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 already 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]

“If this is tomorrow's generation, then Britain has little to fear in the years to come.”
— Margaret Thatcher, 1982 Conservative Party Conference

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

To succeed in this ideological offensive, changes in historical consciousness are essential. The commercially successful CHARIOTS OF FIRE provided an initial inspiration. It contained nostalgic echoes of Britain's imperial past, anticipating the Falklands War.[2] Other examples followed such as THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN, A PASSAGE TO INDIA, and GANDHI, all favorably revising Britain's legacy of colonial oppression.[3]

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

However three films echoed the decade's predominant fear. 1984 was the year of George Orwell's 1948 warning to a future generation about the dangers of historical revisionism and cultural betrayal. Michael Radford's reverential film version eschewed the futuristic trappings of the earlier 1954 version to present a society that had not materialistically advanced since Britain's postwar austerity period. Gilliam's BRAZIL portrayed a futuristic (or parallel-world) society having no historical knowledge. The main characters were politically impotent and lost 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 Falklands 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 GERMAN SISTERS and MAN OF IRON in their collaborative venture (Johnston, 105). The film's general release was held up until alter the 1983 election. It drew uncomfortable parallels between government and personal betrayals and showed...
history cynically rewritten for political ends. THE 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, 108).

Shot in a familiar realist, literate style, THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH presents a
distanced, ironic version of those late 50s British upward mobility films whose most
appropriate progenitor is Jack Clayton's (1959) ROOM AT THE TOP.[6] Laurence
Harvey's Joe Lampton seeks upward mobility through the boss's 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 gives him
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 Vietnam 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 while rejecting his class
origins, Susan and his best friend, Jeremy (Tim Curry) betray 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
asting the revisionist history's successful completion. The film now 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 denies his class origins. The
climax presents him frozen in time — an appropriate visual 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 in British
society and cultural representations involving popular memory.

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

This whole strategy was deceitful. The British Government misinformed friendly
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 area. As a
result of United Nations' and world governments' condemnation, France and Britain
withdrew in humiliation. Churchill's successor, Prime Minister Anthony Eden,
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 British
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 against 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 the islands. 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 engaged in a barrage of patriotic and racist polemic that found its lowest level in Rupert Murdoch's *Sun* newspaper. The *Sun* greeted the illegal sinking of the Argentine Belgrano cruiser (sailing back home outside the British exclusion zone) with the headline, "Gotcha!" It also vilified slaughtered Argentine conscripts as "Argies." 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 points out, "There were no [British] interests involved, it was purely a matter of spirit, Britain's 'standing' in the world was at stake. Nothing real 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 social welfare policies of the postwar Labor Government. The character of James Penfield exemplifies this type of former liberal.

THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH argues that without commitment to past working-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, 107). Its manner of statement resembles that textual "essential absence" noted by Pierre Machery in *A Theory of Literary Production*.

"...the work exists above all by its determinate absences, by what it 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 margins, at 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 interstices between the characters, the silence between their voices, rather than in anything that is actually said. The film works on the principles, not of harmony, but of cacophany, not consensus but dissent. So Mrs. Thatcher's 'spirit of the South Atlantic' speech, with its paen 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." (Johnston, 108)

Alexander Walker sees THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH's relation to 1984 in its "same basic fear of living in a society that re-wrote the past in terms of
To properly assess the significance of THE PLOUGHAMAN’S LUNCH, we must relate it to one significant British cultural tradition. There is an ideologically forceful narrative theme crossing several generations. The protagonist is usually 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*, H.G. Wells’ inability to understand Parsons’ politics in *The History of Mr. Patty* (1909), Robert Tressell’s “Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” are all historically significant literary examples of England’s lack of radical alternatives bemoaned by 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 in society. Both plays were later filmed in the culturally stagnant era of the early 50s.

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 Osborn’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 Labor government in 1945 and then gradually became disillusioned when a brave new world failed to materialize.”

Jimmy had supposed leftist leanings. But the play refutes this. Jimmy marries upper-class Allison, anticipating the sexual/class pursuits of Joe Lampton and James Penfield. But he gains no change in social position. Constantly abusing Allison, Jimmy secretly admires his father-in-law, Colonel Redfern. The stage directions reveal both Jimmy (and author Osborne’s) real attitude: “Forty years of being a soldier sometimes conceal the essentially gentle, kindly man underneath.”

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, 84)

Jimmy is alienated, lacking any knowledge of past working-class snuggles and totally ignorant of fifties political movements (anti-nuclear, anti-Cold war) that he could have aligned himself with. Alienated individualism characterizes both THE PLOUGHMAN’S LUNCH and its antecedents in film, theater and television. Although there are exceptions — such as the work of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett as well as Trotskyist playwright Jim Allen — ahistorical, romantic alienation functions as an overwhelming force in Britain’s cultural tradition.

Despite 50s playwright Arnold Wesker’s working-class cultural education[16], post-Suez protest took the form of a kitchen-sink movement in theater and film. Working-class heroes of *LOOK BACK IN ANGER*, *SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING*, *THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER*, and *THIS SPORTING LIFE* were free so wench, booze and rage against their respective environments. But the films never posited any possibility of radical change in alliance with past historical political movements. If he were not destroyed by the system in real life, an alienated hero could always descend into a fantasy world, as did Tom Courteney in BRAZIL’s 1963 predecessor, *BILLY LIAR*. Chris Auty aptly described this movement as. “Protest, not protest It is alienation — not Marxist but misogynist.”

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, working
class fathers and disappointing, upwardly mobile offspring. The works denied any possibility of historical continuity between earlier class struggles and those of contemporary society. WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS — the first play 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. As in Mercer's later play, ON THE EVE OF PUBLICATION, the 30s proletariat are a dying breed, whose utopian vision of a better socialist world is now cruelly irrelevant.

WHERE THE DIFFERENCE BEGINS cast vaudeville comedian, Hylda Baker, as the old wife Bernie. This represents a particular British casting tradition whereby representatives of a now defunct mode of working-class entertainment portray 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's father and mother.

Mercer's final teleplay in THE GENERATION trilogy, BIRTH OF A PRIVATE MAN, focuses on the alienated, anti-nuclear protester figure of the grandson, Colin Waring (played by filmmaker Tony Garnett). Colin has retreated into insanity away from his grandfather's political legacy, the Committee of 100, the late-1950s radical wing of Britain's anti-nuclear movement (dramatist Mercer had belonged to this organization). Cohn's working-class girlfriend, Linda, is critical of his inability to link up with the working-class. Cohn eventually dies as a 'private 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 their "simple belief is impossible in a complex social situation" (italics mine), despite acknowledging Colin Waring's "cancer of nihilistic despair."[19]

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

THE PLOUGHMAN'S LUNCH presents a vision of a society seeking to destroy those inspirational historical lessons. History is rewritten for totalitarian ends. The film is the culmination of those negative roots within Britain's cultural tradition. Orwell's 1984 is now more applicable to a British media-dominated authoritarian rightwing society rather than to any supposed leftwing totalitarian 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 English Working Class, Thompson severely criticized Althusserian Marxism's negative influence upon a trendy English intellectual establishment. Althusser's revisionist platform in works such as Reading Capital elevated theory over practice in isolation from everyday class struggle.[20] THE PLOUGHMAN’S LUNCH hints at James's possible former
involvement in this Althusserian movement. A copy of Capital lies among a pile of books propping up his telephone.

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

The film's title offer an appropriate metaphor for its content. A Ploughman's Lunch is a popular English pub snack but was never historical. As television advertising director, Matthew Fox, tells James, it was a "completely successful fabrication of the past," a media strategy to attempt to persuade people to eat in pubs. This culinary manipulation thus parallels Thatcher's successful stage management of Churchillian ideology during the Falklands campaign (McEwen, 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 past 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 history 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 a publishing house party, James's upper-class friend Jeremy comments on the politics of the exclusively white guests:

"Some social democrats. Some diligent anti-communists. A Political 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 market forces determining publications. "I don't think anybody should be allowed to get a book published unless it sells at a supermarket." U.S. finance capitalism is 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 growth area of Twentieth Century Studies. James reinterprets the Suez humiliation in terms similar to 80s historical revisionism describing Vietnam as the "noble crusade." Presenting the United States as the "good ally...who tells you when to pull back," James manufactures his intellectual commodity in the new British conservative spirit engendered by the Falklands campaign. He assures Gold that he is no socialist. Gold cautions him about the freshman and sophomore college 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 Afro-Caribbean descendants of those late 40s immigrants lured to England to undertake low-paid, non-skilled work. On the underground James sits uneasily 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 now pricing the original inhabitants out of the area.

James has romantic feelings towards television researcher, Susan Barrington.
Although she is the daughter of a left-wing 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” (MeEwan, 3).

Susan has left the women’s movement after unscrupulously using it for her own 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. Selecting four minutes of edited material from an hour of complex archive information, 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-scène surrounds upper-middle-class life with signifiers of sterility and artificiality. James takes Susan to the Barbican Art Gallery — an upper-middleclass ghetto with pretentious paintings “representing various forms of aesthetic self-consciousness” (McEwan, 8). While visiting a Polytechnic James finds the students engaged in Space Invader machines instead of the political protest that occupied their late 60s predecessors.

A history professor at the Polytechnic tells James the real reasons for the Suez invasion that mirrored the British Falklands expedition — ideological manipulation, racism, and political deceit. These are factors James will ignore in his history. James then travels to Norfolk to meet Susan’s mother, Ann, in order to gain access to her Suez archives, A former leftwing historian remarried to 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 parrot-fashion. When James queries the missing Cromwells, the child Tom dismisses this seventeenth century revolutionary aspect of British history: “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 as it 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 Woman’s Peace Camp (clearly modeled on Greenham Common) protesting against U.S. nuclear missiles in England. Unlike Jimmy Porter, James has “good, brave causes left” with which he could identify. So could Ann who admits that she has retired from politics to leave the struggle to others. But James will choose misrepresentation.
and decide to ignore present realities. Ann narcissistically idealizes James after her dead brother. She nostalgically lives in the past, the former "brave new world" of the 1945 Labour Government. Thus Ann chooses to ignore the women's peace camp on her estate's doorstep. When she first seduces James, a jet fighter flies overhead — clearly armed with U.S. missiles — an ironic comment on her selfish preoccupations.

On his second visit James meets Polish historian Jacek. Jacek comments on 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 those who struggled to win them for you- Now that is why I think them is hope for the Poles, whoever occupies their country. They remember their dates, and they keep adding to them. December 1981, Gdansk 1980, 1976. 1970. Katyn 1940, 1922 and so on. It's a subversive list. Say 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 mother Ann's romantic fantasies. In their historical discussions Ann speaks of 1945's lost hopes. This was the period of the post-war Labour Government when Evelyn Waugh (of Brideshead Revisited) spoke of the country being under "enemy 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. Yet James will soon suffer the same fate. Before this class betrayal happens, he watches Matthew Fox's television commercial. This sequence acutely illustrates the advertising media's ideological distortions of history and gender roles. In a studio set James sees a "deeply contented pre-war middle-class sitting room." It resembles Margaret Thatcher's imaginary thirties world where the real historical issues of poverty, unemployment and economic depression are absent. Inside the sitting room is a "typical family," a key ideological construction in her platform of Victorian-derived middle class values.[21] The screenplay succinctly describes patriarchally proscribed rigid family stereotypes:

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

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

Unlike Joe Lampton, James fails to obtain his "room at the top." The new, rigid, 80s class barriers will not allow him entry. The final image shows James in a freeze frame optical zoom. Impatiently glancing at his watch during his mother's funeral, unobserved by his grief-stricken father, James becomes frozen in a petrified ahistorical frame. It is an appropriate punishment for his complicity in the political distortions and cultural betrayals that characterize 80s England. The final scene mirrors Britain's contemporary stagnant condition. Unless there is concerted radical opposition toward authoritarian revising past history, 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: Metheun, 1985), 18. All future quotations are from the published screenplay.


5. The parallels between Orwell's 1984 and BRAZIL will be the subject of my 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.


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 Films of the 1980s" for this historical information. Relevant sources include Anthony Nutting, No End of A Lesson (London; Constable 1967); Anthony Moncrieff, Suez — Ten Years After (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1967), 107-116; and Roy Fullick and Geoffrey Powell, Suez: The Double War (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1979).


9. On the Falkland Conflict's political significance see the special "War in the Falklands" issue of New Left Review 34 (July-August 1982), especially Anthony Barnett's article "Iron Britannia, 6-7, on the ideological uses of propaganda. See also Paul Foot, "How the Peace Was Torpedoed," New Statesman 105 (May 13, 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 ideological use of World War II imagery in the affair, see Geoff Hurd (ed). National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television (London: BFI, 1984),


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 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 class system and ignorant working-class prejudices destroy Pip.


Forgetting. JAMES. History books are first onto the. bonfires. ANN. If we leave the remembering to. historians then the struggle is. already lost. Everyone must have. a memory, everyone needs to be a. historian. In this country, for.Â A completely. successful fabrication of the past, the Ploughman's Lunch was. We look at James's plate, the unappetising food. Matthew. takes a long drink. MATTHEW. Listen, James. There's something. The Ploughman's Lunch. Synopsis: James Penfield has made a career out of journalism. Now bankrupt, he finds himself with a group of other writers in the middle of the dispute-ridden British homeland at the time of the Falklands War.Â Style:MLA Chicago APA. "The Ploughman's Lunch" Scripts.com. STANDS4 LLC, 2019. Web. 19 Jan. 2019. . Powered by CITE.ME. We need you!