Orgreave revisited

David Peace's *GB84* and the return to the 1980s

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> *Leslie Grantham*: That's what the eighties are all about: nostalgia.
>
> *Anita Dobson*: Well… how could it be anything else?
>
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> Most of the things one imagines in hell are there – heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space.
>
> George Orwell

Ours is a retrospective culture, in which the events and images of the 1980s have lately held much fascination. More specifically, it is an anniversarial culture, in which, in a given year, many clustering formations of attention and warm fronts of discussion can be predicted according to what was happening twenty, fifty or a hundred years previously. The peculiar status of the Thatcher years today – far enough to have been forgotten, recent enough to remember – is signalled by the dutiful retrospectives that have in turn been accorded to their major events: twenty-five years since her victory, twenty years of Channel 4, the Falklands twenty years on… and between March 2004 and March 2005, twenty years since the miners' strike. This anniversary did not pass unmarked. Early in 2004, for instance, BBC2 and Channel 4 both screened documentaries on the strike: one sober, the other brash. They were followed by a BBC Radio 4 documentary series, and – as if confirming the anniversarial media's exhaustive dedication to the past – the end of the strike was also marked by a formulaic BBC drama, *Faith*. The roll-call of retrospect performed solidly enough its pedagogic function, temporarily reviving reflection on the strike and its significance. But the most complex and challenging text to appear in this period was David Peace's *GB84*, a novel that will still be discussed when the twenty-year itch has moved on to Maradona's hand ball or Thatcher's resignation. This article is devoted to understanding the book's strategies and effects, as a contribution to the sense we now make of the Thatcher years.[1]

The novel is Peace's fifth, following his *Red Riding Quartet* of crime fictions set in Yorkshire between 1974 and 1983. Stylistically, and to an extent atmospherically, it resembles that sequence, but while deploying some of the moods and motifs of crime writing it moves into more unmistakably political territory. It is clear that Peace's trajectory is towards such explicitly political writing: he has spoken of *GB84* as the first in an 'inverse post-war trilogy' which will also explore the Wilson and Attlee governments and Thatcher's rise to power.[2] It is distinctive in its renewal of attention to the miners' strike, about which, pre-anniversary, the majority of British culture had been meekly, or forgetfully, quiet for years (an absence whose contemporary political correlatives we shall consider in closing).[3]

GB84 deserves attention on the Left, since its political knowledge and commitment are relatively unusual in contemporary British fiction.[4] Indeed, while not all its risks may be judged successful, the book's formal experiments merit the attention of anyone interested in the current possibilities of fiction – and of historical fiction in particular. For *GB84* is deliberately a novel of the recent past, and it is not the only recent novel to explore the Thatcher years. If on certain vectors it belongs to the history of the crime story, the political thriller and the proletarian novel, it can also more locally be situated with works like Nicola Barker's *Five Miles From Outer Hope* (2001), Tim Lott's *Rumours of a Hurricane* (2002) and Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), whose Booker Prize victory most visibly signalled this wave of historical excavation. These fictions do not have 'contemporary' settings: the trip two decades back in time is too deliberate and foregrounded for that.[5] Nor are they exactly historical novels in the manner of *Ivanhoe* or *Salammbô*, their contents securely distant. The period in question in these novels is within living memory, but unmistakably

other. They thus provoke the question: why this past, now?

David Peace has offered answers. The miners' strike, he explains, ranked alongside the hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper as a dominant event in his South Yorkshire youth. Having devoted the *Red Riding Quartet* to the latter experience, he produced *GB84* as a monument to the former. More particularly, Peace speaks, with a distinctive puritanical fervour, of the motive power of guilt. 'As I researched and wrote', he explains in an interview with Mike Marqusee, 'I just felt guiltier and guiltier and angrier and angrier. Anger at myself for not doing enough. For not understanding what it was really all about.' '[W]hile the Ripper terrified me', Peace confesses elsewhere, 'the strike eventually bored me. That guilt, that failure at 17 and 18 to understand the enormity and importance of events on my own doorstep, in my own country, that guilt was what drove me to write *GB84*.'

However harsh Peace's assessment of his own culpability – unlike many teens of the time, he actually played benefit gigs for the miners – his account of the novel's origins thus implies a gesture of imperfect reparation: art is a bid, twenty years on, to make up a long-standing deficit. He also describes the novel's polemical design on the world outside: 'In writing about the strike, my main motive and responsibility was to stop people forgetting what happened. Especially younger people.' While dubious of the softer focus of a film like *Billy Elliot* (2000), he speaks of his admiration for 'anything that makes people aware of the strike'. The implication is that public memory of the strike is imperilled two decades on. In this sense to talk of 'living memory' is imprecise: it is dying memory, memory on the verge of oblivion, that Peace considers himself to be reigniting.[6]

True history: dates

GB84 is confined almost entirely to the twelve months of the strike, and is essentially chronological. The book's four main sections are labelled as detailing three-month periods between March 1984 and February 1985.[7] At a micro-level too, *GB84* comes stamped with dates. The major part of the narrative is divided into fifty-three chapters – 'The First Week', 'The Second Week' and so on – with the dates from each Monday to Sunday appended.

Peace's insistence on calendrical particularity distinguishes his book from many contemporary novels, which while they may seek the spirit of the age are not often festooned with dates. Unlike much fiction, in which a certain empirical indeterminacy is essential to aesthetic effect, *GB84* thus resists the impulse to keep art and documentary at arm's length.[8] Peace's formal radicalism lies partly in a fanatically unimaginative refusal to toy with his meticulously rendered chronology. Too many dates, too much diaristic information, threaten to broach the border between fiction and fact, novel and documentary – and this disturbance of the aesthetic is just the effect of Peace's temporal framing. This aspect of the book gives it an unusual intimacy with written and recorded history. The book appears to assume some of the responsibilities of the historian: there is no question of skipping a week, or omitting a crucial event. Indeed, 'responsibility' is a key word in Peace's own accounts of the book, which also tend to conflate the moral duties of fact and fiction: 'Anybody who writes anything – fact or fiction – about real events has a responsibility to the people who lived through them.'[9] Central to *GB84*'s effect is the sense of inclusiveness – even of completeness – that its headlong progress produces. To a rare degree, the novel implies its congruence with the historical record. Peace, who in interviews stresses the thoroughness of his research, gives a substantial list of sources at the book's end.[10] He is not unique in this: Jonathan Coe's *What A Carve Up!* (1994), to take a pertinent comparison, conscientiously makes a similar gesture.[11] But it is significant that Peace's sources include *The Miners' Strike Day By Day*, and that he uses newspaper archives as raw material: his sources are not just thematic or broadly informative, but are a matter of the daily ebb and flow of the strike, not to mention surrounding events (football results, for instance). In an important and unusual sense the novel, like a work of history, is checkable, contestable – historically accountable, potentially open to cross-referencing with cognate non-fictional texts.[12] The form that Peace has developed, for all its additional audacities, has its base in the chronicle: the linear collation of material, which has often been produced contemporaneously with events. It thus has a parallel with the work that it briefly shows a miner's wife producing:

> Mary had scissors and glue out, cutting up bloody paper fore anyone had had a chance to read thing. For her scrapbook. *True History of Great Strike for Jobs*, that was what she called it. Filled three books now. Most of it were lies, said so herself. Bloody lies, she'd say as she cut stuff out. Tory bloody lies. But what she'd do was, under all lies she cut out, she'd then write truth of matter. (350)

The miner who tells us this has few illusions about the power of his wife's scrapbook – 'Just another way to pass time, I suppose'; but in this he concurs with

David Peace's estimate of his own book. *GB84* is his belated version of the true history, which like Mary Cox's is a cut-up of counter-memory. Both books are aggrieved acts of witnessing rather than promises of political redemption.

Non-action: strike and narrative

GB84's idiosyncrasies result from David Peace's decisions, but also from the particular character of the event that the book describes. For just what sort of event is a strike, and what potential does it offer the novelist? The history of art is not crowded with major works devoted to industrial stoppages – and this, of course, is partly a matter of centuries of class imbalance in artistic production. But a few significant titles demonstrate possibilities: Zola's *Germinal* (a favourite of Arthur Scargill, and cited as a source by Peace), Eisenstein's *Strike*, Godard's *Tout Va Bien*. James A. Davies, pointing to notable scenes in a series of nineteenth-century industrial novels, describes 'the obvious dramatic potential of confrontations between masters and men and within the ranks of masters and men', observing 'the transforming power of the industrial stoppage, the way in which strikes change lives'. Reviewing *GB84* itself, Terry Eagleton likewise considers that 'the strike lends itself well to fiction, in which specific situations accrue a more general resonance'.[13]

The 'transforming power' of 1984–5 is not in question; nor, indeed, is its 'general resonance' as the pivotal domestic battle of the Thatcher years and the last stand of a generation of organized labour. It is true, too, that the experience of a strike offers a dramatic background for the artist, in which everyday grievances and conflicts are magnified and political consciousness heightened. In so far as it has not only beginning, middle and end but also aims and goals, friends and foes, a strike is indeed more evidently story-shaped than normal working life. But we should also consider the opposite: the strike's inconvenience as fictional subject matter. Fiction traditionally thrives on hazard, twist and revelation. In a sense, a strike must aim to avoid these factors. A striking workforce needs unity, steadfastness, the readiness to bear hardship, a capacity for the monotony of the long haul. If negotiations between management and workers are dramatic or fractious, that is not necessarily an encouraging sign. A strike, Walter Benjamin wrote, can be viewed as 'an omission of actions, a non-action': not the clearest qualification for drama, unless it be Beckett's. Equally, industrial action sits ill with novelistic narrative's characteristic interest in individual development and agency. Of course, individual strikers and those around them are transformed by their experiences; but a strike's major meaning is not individual enterprise but collective solidarity. Davies's discovery that Welsh novels of industrial action usually centre on 'the individual's pressing need to get out' confirms the literary problem.[14]

Eagleton writes that *GB84* 'is the literary equal of the epic events it commemorates'. But to *equal* an unsuccessful year-long strike requires quite unconventional literary characteristics. The work that would do this must offer less drama than duration, less action than attrition. Unusually, it must be prepared to place as much emphasis on sameness as on difference: it must be, like a striker, prepared for monotony. A narrative mode is needed in which change – at least from the standpoint of the miners and NUM – is not a matter of enterprise and development, but a gradual but unstoppable process of decline. *GB84* is an attempt to produce that mode, and here again bloody-mindedness plays a large part in its literary distinctiveness: Peace is prepared to stick it out, maintaining the book's stubborn adhesion to attrition. In this at least a resemblance suggests itself between him and the NUM president he depicts. This is a major aspect of the work: its mimetic relation to the strike. *GB84* is a gruelling book to read, partly because it seeks to model the experience of 1984–5. Such a replication of history as fiction can only be analogical, figurative: the travail of the reader is a pale shadow of the struggle of the striker. Yet the analogy remains central to the book's effect, as Peace confirms: 'the miners' strike was intense, repetitious and demanding and, I felt, the text should reflect that'.[15] The unceasing chronology is one component of this. There is no movement back and forth in time in search of answers and insight, no way to redeem failures that have already occurred: the reader must keep trying to make sense on the move, in Peace's wilfully wearisome week-by-week format. It is also necessary that the book be long (462 pages): 100 or 200 would simply not offer the reader a daunting enough labour.

The scale of the book daunts for two reasons: the text is repetitive (a stylistic as well as structural feature), and it charts a protracted defeat. Moreover, the latter cannot emerge as a plot twist, or a sudden melancholy denouement: anyone dedicated enough to read *GB84* will know the strike's fate from the outset. Peace may be reimagining history, but he is not seeking magically to alter its outcome. The relentlessness of the text is thus coupled with the constant knowledge that all the NUM's tactics, hardships and

hopes will result in failure. Idiosyncratically, again, Peace produces a narrative – a thriller, indeed – in which not only hope but suspense is falsified from the start. If this strategy has a major precursor on the left it is Brecht, for whom knowledge of a narrative's end was a useful component of epic theatre: with 'eyes on the course' rather than 'eyes on the finish', the spectator would be more disposed to assess how events might have developed differently.[16] This is part of the experience of *GB84*. When, seven weeks into the strike, NUM chief executive Terry Winters prevents a possible deal brokered through NACODS (62–3, 66–7), or when Scargill twelve weeks later spurns a possible settlement with the National Coal Board (164–5), the reader is in a position to consider that these are wasted opportunities to limit the eventual, catastrophic damage to the miners and Union. But our epistemological advantage over the protagonists is essentially negative: our knowledge of the scale of defeat lets us judge more favourably what look at the time like inadequate compromises and face-saving deals. What hindsight does not offer is an unnoticed road to victory over Thatcher. Asked in an interview whether the strike was a civil war, Peace replies 'Unfortunately not', and muses that fuller commitment from the TUC might have brought that condition closer – but then concludes that 'given the lengths, tricks and expense that the Thatcher government went to in order to crush just the NUM – it would have been a very short civil war'.[17] Even a more concerted effort from the Labour movement would still have issued in failure.

Peace's historical imagination, forged in the investigation of brutal crime, is not consoling or utopian, and has no counter-factual hope to offer: *pace* the Heraclitean Brecht, the extensive narration of pre-existing political defeat seems to confirm not its contingency but its inevitability. In this sense it recalls that genre of which Brecht most disapproved: tragedy. Diffuse though that term is, some of its conventionally defining features could readily be assigned to *GB84*, with Scargill's pride and misjudgement bringing down upon his people a fate of disproportionate violence and punishment, and the ending as the result of the intractability shared by the two protagonists. 'Everyone had had enough', we read thirteen weeks in:

> Everyone except the President –
> *They were on the verge of the greatest industrial success in post-war Britain!*
> The President and the Prime Minister –
> *Insatiable*, thought Terry. The pair of them. (115)

Andy Beckett identifies in British novelists a reluctance to confront Thatcherism directly; if this is so, then perhaps a resistance to tragedy has been its generic correlative.[18] If Peace's novel does not after all belong in that category, it is because of its hard-bitten refusal to ascribe great value to the central protagonists on either side. As Eagleton justly remarks, it is an epic novel but not a heroic one. Still, its confrontation with defeat is unflinching. Part of the boldness of Peace's novel is its fidelity to failure, its prolonged pursuit of the march of labour all the way over the cliff of the mid-1980s.

Unresolved: plot lines

Brecht remains a relevant precursor in another sense. For structurally *GB84* is a montage: it achieves its range of vision through rapid cross-cutting between different characters, locations, milieux and styles. We shall see later how the main text is offset by another, but even this central narrative contains a number of different, concurrent narrative lines. The central pair are the story of the NUM hierarchy, centring on the frantic and hapless chief executive Terry Winters; and that of the maverick millionaire Stephen Sweet, licensed by Thatcher to strategize against the union and to encourage strike-breaking. Winters and Sweet are based on real historical figures, Roger Windsor and David Hart, respectively.[19] In *GB84*, to use one of Peace's favoured terms, both are 'occulted' under new names – perhaps as proof against libel, but the gesture

also surely allows Peace a larger margin of freedom in which to reimagine them in detail.[20] Other characters are equally pervasive. Sweet's chauffeur, Neil Fontaine, is a bizarrely omnicompetent and influential figure who connects Sweet to a violent world of right-wing plotters and agents provocateurs. These include the paranoid surveillance man Malcolm Morris; his estranged wife Diane (helping to undermine the NUM via her secret affair with Winters); 'the Mechanic' David Johnson, a petty criminal and hired thug who organizes attacks on miners; and his wife Jennifer, another hireling of the secret state, who for part of the book is Fontaine's lover. Even a cursory account demonstrates the tangle of relations between these characters, and their actions and interactions are not necessarily clear to the reader. Peace himself disarmingly declares that 'sometimes I don't actually know what's going on',[21] in an echo of Raymond Chandler's admission that he did not fully understand the plot of *The Big Sleep*.

The text's movement between these figures is also a movement between social worlds, levels in England's hierarchy. That movement is abrupt, signalled only by a line space in the text, and sometimes by a move in or out of italics or a change of tense. Transitions from one narrative line to the next are not managed by any helpful commentary. It is not that the book lacks a narratorial hand. On the contrary, within a given passage the third-person narrative voice can become thumpingly intrusive, whether in ostentatious alliteration:

> The boring backbenchers. The courteous constituents. The jaded journalists –
> All waiting on wink or a word from the well connected or the wealthy (274) –

or in an italicized counterpoint to the action:

> Terry put his forehead against the window, the city illuminated beneath him.
> *Never dark –*
> You couldn't sleep. You had to work –
> *Always light.* (7)

Yet this narrative authority does not steer us across the gap from one plot line to another: they coexist without a mediating metalanguage to explain their relations. If one word is always implicit but virtually never present in *GB84*, it is 'meanwhile'. Synchronicity is assumed, and the careful marking of dates makes it the more unmistakable; but the narrative voice neglects to perform the bridging work of explicitly articulating the coexistence of events. This is in part another mimetic move. The lack of mediation between scenes mimes the distrustful lack of dialogue between opposing sides in the dispute, and the lack of transparent intercourse between the public world of negotiation and the secret sphere of sabotage: the activities of Sweet and Fontaine, and certainly those of their even murkier minions, remain invisible to the NUM.

The lack of explicit mediation also hands to the reader the dismaying complexity of the strike. Asked about the book's ambiguities (whether, for instance, Terry Winters is not a patsy but a spy), Peace comments that 'I wanted to leave it open and unresolved.… I wanted to leave the story in the mess it was in at the end of the real strike.' 'Mess' and hermeneutic difficulty are one result of the lack of narrative linkage. The strategy is also convenient for Peace in avoiding the problems of unification with which state-of-the-nation fictions have had to grapple, and which have arguably become more pronounced over time.[22] A notable test case of the problem in the Thatcher years themselves was Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* (1987), which explicitly deals with the miners' strike and the North–South divide. That novel struggles precisely in its attempt to bring disparate social elements, characters and locations under the sway of one narrative voice, valiantly managing and explaining the connections and contrasts between them. In *GB84* this enterprise has been abandoned.

Something of the realist novelist's mission to explain is thus lost, and this should not be blithely celebrated. The way in which a character encountered in one place crops up in another – as when Diane Morris greets Neil Fontaine at the location of secret coal imports (99) – is a distant echo of the extraordinary web of interpersonal contacts woven in *Middlemarch*; but George Eliot's ambition not only to show connections but also to reflect upon them has been ditched as a retarding encumbrance. The new historical novel risks substituting mimesis for understanding, imitative form for integrated analysis. In enacting incoherence, *GB84* eschews some of the labour of making things cohere. But in shedding the burden of explanation and mediation, Peace gains speed: the narrative travels light across the wide social and geographical spaces that separate its elements. In this it resembles not Scargill but his sinister opponents: it is Neil Fontaine whose Mercedes crisscrosses England in the space of a sentence. If the novel's relentlessness mimes the obduracy of the president and his men, its internal swiftness is a quality of the secret police and far-right strategists. I have suggested that the strike is not evidently ideal material for thrilling narrative; but the correlative of this is that the novel's 'thriller' dimension is driven by those seeking to break the strike. It is thus that Peace

can accurately declare the novel ‘fast-paced’,[23] when its year-long subject was ostensibly anything but.

Notes –: style

Speed is a function of these unburdened narrative transitions, but more locally it is a product of style. The most frequently encountered comment about Peace’s style recurs on the front of *GB84*’s 2005 paperback, in Ian Rankin’s stark assertion that Peace is ‘the English James Ellroy’. Peace indeed confirms his admiration for Ellroy, and a full-scale comparative reading of the two would be worthwhile, both stylistically and politically, regarding the novel’s purchase on an occulted history.[24] There is a risk, though, that the comparison forecloses an exploration of the distinctive effects of style in Peace’s own work. *GB84* contains more than one style, but the book’s central pulse deserves our initial attention.

> Here is Neil Fontaine, gradually working out the trap that the government will set the miners:
>
> Neil Fontaine leaves Mansfield. He drives up the M1. Onto the M62 –
>
> Eastbound. Maps out. Notes –
>
> *Possibilities*.
>
> Neil Fontaine passes Ferrybridge. Turns off at Goole. Takes small roads through Scunthorpe. To Immingham Dock. He parks. He walks about. He takes photographs. Notes. He listens. He hears –
>
> *Possibilities*.
>
> Neil Fontaine gets back in his car. He drives back through Scunthorpe. He comes to Flixborough. To Gunness. He parks. He walks about. Takes more photographs. Notes. He inhales. He smells –
>
> *Possibilities*. (78)

The writing is curt, the sentences short and simple; sometimes (‘Maps out’, ‘Notes’) barely sentences at all. For all his book’s scale, Peace is a stylistic minimalist. Here indeed the echo of Ellroy’s clipped and urgent narration is apparent. Brevity buys pace: it would be a task to count the number of Northern English miles covered by these dozen or so lines. This narrative economy is of practical value, given the mass of facts to which *GB84* opens its pages.

Martin Amis recalls being advised by his early editor, John Gross, never to begin consecutive paragraphs with the same word. Amis appends a supplementary rule of his own: never do that, ‘unless … you begin at least three paragraphs this way and the reader can tell that you’re doing it on purpose’.[25] That David Peace is doing it on purpose is never in doubt. In the passage quoted above, three paragraphs begin ‘Neil Fontaine’, frequently followed by repetitive sentences denoting his actions (‘He parks. He walks about. He takes photographs’). Each sequence, moreover, leads to the same conclusion: a hyphen, a new line, italics: ‘*Possibilities*’. Such a rhythm is recurrent in the book, and through Peace’s earlier fiction. With his tendency to slice a sentence in mid-flight, sending the payoff to the next line down, he wastes more white space on the right of the page than most writers of prose. The pages of *GB84*’s main narrative are jagged to the eye: Peace’s idea of a paragraph is often a sentence or a phrasal fragment. In the Fontaine passage, the italicized word is each time the culmination and summary of its roman predecessors. The hyphen and new line offer a dramatic pause, an instant of suspense, resolved by that resounding ‘*Possibilities*’. Roman and italic type exist in a pattern of enquiry and answer, call and response. Italicized phrases frequently offer a thudding crescendo to a train of thought:

> She has given him new orders –
> *New orders from the New Order* –
> New orders to follow. New orders to give.
> Neil Fontaine has his own orders –
> *Old orders*. (61)

Elsewhere the same elements are shuffled in and out of new and old orders:

> *Deals, deals, deals* –
> Deals and secrets –
> *Secrets, secrets, secrets* –
> Secrets and deals. (41)

The mode flirts with banality – deliberately, perhaps. The words imply great complexity, but are also childishly simple. Peace sometimes relishes debunking the strike’s political intricacies: most garishly in the sequence in which relations between Scargill and MacGregor are reduced to an escalating exchange of sexual insults (239). But his insistent repetition also affects the tone and atmosphere of the narrative. For one thing, it is another mimetic strategy: the relentlessness we have already observed is carried into the level of the sentence. When Peace writes

> The Chairman was ready to meet. The Chairman was not. The President ready to meet. The President not. Preconditions. No preconditions. Set agendas. No set agendas –
>
> The talks were on. The talks were off. The talks on. The talks off – (102)

the parties’ suspicious oscillation is rendered in binary sentences, each proposition promptly cancelled by its successor.

Yet style has still deeper effects. In Amis’s code, the resort to the rule of three means that the natural order of prose has been suspended; and Peace’s repetition is

in a fuller sense denaturalizing. Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* makes a usefully direct comparison. That book unfolds its tale with chatty charm; its narrative voice ceaselessly seeks clarification and nuance, but this never obstructs the courtesy with which it guides the reader along. Nodding regularly to Henry James, the book takes for granted that description should be fresh, metaphors surprising: the last thing it would do is simply replay or invert a sentence. 'So here they were, out in the street, being nudged and flooded round by the crowds, and heedlessly obstructive in their own slow walk, which unfurled down the hill to the faint silky ticking of Leo's bicycle wheels'[26] – such a sentence is literally unthinkable between the covers of *GB84*. Hollinghurst's languidly pensive lines imply a sense of subjectivity as organic, slowly growing through its myriad impressions. The ceaseless inventiveness of the prose's redescription of the world, registering each shift of tone and light, answers to the sensitivity that Hollinghurst's protagonist treasures. Such subjectivity has no place in Peace. By comparison with Hollinghurst's, his people are robots, machines for driving or taking pills – save that they are also thoroughly 'interested' animals, driven by raw desire for survival or victory. In so far as subjective depth exists, it is mainly as a realm of dread and fear – and these are not occasions for unfettered expressiveness, but the most relentless sources of linguistic repetition, as in the recurring nightmare visions of Neil Fontaine and Malcolm Morris.

Verbal recurrence is ultimately a dystopian signal: Peace's style bleaches his human figures of plenitude and value. It is also sardonic, deadpan, black-humorous. The tone is cool, establishing a detachment from events. This seems surprising, in a book so driven by political conviction. But in an important sense, while the main body of *GB84* registers the passions of its protagonists, the text itself remains dispassionate. The language of Arthur Scargill – 'Every working man and woman in this country will have to rise as one to defeat this government. This Union will be in the vanguard of that battle, as it has been in every struggle, as it has been in every victory' (16) – is recurrent in *GB84*, but it is not David Peace's language. The novel 'mentions' rather than 'uses' this idiom, framing it as quotation, juxtaposing it with the myriad menaces that make its victory impossible. 'Unusually', comments Terry Eagleton, *GB84* 'shows both sides of the struggle'.[27] But the novel is not dispassionate out of earnest evenhandedness: rather because of a grim detachment that refuses to enthuse over a lost cause, and that is driven to the point of cynicism by a surfeit of violence and subterfuge. In this narrative stance a long legacy of crime writing is present: the book's voice, laconic and unillusioned, is in part that of the detective boiled hard by a life encountering atrocity.

Coming from a recognized crime writer, Peace's novel about a political and industrial event possesses an inherent rhetorical force. It implies that the political history in question cannot be considered as wholly above board, that what was claimed as a victory for democracy and the rule of law in fact heavily involved vice and violence. The crime genre is a sign that society is under suspicion: its deployment implies an attention that is both forensic (the claims of the contending parties will not be accepted at face value; it will be assumed that the decisive events of the period are secret and concealed) and judgemental (the investigation will implicitly have a moral dimension; someone, somewhere, is going to be guilty). The events of 1984–5 are to be considered not as a simple conflict of interests within a democracy (in which the outcome, however unwelcome to one faction, is underwritten by popular mandate), but as a case of democracy's subversion by occult forces. Peace has commented that 'crimes take place in society, not in a vacuum',[28] but this formulation seriously understates the imputation of *GB84*, in which crime is integral to the very working of 'society'. The novel deepens

a chiasmatic claim already implicit in Peace's earlier work: crime tends to be political and politics to be criminal. The relation between the two is not merely overlap but contamination.

If crime unites Peace and James Ellroy, their countries of origin divide them. It is intriguing that a writer so intensely preoccupied with recent British history should be so regularly bracketed not with his compatriots but with a noisily American model. The challenge of conceiving a Sheffield Ellroy is a productive one akin to the historical difficulty of imagining an effective British *On the Road*. In so far as Peace tries to refunction a hardboiled, wired American mode in a Yorkshire context, he immediately achieves estranging results from the clash between genre and locale. But if his minimalist rhythms seem more akin to American than British contemporaries, his diction is consistently based this side of the divide. When Peace opens a chapter with the declaration '*The best place to nick a car in Yorkshire is outside the Millgarth Police Station in Leeds*' (231) he displays his determination to run his laconic narrative on the fuel of an indigenous idiom, not a mid-Atlantic concoction. Indeed he has dismissively, and slightly bewilderingly, complained that the problem with contemporary British fiction is its surfeit of Creative Writing graduates 'wanting to write the "Great American Novel"' and lacking, above all, a 'British Voice'. Yet in his own way Peace shares something important with the postwar Great American Novel. Perhaps his most significant transatlantic affinity is a matter not of style but of vision: one recurrent feature of modern American fiction without prominent British equivalent is the paranoid imagination. Ellroy's determination to chronicle a subterranean history is one incarnation of this tendency, which runs equally deep in the American epics of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo. The assumption of obscure guilt, the suspicion that apparent contingency is actually conspiracy, and thus that stray details belong to a sinister pattern – these are at least entertained, if not emphatically endorsed, in *The Crying of Lot 49* or *Underworld* as well as in *The Cold Six Thousand*. Peace has named DeLillo as a great writer who has written crime, and the remark signals the link between crime narrative and the paranoid imagination. Both imply an interest in clues, portents, signs of hidden intricacy, the need for hermeneutic cunning. And for both the American paranoids, with their anarchistic distrust of government, and Peace, faced with the work of the British security services against the labour movement, the ultimate suspect is not a private individual but the state itself. Any crime fiction implies that not all is well in society; but the political crime of *GB84* proposes that society has been molested not by its renegades but by its rulers.[29]

The novel's hard-bitten vision is partly a matter of genre; it is also arguably masculine. Its world is largely male, the politics it depicts violent and confrontational; at times it tests the reader's stomach by casting the conflict in explicitly phallic imagery (217, 239). The book, as Peace admits, has little to say about the role of women on the miners' side. Its dominant females are on the Right: a woman like Diane Morris can exercise power through seduction and deception, and the ultimate victor of the entire struggle is a woman. This, like Thatcher's reign as a whole, is cold comfort for feminism – or for anyone seeking alternatives within the book's devastating political landscape.[30] The detachment of Peace's style, with its heavy irony and guying of hope, is in the end a defence mechanism against despair. The romanticism of the doomed struggle – 'The *history* of the miner. The *tradition* of the miner' (7) – can be recorded, but not endorsed.

The dead brood: monologue and myth

Yet such honour is not utterly absent from the book. It resides not in the primary narrative but in the densely packed pages that punctuate it, dividing each weekly chapter from the next and recording the monologues of a pair of miners, Martin Daly and Peter Cox. These pages mirror the chronology of the book as a whole: where the main text is marked week by week, Daly's monologue is (a quiet pun, perhaps) labelled by the day. They also contain arresting echoes of the main text – as in Daly's declaration of deadly hatred against Thatcher's Cabinet (272), whose listed names will be echoed in the same order during Neil Fontaine's sighting of them (413). In the courage and resourcefulness with which they confront daily brutality and impoverishment, the miners are the only element in the book to retain unqualified value. They are also the most politically compelling voices that *GB84* holds. This is partly by virtue of the record of state violence against them – 'I crawl out – Black eyes. Stars. Broken nose. Ribs. Blood from my ears. Teeth – fuck me. They've got us in field again – Penned in. Like fucking animals' (90) – which, continuing and, incredibly, intensifying through the book, represents one of the starkest fictional indictments of Thatcher's strategies of governance, a reminder of systematic injustices twenty years old. But it is also because of the capacity for political analysis that the miners retain through their ordeal. Their monologues document diverse, detailed reflections on the changing state of the strike. Some of

them propose more complex and inventive strategies than the NUM leadership (118, 158). They calculate the improbable daily cost of the strike, contrasting it with talk of uneconomic pits and the fact that the government has 'Never spent a bloody penny round here before': 'Ten million quid a day for a hundred days. Fucking hell, she must really hate us' (158).[31] They view the strike via historical parallels: the General Strike of 1926 (182, 392), Northern Ireland (322), and the American South, in Daly's vision of miners in trees as 'strange fruit', with police 'ready for fruit to fall. For dead to drop' (238). The miners' voices are most impressive not for a mutely noble endurance of suffering, but in their demonstration of everyday political intelligence, keen and active.

In a sense the monologues underwrite the rest of the novel. Their picket-line reports describe the raw material around which the politicking of the main text manoeuvres – and their language too is comparatively stylistically raw, though it shares its terseness with the rest of the text. The miners' voices are a necessary formal component for the integrity of the book, a body of battered experience which would be further violated by its omission. In some sense they represent the reality of the strike, the day-to-day experience over which the protagonists are struggling; and the documentary realism of their voices generically signals an authenticity, an ontological priority over the rest of the book. If the essentialism of this formulation feels suspect, it is because it is overoptimistic.[32] For 'the reality of the strike' is also that of Sweet and Fontaine, and the schemes of coercion and surveillance whose effects the miners can feel, but to whose sources they can never get close enough to combat. Through its rapid montage, *GB84* meets the formal challenge of moving between the radically different spaces of picket line, NUM headquarters, Chequers and so on; but in doing so it can only show us their incommensurability, the impossibility of the victims striking back at their ultimate aggressors. Carol Watts has observed that *GB84*'s is a montage without a synthesis, a dialectic with no positive outcome:[33] the increasingly desperate voices of Daly and Cox cannot reach across into the rest of the text, where their fates are being sealed.

Something else, however, reaches into their own text. This intermittent voice, italicized against the miners' roman font, connotes archaism and Blakean myth. '*The dead brood under Britain*', Daly's initial monologue commences, '*We whisper. We echo. The emanation of Giant Albion*.' Deftly, Peace winds the voice in and out of the empirical world: those words are followed by a jolt into daylight – 'Wake up, says Cath again.… They're closing Cortonwood' (2). Fragments of this mythic language return during Daly's dreams: often they are followed by the abrupt announcement of waking in darkness (238, 248, 282). Like the miners' pages themselves, the fragments ask to be made continuous, another text within the text within the text. What they consistently suggest is the collective voice of generations of miners, transmuted into an archaic idiom and addressing the rest of Britain in a fractured oration of martyrdom and accusation: '*You took us from the wild-fields… You took us from the whale-roads… We warmed your houses. Your kitchens and your beds… We drove your dreams. Your cities and your empires… You threw us in a pit… You showered us with soil*' (20, 40, 68).[34] By the latter stages, the voice has turned from plaint to nightmare, describing '*dark lands*' where '*skulls sat in monstrous and measureless heaps*' (282, 340).

In deploying the voice of myth, Peace strains for terms equal to the unfolding catastrophe, as though the miners' everyday idiom cannot fully provide what Seamus Heaney in a different context called 'symbols adequate to our predicament'.[35] The judgement is questionable: arguably the voices of Daly and Cox are evocative enough in themselves. But it is characteristic of Peace to seek a switch of register, an oscillation between linguistic levels: as though the climb, or descent, to one offers a necessary purchase on the other, and as though the transhistorical language of myth grants the empirical world an extra dimension.[36] The italicized phrases are also, almost literally, those of a ghost crying under the stage ('Canst work i' th' earth so fast?'), a neglected and violated historical agent claiming its due. That they surface during sleep makes more exact their implied status as the book's political unconscious; they connote depth and historical reach, linking the strike to a tradition whose surface is only scratched in these fragments.

GB84 thus matches one textual extreme with another: the hard-nosed, sardonic detachment of the primary style coexists with its opposite, an unabashed invocation of mystic tradition. Iain Sinclair is perhaps the closest contemporary to this yoking of the streetwise and the sorcerous, but even he is outdone by the extremity with which Peace works at both poles. The ghosts finally escape their italics and join the main current of Martin Daly's monologue, as the defeated strikers return to work and he has a vision of 'all the others – From far below. Beneath my feet… The Union of the Dead… The Dead that carried us from far to near. Through the Villages of the Damned, to stand beside us here' (452).

The novel's final page completes this apparition: Daly's monologue, narrowed to a single column of print, falls through a series of apocalyptic images in a lurid vision of Thatcher's triumph (462). As striking as the archaic imagery are the insistent echoes of phrases from closer to home, which themselves played upon echoes from the past: L.S. Lowry via the pop duo Brian and Michael ('matchstick men, with our matchstick hats and clogs'), Norman Mailer ('The Armies of the Night': another work that breached the border of fact and fiction for political ends), Barbara Castle ('In place of strife'), Enoch Powell ('rivers of our blood'), Eric Hobsbawm ('she looks down at the forward march of labour halted here before her'), Orwell ('Awake! This is England, your England'). The allusions risk importing bathos to an epic idiom; but in bringing Peace's mythic language into repeated contact with recent cultural and political history, they stir connotations and contexts together to unapologetically jarring effect.

1985–

In the book's last words, 'the year is Zero'. The closing word is apt: the final score to the Left, unadorned by hope or illusion. But the phrase, uttered by a monstrous Thatcher, also announces the beginning of a new age: '1985–', as the last section's title page has said. That unanswered dash implies an unfinished era, and suggests that if one reason for the intensity of retrospection on the 1980s is their estranging distance from the present, another is their formative relation to it. In the wake of his Booker win, Alan Hollinghurst seemed to justify his own literary excavation in the comment that the Thatcher decade 'seems to have determined so many things about the way we live now'. The truth of this claim is broad, from high-street façades to house prices; it also has a more plainly political pertinence. Among Thatcher's stated ambitions, John Lanchester has recently recalled, was to change the Labour Party for ever. For the time being, at least, that aim looks well executed, even if on the night of the 2005 general election Thatcher herself told an interviewer that she saw only a 'tincture' of her influence in the current administration. Thatcherism hastened the end of a postwar social-democratic consensus, and forged a liberal one. Whether New Labour in power has entrenched or ameliorated this is debatable, but few would claim that the government has sought radically to displace it. In its eagerness to allow private finance to invest in and profit from the public sector, Blair's governments, like Major's before them, have gone further than Thatcher's had time to do. The presidential concentration of power and the management of politics by media, both now thought as typically Blairite, were also basic Thatcher strategies. And this is not to mention the tendency towards illiberal legislation in the name of security, and the readiness to shadow US foreign policy: another area in which Blair has been more Thatcherite than the former premier herself.[37]

These facts are familiar enough to the Left. Yet the situation is odder than they suggest. Thatcherism holds a strange position in British political debate: at once foundational and unwanted. Ours may be a retrospective culture, but the images that make good television for their twenty-year alterity are less desirable as options for the political present. Thatcherism is fascinating enough, just so long as it remains exotically distant. In the 2001 general election a Labour poster campaign insinuated the continuity between Thatcher and William Hague: that this might hand votes to nostalgic Conservatives was apparently not a serious consideration. Four years later, Michael Howard's membership of Tory Cabinets of the past was likewise perceived not as valuable experience but as an electoral liability. Blair could greet his re-election as a sign that Britain was not returning to 'the selfish individualism we left behind in 1997'. Precisely a year earlier, Gordon Brown had similarly denounced 'the Tory policies that would plunge the country backwards into failure': 'Far from creating a new Conservatism, Michael Howard is still trying to complete the unfinished business of the Thatcherite privatization agenda.'[38] Whatever the government's actual debt to Thatcherism, all the rhetorical mileage is in denouncing this precursor: the easiest of buttons to press for anyone trying to secure core Labour support. Nor are Conservative MPs likely to make too much play of Thatcherism in their attempt to capitalize on anti-Blair feeling. Perhaps local constituency headquarters are still decorated with fading photographs of her, but, much as it was when Hague first took the helm, the talk after the 2005 campaign is of New Conservatism, cultural diversity, the need to listen to a Britain different from the one she administered. Thatcherism may have been formative for the current shape of politics in Britain, but there is seemingly scant capital in celebrating this.

The miners' strike is the event that best encapsulates this paradox. David Peace views the strike as pivotal in producing the present – 'Now it's carte blanche, full-on privatization, deregulation, trickle-down' – and views Britain's moral invoice as still blighted by the event: 'I didn't want the book to offer a sense of redemption,

because as a country we haven't got it. And we don't deserve it.' Kevin Higgins, reviewing *GB84*, also sees the strike as an event which crucially shaped the continuing present, 'a world fit for New Labour': 'It was in a sense the event which, more than any other, gave birth to the world we all now live and work in.' Even without hindsight, the epochal significance of the government's defeat of organized labour was visible. As the strike ended, Raymond Williams saw in it the lineaments of the future, identifying the miners' adversary as a 'new nomad capitalism, which exploits actual places and people and then (as it suits it) moves on'.[39] Yet this formative event, like Thatcher's premiership itself, is a legacy for which contemporary British politics has little use. Scargill's brand of trade unionism was always a headache from the point of view of Neil Kinnock's attempt to transform the Labour Party.[40] To New Labour proper it is a creature from another planet. For all Tony Blair's rhetorical vagaries and political shifts, it is almost literally impossible to imagine him holding up Scargill's NUM as an inspirational example for the Labour movement. But, once again, little glamour attaches to the government side either. Unlike, say, the sale of council houses, the strike represents in popular memory not the opportunities presented by Thatcherism but the heavy social price paid for them. Even Conservatives today would no doubt be cautious to invoke it as a Tory success story. Thus, if the strike was central to Thatcherism's belligerent air of triumph in the second half of the 1980s, it remains emblematic of Thatcherism today: formative but unwelcome, an old battlefield which those living above it would prefer to forget. It is the major instance of what, *pace* Leslie Grantham and Anita Dobson, Britain does not really want to remember about the 1980s.

It is this that makes David Peace's dogged reconstruction of the strike such a painfully bold enterprise. Higgins and Peace, like Hollinghurst, all imply that the creation of the British contemporary lies somewhere in the Thatcher years; and in that sense the fictional return to the 1980s is a search for origins. We may say that *GB84*, like *The Line of Beauty*, is not a novel of the contemporary, but a novel that digs for the contemporary's foundations. It is testament to David Peace's ferocious dedication that he has dug so deep, even when his own image for the result is not a heap of coal but a mountain of skulls.

Notes

1. On memorial culture generally see Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2003, pp. 1–29. On the suggestive notion of weather as a model for culture, partially corroborated by the profound predictability of anniversaries as foci for contemporary attention, see Steven Connor, 'What Can Cultural Studies Do?', www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/interview/. The media commemorations mentioned were *The Miners' Strike*, BBC 2, 27 January 2004; *Strike: When Britain Went to War*, Channel 4, 24 January 2004; *The Miners' Strike: The Legacy*, BBC Radio 4, 23 March 2004; *Faith*: BBC 1, 28 February 2005.

   GB84's own place in the anniversary cycle is suggested by the correlation of its publication dates with the anniversaries of the strike's beginning and end: the large trade paperback in March 2004 (Faber), the mass-market paperback a year later. By the time of this second edition, the book could carry excerpts of reviews comparing it favourably with the media commemorations of early 2004.
2. See 'David Peace', www.bookmunch.co.uk/view.php?id=1341.
3. Historical analyses of the strike have of course been produced, and some fiction. As well as Raymond Williams's *Loyalties* (1985), James A. Davies in his article '"Two Strikes and You're Out": 1926 and 1984 in Welsh Industrial Fiction' (in *British Industrial Fictions*, ed. H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2000, pp. 137–47), points us to Tom Davies's *Black Sunlight* (1986) and Roger Granelli's *Dark Edge* (1997). The films *Brassed Off* (1996) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) have probably been the most widely viewed reminders of the strike in popular culture. But artefacts like Pulp's song 'The Last Day of the Miners' Strike' (*Hits*, Island Records, 2003) have been rare, considering the prevailing atmosphere of retrospection for the 1980s. The loudest breaker of this silence was Jeremy Deller, whose restaging of the Battle of Orgreave as a kind of performance art in June 2001 was filmed as *The English Civil War, Part II*. The resulting book is cited among Peace's sources for *GB84*.
4. A case could be made that such political commitment is more commonly pronounced in genre fiction than in what is called the mainstream. Contemporary British science fiction, for instance, includes a number of committed socialist writers: see Roger Luckhurst, 'Cultural Governance, New Labor, and the British SF Boom', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2003, pp. 417–35. Peace declares himself proud to belong to the crime genre, and resoundingly adds that 'The best work is always done in the margins and the genres': 'David Peace', www.bookmunch.co.uk/view.php?id=1341.
5. Precedents exist for such 'semi-historical' fiction – among them, in a satisfying parallel, Zola's *Germinal*, published in 1885 but set twenty years earlier.
6. Quotations from Peace in this paragraph are from the following sources: Michael Williams, 'David Peace', 19 March 2004, www/bbc.co.uk/dna/collective/A2436509; '*GB84*: "No ******* end in sight"', www.bbc.co.uk/bradford/culture/words/david_peace_gb84.shtml; Mike Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights', *Independent*, 5 March 2004, http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/features/story.jsp?story=497787. One should not be too hard on *Billy Elliot*, where the strike is really background material, but which does not shrink from screening the build-up and the brutality of the police. Yet its treatment of the strike is perfunctory next to the gender trouble of its central story.

7. They also bear titles from pop records of the period, selected for their aptness to the period of the strike: 'Ninety-Nine Red Balloons', 'Careless Whisper', and so on. The surprise of this is that it gives the book an unexpected proximity to a broader, generally depoliticizing retro culture which thrives on such reference points. But such a use of pop has been insistent in Peace since *Nineteen Seventy-Four*, and he convincingly describes its importance, not only as a way of rediscovering lost associations but as insulating him from the present. See '*GB84*: "No ******* end in sight"'.
8. On the tension in fiction between the use of particular detail and the bid for general significance, see Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: an Introduction*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2005, pp. 12–14.
9. Peace quoted in '*GB84*: "No ******* end in sight"'.
10. David Peace, *GB84*, Faber, London, pp. 464–5. Page references in the text here refer to this edition.
11. Jonathan Coe, *What A Carve Up!*, Viking, London, 1994, pp. 500–501. The comparison is pertinent because Coe's is another fictional anatomy of Thatcherism – which Andy Beckett has suggested makes it a rarity: see 'Thatcherism for Beginners', *Guardian* Review, 2 February 2002, http://books.guardian.co.uk/whitbread2002/story/0,,842641,00.html.
12. One precedent for this condition – news items, weather conditions and all – is *Ulysses*, though the challenge of documenting a day differs from that of chronicling a year.
13. Davies, '"Two Strikes and You're Out"', p. 137; Terry Eagleton, 'At the Coal Face', *Guardian* Review, 6 March 2004, available at http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1162205,00.html.
14. Davies, '"Two Strikes and You're Out"', p. 146. For Benjamin's phrase see 'Critique of Violence' (1920–21), in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, Verso, London, 1992, p. 136.
15. 'David Peace'.
16. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in John Willett, ed., *Brecht on Theatre*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1964, p. 37.
17. Peace quoted in '*GB84*:"No ******* end in sight"'.
18. See Beckett, 'Thatcherism for Beginners'. Elsewhere, Beckett has acutely noted that Peace's emphasis on the protagonists' stubbornness is in fact a rather traditional explanation for the strike: see 'Political Gothic', *London Review of Books*, 23 September 2004, p. 26.
19. It must be said that while Hart's eccentricity is undiminished in the figure of Sweet, the novel's presentation of Winters does not appear to follow the view, held by some commentators on the strike, that Windsor was an MI5 agent sent in to the NUM to undermine it. See Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners*, 3rd edn, Verso, London, 2004, ch. 4. Perhaps a novel centring on such an ambiguously treacherous figure would have lost the fog of uncertainty in which *GB84*'s NUM protagonists wander, and the shadowy breadth of the conspiracy it implies would have been rendered more deceptively one-dimensional. Still, it is rare to find Peace's narrative less paranoid than the historical record appears to allow.
20. Sweet is mostly referred to as 'the Jew' – a plainly provocative gesture which Peace justifies with the claim that this is Neil Fontaine's point of view. See Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights'. Peace's comments here also show his interest in the anomalous presence of Jewish politicians in Thatcher's Cabinets: amid an anti-semitic Tory atmosphere represented in *GB84*, several Jewish figures were nonetheless favoured by the prime minister, and seemingly associated by her with a culture of autonomy and enterprise. *GB84* contains a whole subset of imagery connected with fascism and anti-Semitism, all the way to a closing correlation of mine and concentration camp (462), and this issue may well be taken further in future discussions of the novel.
21. Williams, 'David Peace'.
22. On the difficulties faced by contemporary fictional attempts at the condition-of-England novel, see Steven Connor, *The English Novel in History 1950–1995*, Routledge, London, 1996, ch. 2; and, with specific reference to Thatcherism, D.J. Taylor, *After the War: The Novel and England since 1945*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1993, ch 12. For Peace on unresolved 'mess' see Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights'.
23. Williams, 'David Peace'.
24. 'David Peace'.
25. Martin Amis, *Experience: A Memoir*, Hyperion, New York, 2000, p. 154n.
26. Alan Hollinghurst, *The Line of Beauty*, Picador, London, 2004, p. 111.
27. Eagleton, 'At the Coal Face'.
28. David Peace quoted in Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights'.
29. Peace's complaint about British fiction and his approval of DeLillo appear in the same paragraph of 'David Peace'. Coe's *What A Carve Up!* is once again a surprisingly pertinent comparison here, in that its intricate deployment of the detective plot envisions Thatcherism as a conspiracy of Pynchonesque depth and complexity; but the vision is achieved via an English tradition of comedy of manners and caricature, rather than the American hard-boiled legacy appropriated by Peace. Perhaps it does not need adding that 'paranoid' in the present context is not intended as a criticism, and may even be a compliment.
30. In casting the prime minister as a figure of male awe and hatred, *GB84* intersects with an important sub-plot of 1980s gender politics: the divisive and fearsome presence of Thatcher herself as a female icon. Jacqueline Rose ('Margaret Thatcher and Ruth Ellis', *New Formations* 6, 1988, pp. 3–29) and Marina Warner (*Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1985) have offered studies of this modern mythology; but to its fruits we can add the wicked Widow in Iain Sinclair's *Downriver* (1991), or even the smothering maternal figures of the Smiths' *The Queen Is Dead* (Rough Trade LP, 1986). See Simon Reynolds and Joy Press, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock'n'Roll*, Serpent's Tail, London, 1995, pp. 48–9. As for Peace himself: 'Of course, there were positive things that happened in the strike that are missing from the book, such as the role of the women's support groups. But much of that has already been well documented' – Peace quoted in Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights'.
31. As the strike ended, Raymond Williams also endorsed the NUM claim 'that the costs of defeating the strike and of financing redundancy are greater than the costs of sustaining the existing industry': see 'Mining the Meaning: Key Words in the Miners' Strike', in *Resources of*

Hope, ed. Robin Gable, Verso, London, 1989, p. 123. Seumas Milne argues that the economic case for closures was bogus: see *The Enemy Within*, pp. 8–19.

32. It is not idle sentiment, though, to stress the realism of the monologues. It is clear that Peace drew directly on documentary sources and personal interviews. 'I met with people', he recounts, 'and also used the oral accounts from the books listed at the back of *GB84* – and the things I heard and the things I read needed no fictionalizing; they were powerful enough' – '*GB84*: "No ******* end in sight"'.
33. At a panel discussion of *GB84*, Birkbeck College, University of London, 10 June 2004. It is more difficult to read the two texts together, cutting from one mode back to the other, than to read each text continuously in turn. The latter approach helps to grant the miners' words their cumulative power; but this dilemma for the reader reinforces the failure of synthesis.
34. The image of a world of underground labour which supports the comfortably oblivious lives of those above is projected again on the last page: 'the people of England are blind and deaf' (462). If the novel's title recalls Orwell's last book, this theme recalls his reportage 'Down The Mine', which stressed the debt owed by a complacent Britain to those toiling beneath its surface: see *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1989, pp. 18–31.
35. See Seamus Heaney, *Finders, Keepers: Selected Prose 1971–2001*, Faber, London, 2002, p. 23.
36. The underground voice bears an increasingly strong echo of T.S. Eliot: in its representation of an austere mythical realm as analogy for the present, in its use of archaic English, in its recourse to Gothic imagery, and, as we shall see, in its concluding patchwork of quotations.
37. Alan Hollinghurst's comment appears in Stephen Moss, 'I Don't Make Moral Judgments', *Guardian*, 21 October 2004, http://books.guardian.co.uk/bookerprize2004/story/0,14182,1332083,00.html. For an early articulation of the 1980s' cultural legacies, see Peter York and Charles Jennings, *Peter York's Eighties*, BBC, London, 1995, whose 180 entertaining pages manage not to mention the miners' strike. For Thatcher's goal, see John Lanchester, 'What is Labour For?', *London Review of Books*, 31 March 2005, p. 6.
38. Gordon Brown, 'Radical and Labour', *Guardian*, 2 May 2004, p. 19.
39. Williams, 'Mining the Meaning', p. 124. For Peace's and Higgins's comments, see respectively Marqusee, 'David Peace: State of the Union Rights', and Kevin Higgins, '*GB84*', www.nthposition.com/gb84.php.
40. See for instance John Cole, *The Thatcher Years: A Decade of Revolution in British Politics*, BBC, London, 1987, pp. 142–3; Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann, *Safety First: The Making of New Labour*, Granta, London, 1997, ch 9.

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