actually benefit from such a product as suffering. For the beggar to participate in the mutualism of a healthy economy, he needs to 'sell' his suffering. As the

narrator points out, there are many other useless trades which are still reputable, but they are perhaps trades which are in demand. Thus, the narrator succeeds in proving that the beggar puts in the same amount of effort as other tradesmen do, yet not that the beggar is a tradesman.

The threshold the beggar or tramp finds himself on is not just one between an animalistic and human existence; it is also one between a social existence and one of social exclusion.

According to the narrator, the beggar is viewed as 'a mere social excrescence, tolerated because we live in a humane age, but essentially despicable' (185). The humanity of the beggar is thus what includes him, yet at the same time he is excluded from personal relations due to his poverty. This is, according to the narrator, the root of much of the beggar's misery and spiritual decay, as he is 'entirely cut off from contact with women', and is 'condemned to perpetual celibacy' (219), due to very few women at the beggar's level of society. The narrator elaborates:

The sexual impulse, not to put it any higher, is a fundamental impulse, and starvation of it can be almost as demoralizing as physical hunger. The evil of poverty is not so much that it makes a man suffer as it rots him physically and spiritually. And it can be no doubt that sexual starvation contributes to this rotting process. Cut off from the whole race of women, a tramp feels himself degraded to the rank of a cripple or a lunatic. No humiliation could do more damage to a man's self respect (220).

The narrator thus describes a situation where, finally, the tramp could end up completely dehumanized, even spiritually. This is slightly different from the situation he describes when defending them against the accusation of parasitical behaviour and laziness, where it appears that the only different thing about them is their parasitical behaviour which is forced upon them by law, while their mentality remains that of a normal person.

The fear of becoming a parasite is due to the fear of not being able to give something back; to not participate in the exchange economy, and this is also applicable to sexuality. In Michael Tratner's book *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in 20th Century Literature*, Tratner explores the idea of a convergence between economic and sexual discourses:

Not to borrow when young leaves one economically weaker, a direct reversal of nineteenth-century logic. Similarly, not indulging in sex is often presented in twentieth century texts as leaving a person weaker sexually - inexperienced or repressed. Temporary relationships with lenders and lovers have become part of the process of economic and sexual maturation (Tratner 2001, 2).

Furthermore, he roots this new sexual liberalism in Keynesian policies, as people were encouraged to indulge 'economic desires by temporarily borrowing' in order to keep the circulation of money going. Similarly, people were encouraged to spend their sexual desires, as not doing so would lead to a "pent-up state" that was considered deleterious to the economic or the individual body' (Tratner 2001, 3).

The tramps in *Down and Out*, however, find the second best solution to the issue; they turn to homosexuality, in addition to ‘occasional rape cases’ (220). By turning to homosexuality without necessarily being actual homosexuals, they are building an experience that is only useful in their own sexual sphere, in addition to only meeting their true desires (sexual relations with women) half way, on the threshold between a sexual life and celibacy. Homosexuality seems to be the norm, as a tramp makes homosexual attempts against the narrator during a night in a casual ward; ‘Homosexuality is general among tramps of long standing, he said’ (156). Homosexuality also suggests a futility in terms of survival, as it will not lead to any offspring. By excluding the poor from reproduction, society indirectly deems their ‘kind’ unworthy of existence, perhaps rooted in the perception of the poor as reversions of evolution.

Rape, however, as occasionally happens, according to the narrator, it is a sort of theft, a completely parasitical action, which demands an inhumane mind; a mind driven entirely by the natural instinct of lust. This, perhaps, refers to the tramps who have sunk to the very bottom of poverty’s misery and have rotted spiritually as well as physically. They are no longer human, and so they no longer follow the human norms. Some tramps can also afford prostitutes from time to time, and the narrator listens to the story of a Frenchman named Charlie and his experience with a prostitute at a brothell. Charlie refers to the prostitute as his ‘chicken’, and describes in detail how he ‘pulled her off the bed and threw her onto the floor’ before he ‘fell upon her like a tiger’ (10). His behaviour is beastly:

More and more savagely I renewed the attack. Again and again the girl tried to escape; she cried out for mercy anew, but I laughed at her. "Mercy!" I said, do you suppose I have paid a thousand francs for that?" I swear to you, messieurs et dames, that if it were not for that accursed law that robs us of our liberty, I would have murdered her at that moment (11).

Desire is a fundamental part of capitalism; as a consumer you will never have your desires completely fulfilled, there will always be something you want. When you are poor, however, desires are hard to fulfill at all, which in Charlie's case has seemingly led to a mind completely dominated by unfulfillable desire:

Ah, the poverty, the shortness, the disappointment of human joy! For in reality - *car en réalité*, what is the duration of the supreme moment of love? It is nothing, an instant, a second perhaps. A second of ecstasy, and after that - dust, ashes, nothingness (11).

After the act, Charlie is 'full of vain regret' and feelings of pity for the girl. He inquires why they 'should be pray to such mean emotions', but ends the story by stating it was 'the happiest day of [his] life' (12). While realising that he has wronged the girl, he still considers *himself* a victim, implying that his desires are uncontrollable. In this sense, desire is an evil, yet he appreciates its pleasures, paradoxically both accepting and rejecting the consumer mentality and its influence on sexuality.

Thus, the narrative of *Down and Out in Paris and London* illustrates a culture and a society where the economy, and thus poverty, influences sexuality, and the tramps are forced to lead dehumanized lives as parasitic beings, finding themselves in an ambivalent sexual state where they are in fact participants in sexual activity, yet at the same time not the sexual activity they desire. Simultaneously, this sexual threshold will at least eventually lead to their demise, as they are refused reproduction by society, in whose eyes they are unfit. The biology of the tramp is then also in a state between life and death, as he is already condemned to being the very end of his bloodline. On the other hand, not participating in the sexual sphere is illustrated as leading to the sort of bestial, lust-driven state of mind capable of rape, a mind no longer human; merely an animalistic mind in a human body. In either scenario, poverty leads to the demise of the human.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the complexities and liminal spaces in Orwell's portrayal of poverty, and through Agamben's notion of the threshold and the *homo sacer* we have seen the poor being placed in a liminal space between human and inhuman, living outside society and the law yet still subject to it. Depicting their treatment like prisoners and cattle by the authorities, and as scientific specimen and machines by the staff at a public hospital, Orwell's portrayals make clear that the poor are not considered regular citizens. In this sense, as the poor are viewed as something less than human, poverty becomes an intermediate zone, where poverty itself can legitimate dehumanizing actions towards those affected by poverty - be it through persecution from the law, medical experiments, or pure neglect of those in need. The narratives also underline that poverty shapes the individual it affects rather than the opposite, illustrated by Dorothy's fall into poverty and the animalistic state of existence she adapts to, but seemingly cannot influence.

Thus, it is those who use the exceptional state of poverty to legitimize an inhuman treatment towards the poor who simultaneously uphold a poverty which can be viewed as exceptional and thus legitimize their actions. The poverty portrayed by Orwell is then not only a result of lack of money, as it could appear on the surface, rather the poverty is shaped by the attitudes towards it - animalistic treatment eventually leading to animalistic behaviour. The state then creates the very situation it needs in order to legitimize its actions, which illustrates its position as a sovereign power: On the one hand, the ruler of the state is inside the law and, like the poor, theoretically open to persecution (for treason, as an example). On the other hand, he is also a political body with the power to suspend the law and thus simultaneously

outside the law, as exemplified by Noddy's unofficial arrest in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. However, Orwell also indirectly underlines the fact that the law must be upheld, despite the situation of those who break it. When Dorothy and her peers are not allowed to sleep in Trafalgar Square, it is indeed inhumane and unfair, but the police officer is also performing his duties, as are the officers who arrest Noddy. While the sympathy is certainly with the homeless, this illustrates that even the dehumanizing treatment they receive is perhaps more complex than it first appears.

Due to the poor's lack of participation in the desire-driven economy, which within the logic of production and consumption is viewed as a failure to work for a common goal, they are shunned by society and their fellow citizens. Characters such as Gordon Comstock are torn between the world of consumption and the world of poverty, attempting to fit into the first while stuck in the latter. Through his journey, we witness the complexities of his existence, and the difficulty of breaking free from one's class background, as well as how those who would benefit from change are ironically those who do not have the time and energy to fight for it. The narrative thus shows that the pieces of the puzzle needed for a change to the condition of poverty are there: Rosemary has the heart and reason, Gordon has the experience and understanding, and Ravelston has the means and influence. However, the puzzle is difficult to put together, as seemingly no single individual has all the pieces needed. This implies a need for a collaboration; a mutualism, by which different roles and different types of people work together towards a better situation for the poor, not by spending money, but by altering their perception of poverty through experience and understanding of the situation of the poor.

Nonetheless, the narratives also show that the issue of poverty is not necessarily rooted within the system, rather it is within the *people* of the system, and while the dehumanizing capitalism is too much ingrained to be changed, it still has its potential and positive notions. In Gordon's case, this potential was both an employment opportunity which would lead to a better life, as well as poverty's way of finally liberating him from the psychic prison which is the mentality of the lower-middle class, freeing him from himself. Dorothy is also liberated from the power of her own consciousness through her experience with poverty. Opening her eyes to a brutal reality, it leads her towards acceptance of her situation in life. However, the lives they end up accepting are in the end quite similar to the ones they were attempting to escape before their descent into poverty, which perhaps shows that even situations which at first appear undesirable or even dreaded, can be turned into something far better merely by having a better understanding of the reality of those situations.

Still, both these characters had an easy way out of poverty as a consequence of their tenuous hold in the middle class, with family who could assist them. This underlines the force of the background one is born into, and that poverty is beyond one's control, freeing the poor from the responsibility of their situation. However, Gordon and Dorothy's mobility between poverty and middle-class life also serves to humanize and even 'normalize' the poor; showing that all that separates the wealthier from the poor is perhaps only a family background, or a stroke of bad luck.

Beneath the inhuman, parasite-like appearance of the poor, Orwell introduces us to regular human beings, whose state of existence results not from free choice but from lack of other options, and who are seemingly judged from birth by their class, which illuminates the

unfairness and helplessness of their situation. However, the mental and bodily decay resulting from poverty is inevitable, as shown in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and at some point they might find themselves fitting the description of the dehumanized creatures they are accused of being. This implies a vicious circle where nothing is done to help the poor due to their inhumanity, and as nothing is done the inhumanity becomes reality, and the lack of action is justified. By being excluded from the sexual sphere, they find themselves being abandoned to a ruthless natural selection, where they are indirectly refused reproduction and thus viewed by their fellow citizens as less worthy.

As Orwell does not tend to suggest political change, his goal is clearly to make people have a change of heart towards the poor by illuminating their humanity, as well as what makes them appear and act differently from the citizens who are better off, and this happens through the complex portrayal of poverty. This thesis strengthens the argument that there is more to George Orwell than the anti-totalitarian essayist, or more specifically, that there is more to his depiction of poverty than self-pity and misery, as certain critics have argued. While his writing is not necessarily at all times distinguished, as exemplified in Gordon's unconvincing epiphany when returning to his job at the New Albion, his texts illuminate a complex reality where everything from the government and the man on the street to the brutal laws of nature are in some way responsible for the inhuman and dreadful existence which is the reality of the poor. The poor are at heart no less human than the rest, yet the vicious circle of neglect might make them what they are accused of being. As their dehumanized existence is shaped through the exclusion from their society and their effectively revoked citizenship, it is clear that what is required for the situation of the poor to change, is first of all a change in external factors, and in how these factors construe poverty, even though this proves a challenge. With this in mind, Orwell's writings on poverty stand as strong as the insights into totalitarianism,

for which he has come to be known for. Making the strange familiar through his vivid depictions of poverty, he opens his readers' eyes to the true face of the poor.

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