

## ***JUMP CUT***

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

# *The Ploughman's Lunch* Remembering or forgetting history

by Tony Williams

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"If we leave the remembering to historians then the struggle is all lost. Everyone must have a memory, everyone needs to be a historian. In this country, for example, were in danger of losing hard-won freedoms by dozing off into a perpetual present."

— Ann Barrington in THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH. [1]

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"If this is tomorrow's generation, then Britain has little to fear in years to come."

— Margaret Thatcher, 1982 Conservative Party Conference

Since Thatcher's 1979 election victory, the 80s have witnessed an overv assault on British social, political, and cultural life. A right-wing Conser Government currently attempts to erase all historical memory of worki struggles. Its ideological strategy is to move national consciousness tov social darwinist "Victorian values," 80s and 90s Britain is a world of fort barriers, excessive racism, assault on the poor, indirect economic dism the Health Service, interference with state education, increased power censorship, and political attacks on minority groups such as gay and le centers funded by local councils.

To succeed in this ideological offensive, changes in historical consciou essential. The commercially successful CHARIOTS OF FIRE provided a inspiration. It contained nostalgic echoes of Britain's imperial past, an the Falklands War.[2] Other examples followed such as THE JEWEL IN ' CROWN, A PASSAGE TO INDIA, and GANDHI, all favorably revising Bri

legacy of colonial oppression.[3]

This was not a uniform image of British cinema. Leaving aside Bill Forsyth's creations of Ealing comedy eccentricity, other films presented a divide — whether in the thriller genre (DEFENCE OF THE REALM, THE WHISKEY BLOWER and THE FOURTH PROTOCOL), the screen work of David Hare (PLENTY, WETHERBY) or the 80s version of the 1956-63 "kitchen-sink" movie (LETTER TO BREZHNEV, MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE).[4]

However three films echoed the decade's predominant fear. 1984 was the George Orwell's 1948 warning to a future generation about the dangers of historical revisionism and cultural betrayal. Michael Radford's reverent version eschewed the futuristic trappings of the earlier 1954 version to show a society that had not materialistically advanced since Britain's postwar period. Gilliam's BRAZIL portrayed a futuristic (or parallel-world) society with no historical knowledge. The main characters were politically impotent in pre-Oedipal fantasies.[5]

THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH (1983) featured BRAZIL's leading actor (Jonathan Pryce) but was set in 1982's recognizable present — the time of the Falkland Conflict. Of the three films, it presented the most relevant picture of British society undergoing drastic change. Writer Ian McEwan and director Richard Eyre wished to echo the style of European films dealing with authoritarian societies such as Tim Burton's GERMAN SISTERS and MAN OF IRON in their collaborative venture (Johnston, 105). The film's general release was held to alter the 1983 election. It drew uncomfortable parallels between government and personal betrayals and showed history cynically rewritten for political effect. PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH did not gain popular success. It offered an uncomfortable picture of contemporary England and had no sympathetic characters. Instead McEwan and Eyre aimed at a quasi-modernist, political satire where character identification would be nonexistent (Johnston,

Shot in a familiar realist, literate style, THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH provided a distanced, ironic version of those late 50s British upward mobility films. Its most appropriate progenitor is Jack Clayton's (1959) ROOM AT THE TOP. Laurence Harvey's Joe Lampton seeks upward mobility through the boyhood of his daughter. Susan. In THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH, his 80s descendent, James Penfield (Jonathan Pryce) emerges from the same lower middleclass origins as Margaret Thatcher, the Grantham grocer's daughter.

James's father owns a similar shop. Like Margaret Thatcher, James escapes his class origins by attending a grammar school and entering Oxford. This is his entry as a news editor into the BBC's upper-middle class environment. James has political and personal ambitions. He is writing a revisionist, historical best-seller about the 1956 Suez crisis — which had split 50s British society as it did 60s United States. He also has romantic designs on upper-class Susan

Barrington. Her first name reminds us of Joe Lampton's desirable Susan in *ROOM AT THE TOP*. However, this Susan is much more manipulative and unfeeling than her prototype. After James has neglected his dying mother by rejecting his class origins, Susan and his best friend, Jeremy (Tim Curry), form an alliance with James in a sexual and class alliance at the 1982 Conservative Party Conference. And it is at this conference that we hear Thatcher spout false, outmoded Churchillian rhetoric about her Falklands victory.

The original ending to *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* had James and his publisher toasting the revisionist history's successful completion. The film ends with a freeze-frame of James at his mother's funeral service, impatiently looking at his watch and anxious to move on. The film unites its political and personal critique. A political chameleon wanted to rewrite the past. He betrays his class origins. The climax presents him frozen in time — an appropriate punishment for his historical and cultural betrayals.

Two important components are crucial in understanding *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* in the British narrative tradition: Suez's historical significance and its place in society and cultural representations involving popular memory.

On July 26th, 1956, President Nasser nationalized the French/English-controlled Suez Canal. This move upset the two colonial powers. Britain had lost its empire after WWII, delayed granting independence to former colonies, and fought to hold on to Cyprus. France also struggled to keep Algeria as a colony. Unless Nasser countered, Nasser's action would inspire third-world liberation movements. Britain, France and Israel secretly arranged to regain control of the Canal. They would attack Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula. Britain and France would intervene and order "both sides" to withdraw. The two powers could then take control of the Canal on the pretext of saving it from damage. All sides turned to move against Egypt.

This whole strategy was deceitful. The British Government misinformed Arab nations and its U.S. ally about the operation. It also lied to Parliament and the people. When the U.S. learned the truth, it ordered Britain out of the Canal as a result of United Nations' and world governments' condemnation. France and Britain withdrew in humiliation. Churchill's successor, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, resigned from office and Britain became as divided as the United States was during the Vietnam War.[7]

Nearly three decades later, the Falklands War reversed widespread popular disillusionment against Thatcher's Conservative Government's first term. Unemployment was above three million, economic policies were failing, and another recession was approaching. Even before the actual invasion, the government knew of Argentine plans. It used the Falklands issue as an ideological weapon to reinforce anachronistic feelings of patriotism and national sentiment. The United States followed this strategy in its later attacks :

## Grenada and Libya.

Britain originally seized the Falkland Islands (called Malvinas in Argentina) in 1832. But prior to 1982, successive British governments had negotiated with Argentina to restore the islands so as to obtain more positive political relationships. Britain had no special military or economic interest in them. They were maintained by absentee landlords in a near feudal state of dependency and suffered from under-investment and inadequate government. For Argentina recovery of the islands was a matter of national pride.[8]

Before the invasion British politicians cared little about the islands or their inhabitants. Once the Argentines invaded, the government and media launched in a barrage of patriotic and racist polemic that found its lowest level in Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper. The *Sun* greeted the illegal sinking of the *ARA Belgrano* cruiser (sailing back home outside the British exclusion zone) with the headline, "Gotcha!" It also vilified and slaughtered Argentine conscripts as traitors. The war became a deceitful propaganda device, similar to its Suez predecessor. But now it succeeded in stage-managing an imaginary postwar ideology of a "united Britain" among the general population."9" As Anthony Barnett has pointed out,

"There were no [British] interests involved, it was purely a matter of national spirit, Britain's 'standing' in the world was at stake. Nothing really was being contested, therefore that most dangerously unreal aspect of international relations was at risk, the very aura of sovereignty itself, the sacred cow of the world order *credibility*." [10]

Thatcher's attitude to the "rescued" Falkland Island inhabitants was one of contempt. Immediately after the conflict, Parliament refused the inhabitants British citizenship!

Britain's general population lacked the historical memory that could have countered such ideological manipulation. Further government oppression followed. Rightwing interests questioned history teaching in schools. Education became reorganized. Assaults began on any possible oppositional groups — leftist, feminist or gay — who would challenge the status quo. Many former liberals and leftists were quick to jump on the Thatcherite bandwagon, particularly those who had benefited from the educational reforms and welfare policies of the postwar Labor Government. The character of Jar Jar Jar Jar Penfield exemplifies this type of former liberal.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH argues that without commitment to past class struggles Orwell's *1984* warning will become a present reality.[11] This message is always present at the margins of the film's discourse. The film was written by a screenwriter who refused the "convention of rounded, complex characters" so as to assert more broadly political themes (Johnston, 10)

manner of statement resembles that textual "essential absence" noted Machery in *A Theory of Literary Production*:

"...the work exists above all by its determinate absences, by what does not say, in its relation to what it is not. Not that it can conceal anything: this meaning is not buried in its depths, masked or disguised; it is not a question of hunting it down with interpretations. It is not in the work but by its side: on its margin that limit where it ceases to be what it claims to be because it has reached back to the very conditions of its possibility. It is then no longer constituted by a factitious necessity, the product of a conscious or unconscious intention." [12]

This is similar to Sheila Johnston's observations about the film:

"A moral position is to be sought, then, somewhere in the interst between the characters, the silence between their voices, rather than in anything that is actually said. The film works on the principles of harmony, but of cacophony, not consensus but dissent. So Mr Thatcher's 'spirit of the South Atlantic' speech, with its paean to national unity and resolve — the resolute approach — is placed against the faintly echoing chant of spectators outside the hall and Penfield's confrontation with his perfidious friend inside." (John 108)

Alexander Walker sees *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH*'s relation to *1984*

"same basic fear of living in a society that re-wrote the past in terms of the present. The multi-cubed scribes in Orwell's bureaucracy pasted the approved versions of history into the Party scrapbook and media smoothies in the Eyre-McEwan picture re-wrote the past for their own advancement in the power game. Each film presented a different perspective, but it was of the same view — a Britain becoming ever more subordinate to the authoritarian view of this world." [11]

To properly assess the significance of *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH*, we must relate it to one significant British cultural tradition. There is an ideological forceful narrative theme crossing several generations. The protagonist is a hero from a lower class background, alienated from his roots, and powerless to change society. Pip's moral isolation from Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations*, Wells' inability to understand Parsons' politics in *The History of Mr. Polly*, Robert Tressell's "Ragged Trousered Philanthropists" are all historically significant literary examples of England's lack of radical alternatives before the rise of Marx and Engels. "Working-class" plays from 1916 such as *Hindle Wakes* and *Hobson's Choice* eliminated class conflict and stressed knowing one's place.

society. Both plays were later filmed in the culturally stagnant era of the

The Suez-influenced "Angry Young Man" movement in theater supposedly offered a protest against postwar malaise. It took its name from John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956). Reviewers believed Osborne's Jimmy Porter to have a particular contemporary significance:

"Jimmy was taken to be speaking for a whole generation, of which he and his creator were among the most precocious representatives, since it was essentially the postwar generation. They represented those who like Lindsay Anderson 'nailed a red flag to the roof of the mess at the fort of Annan Parbat' to celebrate the return of a Labour government in 1945 and then gradually became disillusioned when the brave new world failed to materialize." [14]

Jimmy had supposed leftist leanings. But the play refutes this. Jimmy is an upper-class Allison, anticipating the sexual/class pursuits of Joe Lampton and James Penfield. But he gains no change in social position. Constantly attracted to Allison, Jimmy secretly admires his father-in-law, Colonel Redfern. The stage directions reveal both Jimmy (and author Osborne's) real attitude: "For all of being a soldier sometimes conceal the essentially gentle, kindly man underneath." [15] Jimmy secretly yearns to be a member of the establishment. But rigid class barriers prevent this. Jimmy sees himself as a "rebel without a cause." He says,

"I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us in the thirties and forties when we were still kids. There aren't any brave causes left." (Osborne, 8)

Jimmy is alienated, lacking any knowledge of past working-class struggles and totally ignorant of fifties political movements (anti-nuclear, anti-Cold War) with which he could have aligned himself. Alienated individualism characterized the 1950s. THE PLOUCHIHMANS LUNCH and its antecedents in film, theater and television. Although there are exceptions — such as the work of Ken Loach and Tom Garnett as well as Trotskyist playwright Jim Allen — ahistorical, romanticized alienation functions as an overwhelming force in Britain's cultural tradition.

Despite 50s playwright Arnold Wesker's working-class cultural education, the post-Suez protest took the form of a kitchen-sink movement in theater. Working-class heroes of LOOK BACK IN ANGER, SATURDAY NIGHT AFTER SUNDAY MORNING, THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER and THIS SPORTING LIFE were free to wench, booze and rage against their respective environments. But the films never posited any possibility of change in alliance with past historical political movements. If he were destroyed by the system in real life, an alienated hero could always desire a fantasy world, as did Tom Courtney in BRAZIL's 1963 predecessor, BLIND

Chris Auty aptly described this movement as. "Protest, not protest It is *alienation* — not Marxist but misogynist." [17]

David Mercer's 60s television plays also displayed alienated, ahistorical pessimism.[18] His two trilogies—THE GENERATIONS and ON THE EVE OF PUBLICATION — presented familiar images of conflicting, despairing, class fathers and disappointing, upwardly mobile offspring. The works deny any possibility of historical continuity between earlier class struggles and contemporary society. WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS — the first of THE GENERATIONS — anticipated one plot element of THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH. Two sons, an alienated intellectual and an upwardly mobile bourgeois (who would later be conflated in James Penfield) return to their working-class father's home where their mother is dying. The play contrasts the father, a survivor of an earlier generation of struggles, with his unworthy 60s offspring. Despite the latter materially benefiting from the former's past struggles, the play documents the betrayal of the earlier generation's hopes and aspirations. Mercer's later play, ON THE EVE OF PUBLICATION, the 30s proletariat, a dying breed, whose utopian vision of a better socialist world is now crucially irrelevant.

WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS cast vaudeville comedian, Hylda Baker as the old wife Bernie. This represents a particular British casting tradition for elderly or middle-aged working-class characters. The redundant world of the actors' former success is clearly meant to parallel the older working-class generation's anachronism in the modern world. This device is significant in understanding THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH's use of former music hall comedians, Nat Jackley and Pearl Hackney in the roles of James Penfield and mother.

Mercer's final teleplay in THE GENERATION trilogy, BIRTH OF A PRIVATE CITIZEN, focuses on the alienated, anti-nuclear protester figure of the grandson, Colin Waring (played by filmmaker Tony Garnett). Colin has retreated into isolation away from his grandfather's political legacy, the Committee of 100, the radical wing of Britain's anti-nuclear movement (dramatist Mercer had belonged to this organization). Colin's working-class girlfriend, Linda, is critical of his inability to link up with the working-class. Colin eventually dies as a "patriotic man" enacting an impotent gesture on the Berlin Wall.

By the time of this play, Mercer saw only futility in political action. In an appendix to THE GENERATIONS, television director Don Taylor condescendingly defended Mercer's alienation from earlier British class-conscious struggles. Taylor recognized their moral vision but held that "*simple belief* is impossible in a complex social situation" (italics mine), acknowledging Colin Waring's "cancer of nihilistic despair." [19]

Mercer's second trilogy dealt with the failed, alcoholic, angst-ridden M writer Robert Kelvin, who has betrayed both his political ideals and cla background. *THE CELLAR AND THE ALMOND TREE* presented his po ego-Czech Marxist, Sladek (Peter Vaughn). Despite torture by Nazis an Stalinists, Sladek has remained true to his past ideals. The final play of trilogy, *EMMA'S TIME*, ended positively. After Kelvin's death, his youn (Michele Dotrice) and Sladek collaborate in writing a history of the Cze Communist Party. The older and younger generations will thus salvage betrayed legacy. Using documentary footage of 20s Russia such as Leni funeral, intercutting scenes of young Kelvin with his working-class par *EMMA'S TIME* contrasts contemporary political powerlessness with th historical events that had inspired an earlier generation. That work for isolated valuable lesson in showing how past historical lessons could ir next generation.

*THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* presents a vision of a society seeking to those inspirational historical lessons. History is rewritten for totalitaria The film is the culmination of those negative roots within Britain's cul tradition. Orwell's *1984* is now more applicable to a British media-dom authoritarian rightwing society rather than to any supposed leftwing to dictatorship.

In his introduction to the published screenplay of *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH*, Ian McEwan mentions two significant influences: E.P Thompson's *Reading by Candlelight* and Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Author of *The Poverty of Theory* and *The Making of the Engl Working Class*, Thompson severely criticized Althusserian Marxism's n influence upon a trendy English intellectual establishment. Althusser's revisionist platform in works such as *Reading Capital* elevated theory o practice in isolation from everyday class struggle.[20] *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* hints at James's possible former involvement in this Althusser movement. A copy of *Capital* lies among a pile of books propping up h telephone.

Milan Kundera's relevance is noted by McEwan: "I thought our subject encompass the uses we make of the past, and the dangers, to an indivi well as to a nation of living without a sense of history." In the film, Ann Kundera as having "one of his characters say that the struggle of man a tyranny is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (McEwan, 18). It i which James Penfield will not participate. His individual rewriting of tl crisis parallels the government's version of the Falklands invasion, invo betrayal and deceit.

The film's title offer an appropriate metaphor for its content. A Plough Lunch is a popular English pub snack but was never historical, As telev advertising director, Matthew Fox, tells James, it was a "completely suc

fabrication of the past," a media strategy to attempt to persuade people into accepting a certain version of history. This culinary manipulation thus parallels Thatcher's successful management of Churchillian ideology during the Falklands campaign (vi).

In the film's first sequence a BBC radio newsroom teleprinter announces the British task force's sailing to South Georgia. Later program announcements foreshadow the film's major themes of England's narcissistic investment in its imperial glories and historical distortion.

"Commander Freddy Bracknell will be talking about his four years as a German POW in Stalag Three, and mountaineer John Clayton will be reliving the thrills and perils of Everest. Also Polly Morrell will be finding out from the historian Professor John Gerty how the governments of Eastern Europe distort their recent past in historical books to suit their present policies and allegiances."

Ironically, James engages in this kind of distortion with his proposed revisionist history of the Suez crisis. It appeals to rightwing British and U.S. interests. At the publisher's party, James's upper-class friend Jeremy comments on the politics of the exclusively white guests:

"Some social democrats. Some diligent anti-communists. A Politburo Section man from the U.S. Embassy. And this exquisite Californian wine, courtesy of the CIA."

James's publisher, Gold, speaks to a group of graduate trainees about the forces determining publications. "I don't think anybody should be allowed to have a book published unless it sells at a supermarket." U.S. financial interests clearly dominating British cultural life.

Lunching with Gold at an expensive restaurant, James sells him the idea of a revisionist history of the Suez Crisis. Its market will be the conservative area of Twentieth Century Studies. James reinterprets the Suez humiliation in terms similar to 80s historical revisionism describing Vietnam as the "1960s crusade." Presenting the United States as the "good ally...who tells you when to pull back," James manufactures his intellectual commodity in the new conservative spirit engendered by the Falklands campaign. He assures Gold he is no socialist. Gold cautions him about the freshman and sophomore audience's reading level:

"So your language will have to be simple, not stupid, mind, but simple, very, very simple, and always remember it's an American readership."

The white, upper-middle-class composition of the publisher's party contrasts with scenes showing James traveling to work on the Brixton Underground

Brixton is a prominently black working-class district now populated by Caribbean descendents of those late 40s immigrants lured to England to undertake low-paid, non-skilled work. On the underground James sits next to a black. On his way to the BBC he passes a black streetcleaner. James owns an apartment in Brixton. He belongs to the new yuppie generation pricing the original inhabitants out of the area.

James has romantic feelings towards television researcher, Susan Barri. Although she is the daughter of a leftwing historian and a deceased BBC executive who resigned in protest against the Conservative Government's attempted manipulation of the Suez Crisis, Susan is ruthlessly opportunistic. As the screenplay states, she is a product of her class:

"Flamboyant, effortlessly confident, she inhabits that special world with its different rules — of the truly ambitious. James's fascination owes as much to the certainties of her class as to her looks" (McEwan, 3).

Susan has left the women's movement after unscrupulously using it for professional advancement:

"I mean, in many ways I'm right behind the women's movement. But sometimes I wish they'd get on with it instead of moaning on. The office was split right down the middle. I mean, as a *woman* I understood what they were saying, that current affairs was all about what men did, but as a human *being* and a *television* researcher as a *professional*, I could just sense they'd got it all wrong. I could see that there were two paths I could go down, power or not power. Down the not-power path was lots of sisterly feeling, masochism and frustration. Down the other path, I could keep on working. So of course I voted with the men and the other women all resigned. I think they're mad, don't you?" (McEwan, 4)

James continues his odyssey of lies denying that his parents are alive. Susan has no research interest in the past. "I don't like flashbacks. They make me feel as though I'm holding my breath. I like progress."

Throughout the film, the mise-en-scene surrounds upper-middle-class signifiers of sterility and artificiality. James takes Susan to the Barbican Gallery — an upper-middleclass ghetto with pretentious paintings "representing various forms of aesthetic self-consciousness" (McEwan, 8). While visiting Polytechnic James finds the students engaged in Space Invader machines instead of the political protest that occupied their late 60s predecessor

A history professor at the Polytechnic tells James the real reasons for the invasion that mirrored the British Falklands expedition — ideological manipulation, racism, and political deceit. These are factors James will find in his history. James then travels to Norfolk to meet Susan's mother, Ann, to gain access to her Suez archives. A former leftwing historian remarried a television commercials director, Matthew Fox, she now lives in genteel retirement. James meets her husband's ten-year old son — the ideal product of Thatcherite educational policies — who can recite a list of English monarchs in parrot-fashion. When James queries the missing Cromwells, the child dismisses this seventeenth century revolutionary aspect of British history as "they don't count."

Misrepresenting himself to Ann as a socialist, James succeeds in gaining access to her files. Ann is no real judge of character, "You're a responsible journalist doing...a very demanding job. Every day you take decisions that depend on your sense of history. A genuine tyranny would have to get rid of people like you on the way home, his car tire bursts. A recorded tape of his interview with the history professor plays on his car radio. It contradicts Ann's judgment and shows James's intellectual deceit to be no individual matter.

"Perhaps we should reverse the question and ask ourselves to what extent individuals behave like governments, who are bound to act in the national interest which in turn is rarely separable from the government's interest, or that of the class it represents."

On his way to find a jack, James accidentally stumbles into a Women's Peace Camp (clearly modeled on Greenham Common) protesting against U.S. nuclear missiles in England. Unlike Jimmy Porter, James has "good, brave causes" with which he could identify. So could Ann who admits that she has retreated from politics to leave the struggle to others. But James will choose to use misrepresentation and decide to ignore present realities. Ann narcissistically idealizes James after her dead brother. She nostalgically lives in the past of the former "brave new world" of the 1945 Labour Government. Thus Ann cannot ignore the women's peace camp on her estate's doorstep. When she first meets James, a jet fighter flies overhead — clearly armed with U.S. missiles — and she comments on her selfish preoccupations.

On his second visit James meets Polish historian Jacek. Jacek comments on the British lack of historical memory. In contrast to Tom's list of English monarchs and Matthew's television commercial involving kings and queens, he speaks of Poland's more subversive historical memories.

"Here you have enviable freedoms, and yet no monuments to the people who struggled to win them for you- Now that is why I think there is no hope for the Poles, whoever occupies their country. They remember their dates, and they keep adding to them. December 1981, Gdan

1980, 1976, 1970, Katyn 1940, 1922 and so on. It's a subversive list. it out loud on the streets of Warsaw and you might get arrested."

Frustrated in his attempts to woo Susan, James falls victim to her motl romantic fantasies. In their historical discussions Ann speaks of 1945's hopes. This was the period of the post-war Labour Government when ] Waugh (of *Brideshead Revisited*) spoke of the country being under "ene occupation." Her descriptions uneasily echo Thatcher's Britain:

"A small minority thought that England was really theirs, they had made it, they owned it. The rest, the wage earners, were foreigners the outsiders intent on wrecking it all."

After he gains access to Ann's archives, James eventually discards her. ] will soon suffer the same fate. Before this class betrayal happens, he wa Matthew Fox's television commercial. This sequence acutely illustrates advertising media's ideological distortions of history and gender roles. studio set James sees a "deeply contented pre-war middle-class sitting resembles Margaret Thatcher's imaginary thirties world where the real issues of poverty, unemployment and economic depression are absent the sitting room is a "typical family," a key ideological construction in ] platform of Victorian-derived middle class values.[21] The screenplay s describes patriarchally proscribed rigid family stereotypes:

"Dad sits in an armchair reading a newspaper. A pipe is near at h To one side, a wireless. At his feet, a girl plays with a doll; a boy pl with a model steam engine. Mum enters with a tray of steaming l drinks. As she sets down the tray on the arm of Dad's chair, the n peaks and the children half rise and arrange themselves on either of Dad's legs. Everyone smiles up at Mum" (McEwan, 29).

Traveling with Susan and Jeremy to the national Conservative Party Cc James witnesses his own personal betrayal. Susan and Jeremy are "old both socially and sexually screw James. During this humiliation, Thatc announces the Falklands Victory. Her ideological distortion of present echoes James's rewriting of the past.

Unlike Joe Lampton, James fails to obtain his "room at the top." The n 80s class barriers will not allow him entry. The final image shows James freeze frame optical zoom. Impatiently glancing at his watch during hi funeral, unobserved by his grief-stricken father, James becomes frozen petrified ahistorical frame. It is an appropriate punishment for his con the political distortions and cultural betrayals that characterize 80s En final scene mirrors Britain's contemporary stagnant condition. Unless concerted radical opposition toward authoritarian revising past histor especially memory of the struggles that reversed the working-class

impoverishment noted by Engels in 1844, Britain is condemned to historical petrification. *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* has thus a crucial contemporary relevance in the current moribund world of British cinema that concentrates primarily on imperial nostalgia and escapist fantasy.

## NOTES

1. Ian McEwan, *THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH* (London: Methuen, 1985). All future quotations are from the published screenplay.

2. On the reactionary ideology and historical revisionism behind *CHARIOTS OF FIRE*, see Ed Carter, *CHARIOTS OF FIRE: Traditional Values/False History*, *JUMP CUT* 28 (1983), 14-17; see also John Walker, *The Once and Future Film* (London: Madmen 1985), 121; Sheila Johnston, "Charioteers and Ploughmen," in Alan Auty & Nick Roddick (eds.) *British Cinema Now* (London: British Film Institute 1985), 99-104.

3. See the incisive critique by Saloon Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," *Arizona Film* 10.4 (January-February 1985), 70. On *GANDHI*, see Udayan Gupta, "GANDHI," *Cineaste* 12.4 (1985), 46.

4. See John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963* (London: British Film Institute 1986).

5. The parallels between Orwell's *1984* and *BRAZIL* will be the subject of a forthcoming review in *Orwelliana* (the George Orwell Newsletter). For a comparison of Radford's and Gilliam's visions, see John Hutton, "1984 and *BRAZIL*: Nightmares, Old and New," *JUMP CUT* 32 (1987), 5-7, 14.

6. For a critical attack on *ROOM AT THE TOP* as representative of the anti-British "New Wave," see R. Barton Palmer, "What Was New in the British New Wave: Reviewing *ROOM AT THE TOP*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 14.3 (Fall 1986), 125-135.

7. I wish to express my thanks to graduate student, Dane Thompson, for allowing me to refer to his paper, "A Mixed Message: Some Images of Britain in the 1980s" for this historical information. Relevant sources include Anthony Nutting, *No End of A Lesson* (London; Constable 1967); Anthony Moncrieff — *Ten Years After* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1967), 10; Roy Fullick and Geoffrey Powell, *Suez: The Double War* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1979).

8. See Latin American Bureau, *Falklands/Malvinas: Whose Crisis?* (London: Latin American Bureau, 1982), 11.

9. On the Falkland Conflict's political significance see the special "War and the Falklands" issue of *New Left Review* 34 (July-August 1982), especially An

Barnett's article "Iron Britannia, 6-7, on the ideological uses of propaganda also Paul Foot, "How the Peace Was Torpedoed," *New Statesman* 105 (1983), 8-10. Foot speculates as to whether or not the sinking was a deliberate attempt to sabotage the peace talks beginning in Washington. For the use of World War II imagery in the affair, see Geoff Hurd (ed). *National World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI, 1984),

10. Anthony Barnett, *Iron Britannia* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982), 22

11. For a trenchant criticism of 80s leftist retreat from socialist position Ralph Miliband, "The New Revisionism in Britain," *New Left Review* 15 (April 1985). 5-26.

12. Quoted by John Caughie (ed), *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 193.

13, Alexander Walker, *National Heroes: British Cinema in the Seventies and Eighties* (London: Harrap, 1985), 265, For Thatcher's particular brand of authoritarianism, see the 1984-85 *New Left Review* debates centering around "authoritarian populism" appeal. See also Stuart Hall and Marlin Jacques *Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983). For the effect of Thatcher's policies to Reaganomics, see Russell Lewis, *Margaret Thatcher: A Personal and Political Biography* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984). For an overall picture of Thatcher's first term, see Jock Bruce-Gardyne, *Thatcher's First Administration* (London: Macmillan, 1984). Again, I'm grateful to Dane Thompson for these references.

14. John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After* (London: Methuen, 1962). 40,

15. John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (New York: Criterion Books, 1957)

16. For an early survey of this now-neglected figure in British cultural life see Harold U. Ribalow, *Arnold Wesker* (New York: Twayne, 1965). Wesker's work attempted to unite themes of the historical past and contemporary political consciousness in his first trilogy of plays dealing with a Jewish working-class family — *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1951), *Roots* (1959), and *I'm Talking a Little about Jerusalem* (1960). His 1962 play, *Chips with Everything*, dealt with the failed efforts of upper-class National Serviceman Pip (named conspicuously after the hero of *Great Expectations*) to cross class boundaries. Both the military system and ignorant working-class prejudices destroy Pip.

17. Chris, Auty, "Crises, Revivals and Revolts...dreaming of the British Cinema," *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 50:591 (April, 1983), 90,

18. Mercer later wrote screenplays such as *MORGAN — A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT* (1966) adapted from his original television play, now distributed by the BBC. See *THE GENERATIONS: A Trilogy of Plays* (London: John Calder, 1977).

for WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS (1961), A CLIMATE OF FEAR (1961), BIRTH OF A PRIVATE MAN; and ON THE EVE OF PUBLICATION (London: Methuen 1970) for ON THE EVE OF PUBLICATION (1968). THE CELLA (1968), THE ALMOND TREE and EMMA'S TIME (both 1970).

19. Don Taylor, "David Mercer's Television Drama," THE GENERATION (1970).

20. For relevant criticisms see Frederic Jameson, *The Prison House of Language* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 106-109; Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London, New Left Books, 1976) and *Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983); Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality: Aesthetics, Politics and Pleasure* (London: BFI, 1980), 29-47; Sebastião Timpanaro, *On Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 64-68, 74-78, 192-196; Simon Clarke and others, *One Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980).

21. See *The History Workshop Group* presentation, "Victorian Values," supplement in *The New Statesman* 105 (May 27th 1983), i-xvi. Again we remember the Conservative Government and Rupert-Murdoch-owned attack on the Labour Party as the "anti-traditional family," championing lesbians, blacks and one-parent families during the mid-80s.

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