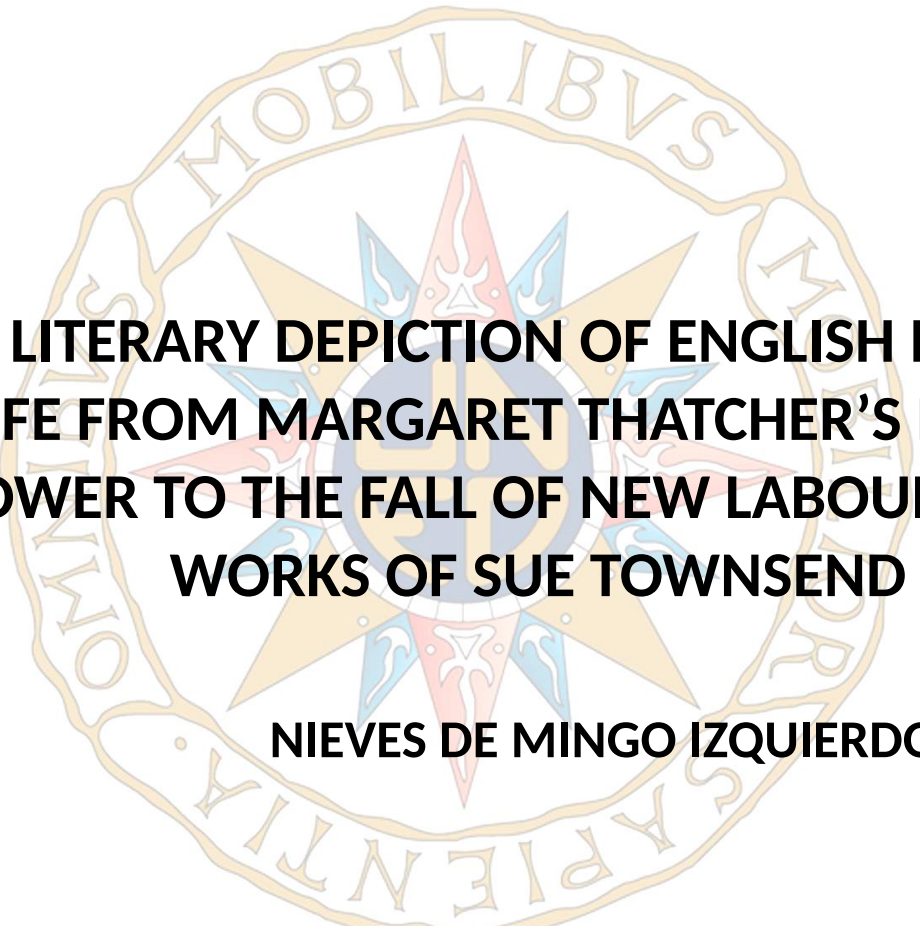


TESIS DOCTORAL

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**THE LITERARY DEPICTION OF ENGLISH EVERYDAY
LIFE FROM MARGARET THATCHER'S RISE TO
POWER TO THE FALL OF NEW LABOUR IN THE
WORKS OF SUE TOWNSEND**

NIEVES DE MINGO IZQUIERDO

**PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO EN FILOLOGÍA.
ESTUDIOS LINGÜÍSTICOS Y LITERARIOS: TEORÍA Y
APLICACIONES**

DIRECTOR: ANTONIO ANDRÉS BALLESTEROS GONZÁLEZ

To Adrian, Pandora, George, Pauline, Bert, Grandma, Nigel, Barry,
Glenn, Edward, Jack, Adèle, The Queen, Beverly, Spiggy.....

And to their mother, Sue Townsend, for so many laughs.

Also to my dear friend Pilar Rodríguez Arancón.

“Are you a teacher?” I ventured. “No”, he said, “I’m leading a research project on popular culture. We are trying to establish why people go out to pubs, discos, bingo sessions, to the cinema, that sort of thing”. “It’s to enjoy themselves, isn’t it?” I said. Palmer laughed again. “Yeah, but I’ve got to stretch that very simplistic answer into a three-year study and a seven-hundred page book”.

Sue Townsend. *Adrian Mole. The Wilderness Years*

I could never discover where to start. How do you find the distance and the cool to write in an academically approved style about something that makes you spin, wobble and weep?

Stephen Fry. *Making History*

Lefebvre descubrió tarde el papel de lo cotidiano frente a lo histórico, descubrió tarde que siempre tienen razón los días laborables.

Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. *El hombre de mi vida*

She will be working from nine in the morning until two o’clock today, at which point she will return to Sunset Park and put in another few hours on her dissertation, forcing herself to sit at her desk until six-thirty, trying to eke out another paragraph or two.

Paul Auster. *Sunset Park*

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“... Where there is despair, may we bring hope” (Thatcher, 1979). Quoting Saint Francis of Assisi, Margaret Thatcher pronounced her first unofficial statement at the door of 10, Downing Street after having just been appointed Prime Minister by Queen Elizabeth II. Hardly could her country fellows imagine that her successive terms of office would constitute one of the most significant periods in the history of the contemporary United Kingdom, neither were there, at that moment, any hints of the profound impact she was going to have on British life and the long lasting consequences of her “Iron Lady” politics.

Ten years later, Sue Townsend, in her work *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts Aged 14½*, included in a larger novel, would imagine the discipline, self-restraint and right-wing conservatism which had probably governed the childhood of the future Prime Minister: “If the filthy socialists ever do take power I shall refuse to drink free school milk. If the poor cannot afford to buy it then they must go without” (Townsend, 1989, p.217). Previous works by the same writer had already shown different characters subjected to the Thatcherite politics, described in a laughable but highly critical way. Townsend, certainly not content with that, would continue to practice her severe criticism of successive governments, depicting the rise and fall of New Labour together with the fading of the intended hopes raised, if not by Thatcher or her successor John Major, then undoubtedly by the following brand New Labour PM: Tony Blair.

Just one year after the publishing of the cited work, a young Spanish brother and sister used to be glued to the TV screen every Sunday evening to watch the series *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 and ¾* broadcast by Spanish national TV Channel 2. They were highly amused and howled with laughter at the misfortunes of the protagonist, not failing, nevertheless, to notice the “hard times” that some

of the characters in a working class suburban area in middle England, were living through. Margaret Thatcher's politics had caused redundancy to spiral upwards, leading soon to pre-war figures, public services were being dismantled and the primary sector was about to collapse. The youngsters were my brother and I. I certainly enjoyed the show a great deal although was still quite far from realizing the role that Sue Townsend, her life and works, and her most famous character, Adrian Mole, were going to play in my life. Reading Townsend's books started as entertainment, soon turned into a passion and, with the passing of time, into a piece of academic research which intends to shed some light on several issues arising from her pages.

Thus, personal motivation has led me to perform the self-imposed task of trying to read between the lines of one of my favourite writers' words in order to discover the tricks of her trade and the keys to decipher the codes and modes in which her works are placed within the literature and history of her own time.

1.1 Justification for the research and research objectives

Since enjoying an author's works a great deal did not seem a strong enough argument to justify a research of this kind, once the idea of working on Sue Townsend came to my mind, I delved into the pages of her books in order to find some interpretative keys of a deeper dimension. In addition, I tried to obtain further information about her in the usual general sources (literature encyclopedias and the like) but this was a vain endeavour and, in a way, provoked some of the questions that I consider the starting point of my work.

On the one hand, I was interested in studying the surprising fact of not finding any reference to Sue Townsend in the sources I initially consulted, despite the author's alleged popularity. This led me to question the concept of "popular author" and as a result, of "popular literature" and the generalized assumptions around it, particularly from the scholarly point of view, which resulted in an interesting realisation of some of the characteristics of the evolution of literature criticism from the 1950s of the twentieth century onwards.

On the other hand, my personal interest in history accounts for the historical dimension of the study as I wanted to go beyond the limits of Sue Townsend's literary production, trying to find the connections between the historical facts and the personal stories of her characters thus tracing a schematic design which

could relate history, stories and literature in order to study how both disciplines are closely interwoven in this case, and have their reflection in the fictional lives of the characters populating Townsend's books.

Both perspectives, theoretical and historical, cannot fail to pay attention to the specific ways in which Sue Townsend develops her literary output as some of her books display distinct literary forms and her whole production covers different genres. Had this wide diversity been taken into account this research would have exceeded the pre-established limits. Therefore, the scope of the analysis was restricted to a certain number of Townsend's works, precisely the ones I considered as the best representatives in order to meet the above mentioned objectives, as specified later. Nevertheless, attention has been given to technical matters due to the imprint that some formats (fictive diary, for instance) have left on the rest of the narrative constituents of Townsend's fiction. My main purpose was to attempt to "read the everyday" of the components, practices and situations depicted by Townsend as inseparable from the context in which they are inserted either narratively or historically.

1.1.1 Popular Literature vs. Highbrow Literature

According to the opinion of the most traditional scholars and specialists in academic circles, being a popular, best-selling author, widely recognized by ordinary people in their everyday lives, would seem to imply that the literary quality of his/her work is practically non-existent and the author is nothing but a disgrace to the trade, whose books are written merely to satisfy the consumerist hunger of an avid, but certainly uninformed, mass of readers. If only the Encyclopedia Britannica expressed a different, and more "diplomatic" position. . . :

Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Popular literature, unlike high literature, generally does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure. ("Popular Literature", 2015)

Such a polemic between popular and high literature had one of its highest representatives in F.R. Leavis for part of the first decades of the twentieth century. In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930), Leavis considers literature as something to be comprehended and appreciated only by a cultivated minority: "In every period it is often a very small minority that the discerning appreciation

of art and literature depends on, it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgement” (Leavis in Storey, Ed., 2006, p.11). In addition, Leavis reproduces an extract of Edward Rice Burroughs correspondence which says “the general public does not wish to think. (...) I have evolved, therefore, a type of fiction that may be read with the minimum of mental effort” (2006, p.11). Leavis himself adds that Burroughs was selling at the moment “over a million copies a year” (2006, p. 11). Thus massive sales implied low quality as the masses, unprepared to palate the most delicate literature and to grasp its richness in full detail, were content with their massively sold literature which required no extra effort to be understood.

In this context, Sue Townsend’s literature would be nothing but superficial. However, she was greeted as the most popular author of the 1980s of the twentieth century in Britain and her literary characters achieved an incredibly wide circulation in the media. In addition, in 2007, some years after the first broadcast of Nigel Mole’s adventures¹ and the staging of her first play, Sue Townsend was given honorary doctorates by both the University of Leicester and Loughborough University. It seems that popular literature had reached the ancient realms of high literature, and was there to stay.

Maybe the use of these literary critique references could be considered as old-fashioned nowadays, as time passes for theories and theoreticians alike, but traditions die hard, sometimes just evolve into new paradigms adapted to new times. With the advent of Postmodernism, it seemed that the Great Divide between highbrow and popular literature was solved. The scholarly treatment of literature opened up to popular manifestations which were given scholar attention. However, as in 1977 Neuburg stated, “popular literature offers us a window -and it is certainly no more than this – upon the world of ordinary men and women” (Neuburg, 1977, p.12). Nevertheless, some authors, such as Sue Townsend herself, remained out of academic and scholar attention, which leads us to question of whether popular literature, and specifically Townsend’s works are so far from the literary critical currents present in most academic domains. So it seems, according to the explicitly stated postulates of the Great Tradition. And so it seems, as well, according to the Postmodern “tradition” that, apparently embraced a more comprehensive approach to literature by cancelling the alleged clash between popular and highbrow literature, something proved wrong, for instance, by

¹The famous character was named Nigel Mole at the beginning, turning into Adrian Mole right before the publication of the first book of the series as we shall see later.

the scarcity of entries about Townsend in anthologies and referential volumes.²

Literary Postmodernism has left (and leaves) such a lasting impression on literature that even the most popular books by the most popular authors show traits of it. And Townsend's are no exception as proved by her paramount creation, *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, a series which presents an interesting example of a metafictional game, fully accomplishing the famous general description of the term coined by Patricia Waugh (1984), particularly as far as the relationship between fiction and reality is concerned. In addition, Townsend's ways of fashioning some of her most celebrated works are also quite experimental as she plays with dystopian visions of a not so distant 1984-style future or re-writings of popular tropes. Thus, from a formal perspective, it could be said that Sue Townsend's works are not alien to the codes of the literary trends of her time, demonstrating both, the hoax of clear-cut classifications when attaching labels to literary products and the futility of the debate "highbrow vs. popular literature" which is still open (Ward, 2009). Moreover, issues such as race, class, gender, Englishness, etc., so dear to Postmodern authors, pervade Townsend's works which implies that her literature is not so far from the generalised literary current which deals with these topics as its flagship.

1.1.2 Sue Townsend's Narrative: What and How

Other than these previous considerations, the task of defining the proper coordinates of Townsend's literature leads one to place part of her works in the literary reaction to Thatcherism (Head, 2002). However, her criticism is not only a literary pose but also the result of personal experience which, albeit disguised with an acute sense of humour, does not fail to reflect the main facts of her time, deeply marking the author's depiction of characters and situations. And precisely those characters and situations, and the way in which the political and economic circumstances influence their lives are some of the key elements in Townsend's fiction. Far from the alleged superficiality of the characters populating the best-sold books, if we credit the definition provided by the Encyclopedia Britannica, Townsend's creatures display a depth which derives in most cases from the author's mastery of literary resources when describing them or reproducing their words:

²The terms "tradition" and "established" have been used here not rhetorically but with full awareness of their implications as, in my view, Postmodernism has already reached the level of Establishment as far as Academia is concerned.

ROYAL WEDDING DAY!!!! How proud I am to be English! Foreigners must be as sick as pigs! We truly lead the world when it comes to pageantry! I must admit to having tears in my eyes when I saw all the cockneys who had stood since dawn, cheering heartily all the rich, well-dressed, famous people going by in carriages and Rolls-Royces. (Townsend,1991, p. 98)

In addition, Townsend's acute criticism is not constrained to the strict limits of Margaret Thatcher's term of office, when she starts writing, but persists throughout Major's, Blair's and Brown's governments, offering a vivid fresco of the development of British politics as "suffered" by its citizens and meeting, at the same time, some of the requirements of the most prevalent, modern-day literary trends when dealing with topics such as sexuality, gender and class issues, Englishness, suburban literary spaces, etc.

From all the above mentioned, it is easily deduced that the task of establishing the basic aims of this research is not an easy one, but for the sake of clarity when trying to reduce the scope of this work, I will focus mainly on the following objectives:

- To discover the ways in which Sue Townsend depicts the political, economic and social circumstances of her time and the way they affect the everyday lives of the characters populating her works, paying special attention to the mechanisms and literary tools she uses. The period between Margaret Thatcher's rise to power and the resignation of Tony Blair as Prime Minister (with occasional references to the subsequent governments of Gordon Brown and David Cameron) has been chosen as the time frame, for both periods are essential milestones in the recent history of Britain and have undoubtedly marked the lives of its people. Therefore, History and Literature and the way in which both relate and interact will be the general base of the study.
- To consider diverse aspects such as the dimension of this widely recognized popularity achieved by Townsend and the apparent conflict between her kind of literature and the more academic works produced by other authors highly praised by literary critics which provide the referential literary framework of Sue Townsend's production. By using this framework, the links which connect her to the literary trends of her time will be identified in order to prove that the label "popular literature" means neither a lack of expertise or literary concern on the part of the writer who practices it nor isolation from the current of literary critique of the moment.

To that end further analysis of the following aspects will be attempted:

- The evolution of the concept of everyday life as a research category and the dimension it acquires in the case of Sue Townsend's production, which may lead to consider the extent of its presence in the author's narrative.
- The discursive representation of the spatial and temporal dimensions that impose upon Townsend's characters and determine the way they operate and the scope of their agency.
- The specific components of identity to which Townsend pays more attention and how she uses them to construct the literary selves of their characters as representatives of certain social models.
- The ways in which all these previous elements relate to each other so as to provide a wide vision of the social and historical side of the author's narrative.
- The most salient traits of Townsend's writings and whether these are representatives of the general modes considered as characteristic of the best regarded literature of her time or specific peculiarities of this author in particular.
- Whether all the aspects covered in this thesis as depicted by Townsend allow the reader to obtain a general picture of the actual time, place and people of Britain and, in doing so, to conclude whether literature may function as a source of knowledge of a concrete day and age.
- The significance of Sue Townsend's popularity in both economic and literary terms.
- The reasons why an author of such a profligacy of readings, perspectives to be approached and sides to explore is the object of such a scarce or non-existent attention on the part of scholarly research.
- The different aspects on the debate between popular and high-brow literature that the study of these topics in Townsend's literature may offer.

1.2 Approach and Methodology

Sue Townsend is an author who can be approached from a multiplicity of perspectives. In this case, I have decided to focus mainly on the relationship between

literature and history and to leave aside other possible views such as gender or the different genres she practised. Starting from a previous approach to the bulk of her work in order to obtain a global impression, I was forced to restrict my research on a secondary reading to those works which seemed to display greater connections with their historical and sociocultural context, and therefore, with my interests in question.

From this point of view, my intention was to reflect on the pervasiveness of history, the ways in which it filters into literature, how literary works, and specifically Townsend's, distil the essence of time and the resulting literary product, ready to be tasted and, in the case of Townsend, with a long-lasting aftertaste. This approach follows Hawkes consideration of the text:

Nor as a mere product of culture -a reflection of ideas and ideologies produced elsewhere-but as one realm among many for the negotiation and production of social meaning, of historical subjects and of the systems of power that at once enable and constrain those subjects. (Hawkes, 1996, p.19)

For this reason, a close reading process in the full academic sense of the term, regarding a detailed examination of what the texts say and how they say it, in terms defined and contained by these same texts only has not been but occasionally attempted. In addition, I am afraid that I have fallen into both intentional and affective fallacies (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004) for I consider the intention of Townsend's works as clearly showed in her production and, at the same time, I cannot fail but acknowledge the emotional component present in the whole process of writing this thesis. Nevertheless, attention has been given to technical matters due to the imprint that some formats (fictive diary, for instance) have left on the rest of the narrative constituents of Townsend's fiction. My main purpose was to attempt to "read the everyday" of the components, practices and situations depicted by Townsend as inseparable from the context in which they are inserted either narratively or historically.

Other than the angle chosen to study Townsend's narrative, the gender perspective is paramount to understand part of it. It is essential when dealing with some of her works, such as *Rebuilding Coventry* or *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year*, and most of her plays like *Womberang*, *Ten Tiny Toes* and *The Great Celestial Cow*. This approach has not been fully developed in this research, just considered somehow partially as it would have deserved a complete research itself. However, it is necessary to link part of Sue Townsend's perception of gender (she

takes a clear feminist stance) with the gender politics both officially and unofficially instilled by Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, which is the perspective of the topic I have chosen to follow, therefore leaving aside deeper considerations on Townsend's treatment of gender issues.

Apart from the presentation of the author and her placement in her sociocultural coordinates, the analysis of her works has turned around different elements arranged into two blocks:

- A first section regarding the most important thematic keys which deal with three concepts, namely, time, space and identity components. By studying the treatment of these elements I was able to cover a great deal of the multiplicity of variables inserted in Townsend's narrative. In turn, the study of the three of them has facilitated the extraction of a clear idea of how they all relate to each other. It is the attempt to systematize these connections which has been the greatest difficulty I had to face.
- A second section describing what I considered the main narrative components of Townsend's works and their analogies and references in the literary production of other authors. All this, complemented with a brief description of her method and approach to the different topics present in her pages.

1.3 Sources

The sources studied to elaborate this research are of different kinds: primary, in turn, divided into published and archived ones and secondary, consisting of the studies carried out by other researchers and submitted in different formats. Further references, necessary so as to frame Townsend's production properly, have been consulted and are found in the last section of this thesis.

1.3.1 Bibliographic corpus

These direct sources include the editions of those books written by Sue Townsend of special interest for this research. Townsend plays with many different topics in her works and her global production turns around some of them but greater attention has been paid to those who have a bigger historical and sociopolitical dimension. Others which refer to a more sociological realm and, unless at first sight, do not deal with historical matters were not totally discarded but less dealt with. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the following volumes:

- These I have termed as *The Adrian Mole Diaries*:
 - *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 and 3/4* (1982). Most of the times and for the sake of brevity I have used a shorter reference, namely *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*.
 - *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* (1984). These first two books and some other pieces with Adrian as the protagonist were included in a single volume entitled *Adrian Mole from Minor to Major* (1991) which is the one used for this research.
 - *Adrian Mole, the Wilderness Years* (1994).
 - *Adrian Mole, the Cappuccino Years* (1999).
 - *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2004).
 - *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole* (2008).
 - *Adrian Mole. The Prostrate Years* (2009).
 - *Mr. Bevan's Dream* (1989).
 - *The Queen and I* (1993).
 - *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole, Susan Lilian Townsend and Margaret Hilda Roberts* (2003). On some occasions I have considered just one of these three personal “confessions”, as if it were an isolated volume.
 - *Number Ten* (2003).
 - *The Public Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman* (2003).
 - *Queen Camilla* (2006).
 - Occasional references to Townsend’s plays *The Great Celestial Cow* and *Ten Tiny fingers Nine Tiny Toes* (1990) and to *Rebuilding Coventry* (1989).

The Adrian Mole Diaries series was essential for this research, as nobody like this stressed and obsessive pseudo-intellectual to describe the changing scenario of British politics and the way it affects the average citizen, from the moment he starts writing the entries of his diary, during the first term of Margaret Thatcher, till we find him under treatment for his prostate cancer with David Cameron occupying 10, Downing Street. However, although his diaries encompass the whole period, I have selected mainly the references to Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair’s premierships as the period covered by their tenures is of great significance

for the country. *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla*, have a clear value as far as their character of political speculation and dystopian vision of British society, respectively, are concerned. *Number Ten* is the key to unveil Townsend's vision of Tony Blair and the New Labour period. *The Great Celestial Cow* is a great representative of both Townsend's playwright production and the reflection of British reality regarding topics such as gender, race and Englishness which were so deeply inserted in the literature of Townsend's times. So is *Ten Tiny Fingers*, *Nine Tiny Toes* which offers a dystopian vision of eugenics expressed in terms of class. *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole*, *Susan Lilian Townsend and Margaret Hilda Roberts* is an interesting game between fiction and reality which offers multiple dimensions to analyse while toying with real and imagined memories and recollections of characters whose ontology is constantly put into question.

I have not considered Townsend's contributions to newspapers and magazines as such, exceptions made only with some of her pieces, mostly the ones collected in *The True Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman* if referred to the topics under consideration. From the so-called "discarded" works, (most of her plays and a group of novels which could not be considered of a comic character, namely the main body of *Rebuilding Coventry*, *Ghost Children* and *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year*, some very interesting topics could be the object of further research.

1.3.2 Archived materials

Apart from the printed books, I had the opportunity to check Sue Townsend's personal archive, donated by her family to Leicester University and currently preserved in the Special Collections section of the David Wilson University Library. The files are chronologically arranged and contain all the materials kept by Sue Townsend herself concerning her whole production. Not only the manuscripts, but also typed copies of them with the corrections of the publishers, drafts, discarded materials (which sometimes include complete sequences deleted in the published work), personal letters, faxes, newspaper reviews, promotional ads, marketing campaigns materials, book cover designs, etc., everything kept in a long list of files neatly arranged, safeguarded and cared for by the most helpful staff of the Special Collections section at the David Wilson Library. This way, those quotes extracted from Townsend's personal archives are termed as "DWL" -which stands for David Wilson Library- and their correspondent folder and document numbers.

Sue Townsend's collection is so extensive (some files have arrived at the University Library from her family only recently) that the full catalogue was still unfinished by the time of my visit to the David Wilson Library as the author kept every scrap of paper related to her work. It was extremely touching to see and read *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* manuscript, to check the corrections and paragraphs deleted and the changes the author progressively introduced. Sadly, due to time restrictions I was able only to revise files related to *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, *Adrian Mole, the Cappuccino Years*, *The Queen and I*, *Number Ten* and *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year* (this last one, very briefly). However, further topics for study also arose during these intense sessions at the David Wilson Library, as I will mention later.

1.3.3 General and specific references

These references include the bibliography detailed in the last section of bibliography. They take into account general reference volumes on contemporary English literature, revised with the double scope of having a global perception of the literary world in which Townsend was inscribed and on the other hand of searching for references to her in these global approaches. The effort amounted to nothing as she does not appear in any of them for reasons to be analysed in chapter two. As this research deals with literature and the production of this field cannot be separated from the context in which it arises, the bibliography includes a number of volumes on diverse topics such as history, politics, sociology, cultural studies, etc. in order to help complete the understanding of the historical, social and economic background of Sue Townsend's works, and not only the literary one. This section includes, as well, other types of materials and references to be found mainly in the Internet, such as political speeches, extracts from TV series, songs and lyrics, etc. whose links are also provided.

Wishing to complete this section with the previous academic research on Sue Townsend, I realised its location was quite a difficult task. During the 1980s and early 1990s, mainly after the huge success of the first volumes of *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, Sue Townsend was the object of some master's degree dissertations. Years later, further research has appeared which deals with different aspects of Townsend's narrative by presenting a wider perspective through the introduction of part of her works as representatives of a sociocultural tendency or by describing the treatment of certain topics through different literary sources, among them, some Townsend's novels. So far, it has not been possible to find out any references to courses or lectures on Sue Townsend.

The majority of the sources about her and her works are of a journalistic nature and, therefore, to be taken into consideration, only when referring to the specific aspects of the author's works they cover. The information about dissertations and theses I include here has been either obtained from the documents kept at the Special Collections section of the David Wilson Library in Leicester University or retrieved from the Internet.

The first dissertation on Sue Townsend dates back to the academic year 1986-87 and is kept at the David Wilson Library. Written by Florence Robin of Bordeaux III University, it is entitled *Adrian Mole: Literary Phenomenon of the 1980's in England*. Absolutely descriptive and somehow naive, the author missed the opportunity provided by a personal interview with Sue Townsend and the paper becomes a series of platitudes with very little interpretation about the literary essence of the character of Adrian Mole.

Through references found in some files of Townsend's personal correspondence, I came to know that some other postgraduates in France, Norway and Belgium, had been working on different topics related to Sue Townsend's creations, focusing on the treatment of Adrian Mole adaptations to theatre in Belgium, the translation into Italian of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* or certain aspects of Townsend's writing studied from the point of view of theory of literature. However, the references to these works are confused and no more than a list of names (Veronique Renard, Anne Brumagne or Kristina Stihlery) came to light but it was quite difficult to identify their specific field of study and the clues have not led to any coherent evidence on the Internet. What seems clear is that Sue Townsend called the attention mainly of female researchers not fully established in academic positions yet, which may respond to a necessity to be innovative in the writing of dissertations and theses and, in addition, that this attention was given to Townsend from a very early stage of her career as a writer, which is symptomatic of both the interest on popular women writers and the impact of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* in the studies on literature of the period.

In 1993, Jurgen Willems from the Faculty of Letters of Wijsbegeerte, Ghent University, entitles his dissertation *A Comprehensive Study of the Non-Dramatic Work of Sue Townsend* guided, unsurprisingly, by the same reasons as in my very same case: personal preference and utter surprise for the fact that so little research had been done on the most popular British author of the 1980s. Both of us deal with topics such as the links between Townsend's personal life and her works, some technical elements, her humour or the reasons for her popularity. However, Willems's approach is quite descriptive and full (in my view) of appreciations

badly suited for research of this kind.³

Different aspects of Townsend's treatment of the figures Queen Elizabeth II and her Royal Family are studied by Claudia Sein in her master's degree dissertation *Constructions of The Queen in Contemporary British Fiction* (Sein, 2010) read at Vienna University. The author focuses on the discursive use of humour to build the public image of the Royals but used by Townsend mainly to criticize "their rank in society and people's attitudes towards them" (p. 122). As far as my research is concerned, Townsend's portrayal of the Royal family and Queen Elizabeth will be analysed as inserted in a wider contextual reference, with special attention to the narrative device developed by the author, particularly in Queen Camilla.

Adrian Mole as a comic creation and the implications of the use of the fictive diary technique have been approached by scholars such as Alcina Maria Pereira de Sousa with "Adrian Mole's Saga or an Instance of Common Readers' Emotional Involvement with Satire" (2009), where she studies the reader's agency on Adrian Mole and "Adrian Strikes back with Style and Humour" (2009) where she deals with the "maps of meaning" that, depicted through the mechanism of humour, conform to the sociocultural and stylistic references of Adrian Mole books.

Elena Xenii (2010) of Cyprus University, has focused on the treatment of humour and diverse aspects around it such as translation. She has referred to *The Adrian Mole Diaries* in relation with the use of humour in children's literature and has described how Adrian Mole's diary responds to the worries and necessities of what she terms third-group children, those pre-teenagers entering adolescence.

The Adrian Mole Diaries have also been the object of some specific studies on both, translation, especially regarding the difficulties of translating sociocultural references (Desmet, 1999)⁴ and the use of literary texts such as *The Adrian Mole Diaries* in the EFL classroom (Clouet & Boylan 2003).

As we see, the popular character of Adrian Mole has offered the opportunity to reflect on some issues concerning diverse aspects either of the format in which it was introduced or the content of the books with interesting perspectives in all cases.

The latest contribution I could trace with reference to Townsend's works is *British Intellectuals and Blairism: Counter-Hegemonic Voices during Tony Blair's Pre-*

³Such as "Sue Townsend is now a very rich woman". or "Anyhow, chain-smoking Townsend continued to lead a rather busy life" (Willems, 1993, p 3)

⁴Cfr. Chapter 2 about the reception of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* in the United States.

miership, Betsabé Navarro Romero's thesis read at Universidade de Santiago de Compostela in 2015, which includes references to Sue Townsend in the context of intellectual reactions to Blairite Britain. Navarro depicts Townsend as a kind of organic intellectual and describes her as a "systematic counter-power voice that, loyal to the social principles she claimed to defend, opposed her own party when it suddenly betrayed the working class and turned its back on the poor" (Navarro 2015, p. 197). I could not agree more.

1.4 General Outline

So popular and prolific an author as Sue Townsend cannot be approached solely from one point of view, as the perception of her work would, inevitably, not include important aspects which contribute to various extents to the conformation of her literary world. Therefore, not disregarding the primary objectives of this research, this study will try to cover them in successive chapters.

Chapter one tries, as we see, to establish the starting point of the research: where we are, where to go, how to do it, the basic routes to be followed and the main sources of information from where to extract the data. As usual, and this work is no exception, it took a long time to be completed, with constant shaping and reshaping, and never entirely to the satisfaction of its author.

Chapter two intends to place Sue Townsend's works within the adequate conceptual coordinates in order to establish a proper theoretical framework to contextualise her production, devoting special attention to the term "popular culture" and more specifically to the studies of everyday life and the author's personal vision of British politics and its literary portrayal and how it affects the lives of people. With the passing of time, these facts, representative of momentary political decisions, have turned into historical facts and their depiction has similarly turned into a historical vision. Thus, Townsend's discourse on Margaret Thatcher's politics, for example, which occupies a significant part of her books has become a literary source on the times of Thatcher's tenure. Sue Townsend's perception of the main protagonists of history and politics is one of an ordinary citizen who suffers the consequences of the Great History. She offers us the vision of ordinary people with the background of a very specific context and, most of the times, she does it with reference to class and gender. Townsend's characters, although comic on many occasions, are deeply affected by important political and economic facts which will shape their personalities and actions and, eventually, lead to an unmistakable identification of the readers with the literary characters.

A further theoretical issue would derive from this point: is Literature capable of informing us about historical facts? I will try to provide an answer for this question in light of the data obtained from the research.

Chapter three approaches Sue Townsend as both author and woman. The intention is to explain the main facts of Townsend's biography particularly the ones indissolubly linked to her writing. In addition, some of her indispensable works will be singled out together with a possible explanation for their persistence in the memory of so many readers and lists of best-sold books. In addition, I will attempt to contextualize Sue Townsend's output within the literary trends of her time, her ascendancy to the highest honours in so-called popular literature (as opposed to the highbrow literature) and her main themes and motifs. Special attention will be given to the reception of her works and the different adaptations to radio, stage and television of her most famous ones: *The Adrian Mole Diaries* and *The Queen and I*. The term "reception" will be considered from two angles; the theoretical, referring to the reception on the part of the readers as readers themselves, thus considering the special literary aspects of Townsend's works in the moment of the active reading, and the more "material" one, regarding the fact that the love of her readers has turned into money, sales having reached high levels and the popularity of our author growing hand in hand with it.

Chapter four will try to come to terms with the main thematic lines developed by Townsend's narrative, that is, time, space and identity, and the different relationships among them. The first section devoted to time covers the connections between both history and story, with the relevant facts, characters and discourses of Townsend's time and their influence on people's lives. Thatcher and Blair are the main political poles around which the facts of the works considered turn. Social mythology also operates as far as the perception of the welfare state is concerned and I will analyse Townsend's contribution to it. Special attention will be paid to the depiction of war which provides the background to some of her character's actions. with an interesting turn in the tone of her discourse with the passing of time, ranging from mocking to critical, this time in the most touching way. The different locations that frame character's actions in Townsend's works are not trivial but possess certain characteristics highly exploited by the author. These locations are linked to the characters by social, economic and affective ties and the different degrees of interconnectedness among them provides Townsend with a vast array of narrative possibilities I will try to unveil. Likewise, identity and its main components are capital when addressing Townsend's narrative. This is loaded with countless references to class, gender, sexuality, race or age to which

I have devoted different sections of the chapter.

This way, personal stories that develop against the wide overview of historical facts are the key elements to be taken into account. Townsend's characters grow up, reproduce and die before our eyes, living their lives with better or worse fortune, moving in spaces either public or private, local or cosmopolitan, and defining their identities in terms of class, gender, sexuality, race or age. They are the main pieces in the rich mosaic of the author's literature. Not to be forgotten are the references they make to the big issues, myths, people and personalities of their time that will be analysed as well.

Chapter five will focus on the narrative keys of Townsend's works. The implications of the literary forms she chose, such as the use of the fictive diary, the touches of metafiction she included here and there in her works or her dystopian visions of the immediate future, paying special attention to humour as a literary tool and the role (again) of the reader in the full appreciation of the puns and witticism displayed in her lines, with special references to the connections between Townsend and other authors, either Postmodern or classical.

Chapter six will draw together a summary of the most important points touched by this research and its main conclusions, in an attempt to answer the questions posed in chapter one, and the possible subsequent lines of study of Sue Townsend as an essential representative of a specific type of literature. At the end of the thesis, the reader will find the list of references, together with an appendix with some extra materials to be taken into account.

1.5 Note on quotations

The richness of Townsend's narrative is so extraordinary that when trying to analyse the different aspects it covers I realised that, on some occasions, these could be illustrated by using the same quotations. For this reason, some of them are repeated in different sections of this research for they proved to be extremely useful so as to exemplify the issues at hand. In addition, there are sections in which the citing conventions have not been strictly respected and several quotations referred to the same matter have been included in a list format in order to stress the pervasiveness of certain elements throughout Townsend's narrative.

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SUE TOWNSEND' S WORK

The contextualisation of Sue Townsend's production must be addressed from the double perspective provided by both the conceptual references about literary depiction, everyday life and historical time, and the specific cultural and literary ambiance of her time.

The term *literary depiction* gives way to an interesting discussion on the relationship between narrative and reality and the ways they both interact. The *everyday*, as part of that reality, has been discussed by different disciplines, including the literary critique as it constitutes a paramount component of human existence and therefore of artistic production. Finally, narratives cannot get rid of the *historical time* in which they arise through the, sometimes subtle, sometimes evident, constraints, modes or fashions that shape the eventually finished narration.

In addition, literary narratives do not spring up in isolation but inevitably participate in the cultural context of the time and place in which they are produced. In this sense, it is interesting to study how they comply with or contest the general trends imposed by either well established traditions or temporarily fashionable trends.

2.1 Theoretical frame

2.1.1 Literary depiction

The next-door-neighbour condition of most of Townsend's characters and their vicissitudes contribute to create a feeling of proximity in which the readers get

inevitably involved to a greater extent than in the case of other literary products which take them to alien worlds difficult to feel identified with:

Me and mum went shopping today. We bought a Habitat lamp-shade for her bedroom and a new pair of trousers for me. They are dead good, really tight. We had a Chinese Businessman's Lunch and then went to see a Monty Python film all about the life of Jesus. It was dead daring, I felt guilty laughing. (Townsend, 1991, p. 66)

The acknowledgement of this common ground which Townsend's actual readers and her literary characters do share has led me to question whether her narrative and the literary depiction of characters and the world around them could be a faithful reflection of life so as to provide valuable information about the sociohistorical context in which it is inserted. However, a previous question of a more theoretical nature is triggered by the use of the term "literary depiction", namely the extent to which literature can represent the world and therefore, as far as this research is concerned, whether it can depict everyday life within the specific context in which Townsend's production developed. In this sense, any reference to literary depiction must deal, inevitably, with the notion of mimesis, the well-known concept which, dating back to Plato and especially Aristotle, establishes the absolute belief that art imitates nature by means of representation. Therefore, there are several elements at stake in the whole system that the idea of mimesis poses. On the one hand the relationship between both fictive and real worlds and on the other hand the extent to which the representation is faithful to the actual object, that is, according to Goodman "the nature of vision and of representation, and the problem of reconciling the objectivity of the latter with its conventionality and the relativity of vision" (Goodman in Frigg & Hunter Eds., 2010, p. xviii).

Auerbach's seminal contribution to the concept of literary representation acknowledges its limitations from the moment it is produced in a time-specific context which implies that its basis "rests on humanly and socially shared understanding of reality" (Auerbach cited by Isomaa et al., 2012, p. ix). This global assumption insists on the impossibility of representation as equating exact reproduction and gives way to a further consideration of mimesis as an intermediate step between literature (and therefore art) and experience, between perception and construction, and the expression of that construction. This way, representation is never objective: "Representations are never innocent or natural, but they betray a number of choices and emphases which have implications for how we experience and understand ourselves and the world around us" (Isomaa et al., 2012, p. x).

As for literary depiction, the discussion between the truth condition of narratives is still open to new contributions. Authors such as Young (1999) do insist on the effective competence of literature to represent the world considering that literary representation can be a source of knowledge and understanding and therefore, the novel is, after Stendhal, “a mirror carried along a high road” (Young, 1999, p. 23). Clarke (n.d.) acknowledges the passive component of literary representation in the case of actual depiction of reality as the author tries not to interfere in the process of representation being only the “holder” of the mirror.

Other authors such as Lamarque and Olsen (1994) deny the truth condition of fiction and therefore disregard any possibility of mimesis as applied to fictive narrative. For these authors, works of literature are works of fiction and therefore, most of the elements described in those works are fictional as well and not actual objects. Literary works are subjected to interpretation and reflect a perspective or point of view of reality according to which the writers construct a particular image of the world. In this sense, Clarke (n.d.) states that, we cannot refer to a “depiction” of the objective truth but to a perspective mediated by a whole range of factors both personal and collective.

Located in an intermediate position between both extremes, Stephen Halliwell defines mimesis in a broader sense referring to it as “committed to depicting and illuminating a world that is (partly) accessible and knowable outside art” (2005, p. 5) and mimesis as the “creator of an independent artistic heterocosm, a world on its own.” (2005, p. 2) This is, precisely, the meaning of mimesis I understand as the most useful for my research. Therefore, I consider literary depiction as the transformation of reality into literary matter through the agency of a narrator. In the case of Sue Townsend, this transformation process integrates the different historical events which provide the framework for the development of her characters and their actions and the author’s special way of inserting the latter within the former as the basis of the whole system of representation.

All things considered, Townsend’s position as mediator between the precise reality of her work and its narrative representation is open to question the limits of her authorship and her intervention. She might be termed as a mere “holder of the mirror” when some aspects of her narrative are taken into account. According to Young (1999) three sorts of depiction can be found in literature and these are present in Townsend’s texts as well:

- Verbal: Not only what is said but how it is said determines what is depicted.

Sharon almost swooned with delight “A ‘otel’, she said.’ow lovely’. Then her face clouded over.’But Aidy, I can’t affor to pay for a ‘otel’.
(Townsend, 2004, p. 47)

- Descriptive: This operates when the descriptions are used to make statements or give examples.

Jack Sprat first realized that he was poor, dirty and from a disreputable family when he was sent by his mother to a neighbour’s house to borrow a saucepan. He was six years old and was wearing plimsolls in the snow. It was his older brother Stuart’s turn to wear the Wellingtons. (...) She [the neighbour] watched Jack walk away down her neat path, swept free of snow (...) and make his way towards his own house at Number Ten. The broken toys, rubbish and old car tyres that littered the Sprat’s small front garden were hidden by a merciful covering of snow. (Townsend, 2002, p. 8)

- Formal: It establishes the resemblance between the formal characteristics of a text and the object being represented. which is clearly visible in Townsend’s growing reproduction of textual modes, printed exactly as they are produced in real life.

She texted back:

K.
UR Fab.
ILY.
FF

(Townsend, 2004, p. 302)

*Sir Nicholas Soames
House of Commons
Westminster*

*To His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales
c/o PC Dwayne Lockhart
Flat 31, The Old Abattoir
Leicester
East Midlands Region*

*My Dearest Charles,
How could you think that I would desert you in your hour of need? I confess myself hart that you think me capable of such calumny.
I was knocked sideways when my man brought your letter to me in bed this morning. I recognized your distinctive hand and almost choked on my Cumberland sausage.*

(Townsend, 2006, p. 219)

But on the other hand, Townsend offers her readers a personal (and collective -understood mainly as generational-) construct of the reality around her which, in turn, is inserted within specific time and space coordinates. Topics such as the erosion of the welfare estate or the issues related to second-wave feminism are purely generational and appear in her narrative clearly sieved by the author's personal circumstances and beliefs:

I visited my father in his isolation cubicle today (...) A defeated-looking woman cleaner approached with a bucket of filthy water and a rancid mop. She was wearing a cheap nylon overall, emblazoned with the logo Priva Clean. She tried to go into my father's room before being stopped by Train, who ordered her to change the water in the bucket, and don sterile clothes. She whined, "I ain't got time. I gotta clean three more wards and a operatin' theatre before I knock off." (Townsend, 2008, p. 231)

2.1.2 The depiction of the everyday

The concept of mimesis is directly linked to the idea of literary realism. It is generally acknowledged that a text is perceived as realistic when referring to everyday situations. In the words of Rossi, realism is:

A text ability to activate the mental models that recall actual reality and present reality to the reader's imagination. The reality effect as a cognitive effect derives from the reader's experiential repertoires and prior knowledge, which, in a realist text, seem to be attached to the frame of the everyday. (Rossi in Isomaa et al. Eds., 2012, p. 134)

Therefore, a realist text "activates" a referential frame in the reader and enables the connection between actual experiences of the everyday and their literary depiction. Highmore (2002), among others, refers to the traditional consideration of the everyday as something tedious or taken for granted. He explains the notion of everyday life as the set of most repeated, familiar and recognizable actions acknowledging its discursive nature but, at the same time, noting that as certain forms of discourse are not adequate to their object (the case of the everyday) there may be more adequate ways to represent it. As the representation may be problematic and liable to generate counter-discourse "no form of discourse is ever going to be proper to everyday life" (Highmore, 2002, p. 21). However, the identification of the readers with those familiar, repeated actions of the depicted everyday, allows them to overcome the possible "interferences" of the author.

The attention given to everyday life in the last third of the twentieth century was not a novelty. Authors such as Simmel at the end of the 19th century in *The Philosophy of Money* referred to the necessity of finding in “each of life’s details the totality of its meaning” (1978, p.15) therefore contributing to the so-called current of Impressionism in Sociology. In this sense, the time line of the discipline may be traced by taking Simmel’s conception as the starting point.

Some years later, Surrealism and its intention of “rendering familiar the unfamiliar” utilized the technique of “collage” by juxtaposing disparate elements to generate a defamiliarization of the everyday. Thus, the ordinary was turned into extraordinary by being placed in unusual contexts and combinations in order to pervert the bourgeois modes. Surrealists advocated for the total critique and the transformation of everyday life (Gardiner, 2001).

In the 1930s, Georges Bataille and Michael Leris from the journal *Documents* (1929-30) and the Collège of Sociologie of Paris (1937-39) analysed everyday life as the realm of different disciplines; Archaeology, Ethnography and Western Fine Arts. The main idea was to study Western modernity in contraposition with “other cultures” by using the point of view of these so-called “alien” cultures. This vision of everyday life from an alien perspective was followed by Walter Benjamin who, in turn, approached History through “trash”, the discarded materials that filled the everyday. He described the process of modernization as a constant accumulation of debris cluttering the everyday (Pensky, 2006, p. 86). Benjamin was linked to the Frankfurt School although not as a founding member but as a follower of the School’s line of study of *Mass Cultural Critique*.

According to the Frankfurt School, this mass culture and its possibilities of manipulation pervaded the everyday which was used by capitalism for its own benefit. Although highly influenced by the extended use of propaganda produced by the Nazi party, the theorists of the Frankfurt School were paramount for the development of Marxist critique of everyday life which would find one of its best representatives in Henri Lefebvre some years later.

Previously, by the end of the 1930s, the Mass Observation Group,¹ a social research organization, intended to record everyday life in Britain through different means such as volunteer observers who kept diaries or answered questionnaires, or even by recording conversations secretly. Their first project was to document the feelings of British people regarding the abdication of King Edward VIII. They

¹Formed by Charles Madge, Kathleen Raine, Humprey Jennings, David Gascoigne, Tom Harrison and Stuart Legg.

gained influence during the years of World War II with their studies on Government propaganda and British citizens' saving habits. Criticised for including an imbalanced sector of British society, the group's data gatherings do possess considerable historical value and after some decades of decline, from the sixties to 1981 its research continued. Nowadays the group is hosted by the University of Sussex.²

After World War II, the following milestone along the road of studies on everyday life is represented by Henri Lefebvre's Marxist vision. Lefebvre studies the post-war extension of capitalism penetrating thoroughly the details of everyday life. For him, everyday life implies continual recurrence and repetition even in those elements which are out of the ordinary. All activities even with their conflicts and differences are an active part of everyday life. His *Critique de la Vie Quotidiene* cycle starts in 1947 and develops through several works up to 1981.³

In the 1950s the British Cultural Studies group, represented by Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart aimed at broadening the definition of culture to include everyday practices. Hoggart would later establish the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the University of Birmingham in 1964. In 1956, Erwin Goffman published *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). He used a theatrical simile to describe the "acts" that individuals "perform" in everyday life by using terms such as performance, human actions played out, front stage, back stage, social roles, etc. In 1957, Roland Barthes published *Mythologies*. His deep personal links with Henri Lefebvre were significant enough so as to establish a connection between both thinkers' approaches to the everyday. However, Barthes's vision would not focus on the destructive impact of dominant ideologies upon the creative energies of everyday life. He saw them as integrated within the multiplicity of discourse levels operating in a wide range of phenomena, everyday life included (Sheringham, 2006).

During the 1970s, the gender studies and the feminist critique started to focus on everyday life which, in a way, had been traditionally considered as the characteristic domain of women. Following the Marxist line but highly critical of it at the

²In relation to this, it is blog entitled *One day in History Project*, an initiative by several British heritage organizations to record the everyday of the British people at the beginning of the 21st century. People were asked to write entries explaining their activities on a concrete day in order to keep a record of their everyday activities and thus obtain a global panorama of British life.

³The cycle is made up of *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947), *Critique de la vie quotidienne II, Fondements d'une sociologie de la quotidienneté* (1961), *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (1968), and *Critique de la vie quotidienne III. De la modernité au modernisme* (1981.) There is a further revision of the first volume dated in 1991.

same time,⁴ the works by Agnes Heller encompassed Lefebvre's theories on everyday life and took them further so as to describe everyday life as the holistic realm of life itself. For Heller, everyday life was the fundamental dimension of social existence with no society possible without the everyday as it is the component which allows social reproduction. Heller's most important work in this field was developed between the 1960s and the 1970s by using the methodological tools of historical materialism influenced by Hegel and Heidegger. For Heller, promoting social change, implied involving not only large institutions and structures but also the everyday world. As a way of contesting capitalism she defended an absolute necessity for critical thinking going "beyond the reified appearances of everyday life in order to grasp the fundamental human values" (Heller in Gardiner, 2000, p. 155).

Feminists have often argued that social science disciplines have been constructed by men, with a male-oriented perspective of the world. According to the feminist critique, one way to correct the male-biased constructions of social disciplines could be to develop a social science, which would include studies of everyday life, from the point of view of women. Both Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins work on such an approach. Smith's works include *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (1987), where she examines the experiences of women and builds an analysis of everyday life from women's perspective. She argues that social science should pay more attention to the local and everyday experiences of people, especially those of women and other individuals who may be in subordinate positions in society:

I proposed women's standpoint as one situated outside textually mediated discourses in the actualities of our everyday lives. This is a standpoint designed in part by our exclusion from the making of cultural and intellectual discourse and the strategies of resorting to our experience as the ground of a new knowledge, a new culture. (Smith, 1987, p.107)

Smith introduces a different view regarding the relationship between individual and power. The apparatus of power has been traditionally the sphere of men and its impositions on the everyday discard any possible subjectivity. However, from the point of view of women, traditionally operating in a subjugated world, the conceptual organization of power is a product of everyday experience. Therefore,

⁴In what Heidi Hartman (1979) has termed as "the unhappy marriage of Marxism and Feminism".

the directions of the analysis are opposed and it is the everyday, as the usual realm of women, which provides a more practical perspective for social studies:

The ruling apparatus of this loosely coordinated collection of varied sites of power has been largely if not exclusively the sphere of men. From within its textual modes the embodied subject and the everyday world as its site are present only as object and never as subject's standpoint. But from the standpoint of women whose work has served to complete the invisibility of the actual as the locus of the subject, from the standpoint of she who stands at the beginning of her work, the grounding of an abstracted conceptual organization of ruling comes into view as a product in and of the everyday world. (Smith, 1987, p. 109)

Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2001) tries to explain and contribute to the development of black feminism thought as critical social theory, by describing black women's traditional everyday domain as both, burdened by slavery and contradictory, in contrast with that of white women, as black women's everyday existence collided with their masters' giving way to contradictory forms of relationships.

Finally, we must not fail to highlight the vision of the performance of gender in the realm of everyday life, a way paved by the studies of Judith Butler following Erwin Goffman and Michel Foucault. For Butler, the everyday is the sphere in which gender is imposed through a set of common practices (Butler, 1988).

Once assumed the (Lyotardian) postmodern condition, Cultural Studies regarding everyday life focused on different aspects among which media and consumerism found a special position as both have pervaded the everyday with a plurality of discourses and meanings giving way to global phenomena. This has been contested by some authors arguing that these large-scale changes are actually local although consumerism and media impositions do play an important role and capitalism is still a driving force. In this sense, an essential contribution to the studies on everyday life would be Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) with a second volume written in 1998 in cooperation with authors such as Alfred Giard and Pierre Mayol. Again, "production" on the part of the structures of power and "consumption" on the part of individuals are the key terms and De Certeau makes them correspond to "strategies" and "tactics". Structures of power use strategies to impose upon individuals, and individuals use creative tactics to move along those structures, expressed in what he terms as "ways of operating":

These intervene in a field which regulates them at a first level (for example at the level of the factory system) but they [the individuals] introduce into a way of turning it to their advantage and that obeys other rules and constitute something like a second level interwoven into the first. (De Certeau, 1984, p. 30)

In the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) De Certeau introduces some interesting concepts concerning the neighbourhood, understood at both physical and relational levels, operating together in what he terms as “the practice of neighbourhood” (p.13) an idea which will be useful to analyse some aspects of Sue Townsend’s works.

Raymond Williams, an active member of the Centre for Contemporary Studies (together with Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall), outlined the concept of “structures of feeling”. This idea refers to the general organization of emotion and experience in a given period. It also describes the ways in which common values or shared generational experiences shape subjective experience. The main records of such structures are the works of art and literature. These values are effectively lived and felt via everyday life experience:

The term [structures of feeling] is difficult, but “feeling” is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of “world-view” or “ideology”. It is not only that we must go beyond formally held and systematic beliefs, though of course we have always to include them. It is that we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt. (Williams, 1997, p. 2)

By the 1980s, the works and theories on everyday life had gained a deserved position of status within the wide domain of Cultural Studies and were there to stay. Not only had the field been widely taken up by some of the most important scholars of Postmodernism but it also continued to produce a mainstream of valuable discussion from varied individual perspectives, such as Rita Felski’s gendered viewpoint of the everyday beyond feminism (Felski, 1999), Roger Silverstone’s studies of the impact of television on everyday life (Silverston, 1994), Stephen Katz’s works on the management of everyday life by certain groups (elders, for example) (Katz, 2000), and as part of comprehensive anthologies such as those by Ben Michael Gardiner (2000), Highmore (2002) or Michael Sherringham (2008).

From all the above mentioned, it seems that we are entitled to say that “everyday life” is alive and kicking and it has already developed its own canon in scholarly

and popular circles alike.⁵ Its presence in literature has been acknowledged from the 19th century though it seemed that the new literary ways of either avant-garde or postmodernity were going to be unable to depict the everyday (Robinson, 1988). However, its pervasiveness has made that no contemporary fiction work fails to disclose its mysteries although the means to do it might not seem as evident as in previous centuries. In the case of Sue Townsend, the everyday imposes its presence in her production as a whole, and her characters live, either accepting or contesting, an everyday that is, at the same time, shared by many actual persons in actual settings. This way there is an undeniable connection between reader and text which operates not only at a national level but also allowing readers with nationalities other than British to spot the differences between the everyday described and their own. It is that “sense of familiarity, readability and transparency” Rossi referred to (Isomaa et al. Eds., 2012, p. xiv)

2.1.3 Writing the time

The time span this research intends to cover starts in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of Great Britain, and ends with the last days of the New Labour period, thus including Tony Blair’s resignation and Gordon Brown’s term of office (up to May 2010), particularly focusing on Blair’s period though, with occasional references to David Cameron’s premiership.

In the introduction to his exceptional volume on the postwar years of Europe, the (sadly) late historian Tony Judt describes the period between 1945 and 1979 as an “interim age: a post-war parenthesis, the unfinished business of a conflict that ended in 1945 but whose epilogue had lasted for another half century” (2005, p. 2). As far as Great Britain is concerned, World War II implied the end of an era and the following years up to Margaret Thatcher’s premiership were of external repositioning and internal reconstruction.

The morally victorious Britain had to face tremendous difficulties to recover from the shock of the war. The imperial “trade mark” had vanished and the “stiff upper lip” attitude was of no use anymore.⁶ External repositioning implied two key components: On the one hand, the redefinition of the former imperial structure into a network of countries freely associated in pursuit of common benefit; the

⁵The term has even given title to a compilation album by the musician Bill Nelson: *The practice of Everyday Life* (2011).

⁶Cfr.: For him in India the British were ridiculous, stiff, unconfident, rule-bound. (...) You couldn’t let the ex-colonialists see you on your knees, for that was where they expected you to be. They were exhausted now; their Empire was gone; their day was done and it was our turn. (Kureishi, 1990, p. 127)

Commonwealth, (whose main defining foundations dated back well before World War II), together with the attempts to close the loose ends of the imperial times; the involvement of the country in the Greek war, the occupation of Palestine and the Suez crisis. On the other hand, the (at times) reluctant inclusion of the country in European economic and political macro-structures and the participation in international organizations (NATO, UN), in this case with further consequences not envisaged at the moment.

The internal reconstruction of the country relied on financial aid from the USA and the strict control of economy and resources with special attention to the extension and full development of the welfare state, supported by Tories and Whigs alike in the spirit of the so-called “post-war consensus”. Special mention, due to its importance during Margaret Thatcher’s first term of office, should be made of the question of the unions and their connections with politics and power.

The 1980s put an end to all this. With Margaret Thatcher in power, Great Britain underwent major economic and cultural changes which persisted well after her resignation. The spirit of the post-war years was over and the new generation’s “growing pains” were not related to bread rationing, Teddy boys’ fights, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* release or The Peace movement any more.

It is precisely the evolution of British life, of the feelings and expectations in the latter part of the 20th century, which forms the base layer of Sue Townsend’s work. She depicts the lives and actions of her characters against a specific background of social, political and economic circumstances that, with the benefit of hindsight, we term now as historical facts. At that moment, they were just tokens of a specific actuality.

Keeping this in mind, a new question may arise: can literature be considered as a source for history? And if so, what are the mechanisms through which this relationship between literature and history is established? Luckily for the reader, scholars far more qualified than this researcher have analysed the question. Authors such as Prager (1998), Cadicott and Fuchs (2003), and above all Stephen Greenblatt in several volumes have provided us with a new vision on literature and history and the intricate net of connections between them. But it is the critique developed by the practitioners of New Historicism which has focused specifically on the analysis of this particular link between both fields.

New Historicism states that history is “both, what happened in the past (a set of events) and an account of those events (a story)” (Payne, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, it acknowledges the literary character of history which implies that it does exist

under a literary shape and this, in turn, influences our conception of “real event”: “historical truth arises from a critical reflection on the adequacy of the story that is told” (White, 1973, p. 429). The connections between facts and tales are clear in what White considers “the elective affinity between the act of prefiguration of the historical field and the explanatory strategies used by the historian in a given work” (White, 1973, p. 427).

Typically, the New Historicists proceed by singling out a striking event or anecdote which had the effect of arousing scepticism about grand historical narratives or essential descriptions of a historical period. But, could this procedure be applied to extracts of literary texts themselves as able to account for facts of a more global character? That is, instead of a real anecdote or event, could we use a fact already in a literary shape in order to reconstruct a historical situation or period? This way we would close the circle of questions: can literature depict actuality? And in this case, can this literary depiction be used to inform about historical events? I certainly believe so although elements such as author-mediator should be taken into account. But if we acknowledge the literary character of history, this idea of mediation is not to be discussed as the usual sources of historical knowledge are, in fact, different interpretations of the events that actually happened. As an example we may work on these lines by Sue Townsend:

Sunday April 3rd (...) 10 a.m. Woke my father up to tell him Argentina has invaded the Falklands. He shot out of bed because he thought the Falklands lay off the coast of Scotland. When I pointed out that they were eight thousand miles away, he got back into bed and pulled the covers over his head. (Townsend, 1991, p. 175)

This short extract shows, through the literary ways characteristic of the journal, the initial perception of the Falklands conflict on the part of most British citizens. A war of no importance, the retaliation for the invasion by Argentinians of a far-away territory, but so alien a conflict that made normal people go back to bed when it erupted. The war would be used, however, to enhance the public image of Margaret Thatcher as a leader by linking her with Winston Churchill or even the female symbol represented by Boudicca (Nunn, 2002) and to send a message to the world of a strong Britain, still standing with things to say in international contexts and not only playing the supporting role of the USA in the staging of the Cold War.⁷

⁷Another example related to the same subject, would be the famous headline of *The Sun* “Gotcha” (may 4th 1982).

Therefore, literary and non-literary texts can be used together in order to obtain the complete fresco of a specific historical period. But not only does a single anecdote portray the history of the period in which it takes place but it also participates (and it is imbued with) the collective memory of the society in which it materializes. And this society imposes current codes to decipher the past as it was described by Halbwachs (from a Durkhemian perspective) by the end of the 19th century:

Halbwachs was without doubt the first sociologist who stressed that our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve the present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present. (Halbwachs cited in Coser, 1992, p. 34)

As far as this research is concerned whether sharing Townsend's views on Thatcher's or Blair's days or not, what is undeniable is that British collective memory has shaped the reading of those past moments and Townsend's production presents us with a set of elements to help confirm our perception of the facts narrated although hers is a gendered, decentered, classed and politically biased view. That is, we move from individual to collective and the other way round, after Jeffrey Prager's statement: "memories are embodied in a particular person and are, at the same time, socially embedded" (Prager in Caldicott & Fuchs, 1998, p. 70). This way, Sue Townsend's perception fuses with some of her contemporaries', thus contributing to the discursive constructions of some defining elements of her time, as will be proved later.

2.2 Cultural frame

It has already been pointed out the extremely popular nature of Sue Townsend's literature practically from the moment she started composing her first works. This acknowledgement, however, does not bring about a corresponding recognition in the form of scholarly attention. It can be argued that high academic compilations do not usually focus on popular literature since best sellers and popular authors are not the main scope of their analysis. But to my surprise, authors such as Helen Fielding are given coverage in relevant anthologies of the British literature of the end of the twentieth century such as Head's (2005, p. 248). Is it possible that the themes, characters or literary shape of Townsend's works did not fit in the literary trends of her time? Is it just a question of snobbery on the part of

literary critique to ignore her due to her popularity as literary research should allegedly focus only on the so-called highbrow literature?

In order to obtain answers as convincing as possible, I will try to describe briefly the literary context in which Sue Townsend's production is placed and, eventually, proceed to revise how her literature shares the traits of her time to check whether her works are actually so far from the global literary trends and, eventually, to discover the possible reasons for her exclusion from anthologies and university courses.

In 1991, Jerry Palmer, dedicated his volume *Potboilers. Methods, Concepts and Case Studies in Popular Fiction* to "Berlin Walls, everywhere, and especially the one that separates low culture from high". This is, precisely, the key issue in question in this section; the long-time accepted abyss between popular and high culture and, subsequently, between popular and highbrow literature as products of both realms.⁸This radical separation was termed as "The Great Divide" which, according to Huyssen is the "kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture" (1986, p. viii). It was the dominating discourse in academic circles from the last decades of the 19th century up to some years after World War II.

In Great Britain, the great theoreticians of this "Great Divide", were Frank R. Leavis and his wife Queenie D. Leavis, together with other authors and followers such as I.A. Richards, T.S. Eliott (in his literary critique facet), or Gordon Fraser. They worked in reshaping and developing ideas from thinkers of the 19th century, especially Matthew Arnold, about the alleged clash between highbrow and low-brow culture, and presented them through both the pages of the journal *Scrutiny*, published by the Leavises and the volumes of the publishing house *The Minority Press* created by Fraser. In *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930), Leavis stated: "I have said earlier that culture has always been in minority keeping. But the minority now is made conscious, not merely of an uncongenial, but of a hostile environment" (2006, p.17).

Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (1996) interestingly explains the adamant position of these critics, to whom the Great Divide is so dear, as a

⁸I have used the terms "highbrow/ high" and "popular" for the sake of clarity, as they are the most widespread, disregarding the further inclusion of the category "middle-brow", thus avoiding obscure terminology, not even clearly defined by scholars. However, I am well aware of this limitation and of contributions such as Gans's who, in his volume *Popular Culture and High Culture. An Analysis and Evaluation of Taste*, distinguishes five cultures (and their corresponding public): "high culture, upper-middle culture, lower-middle culture, low culture and quasi-folk low culture" (1975, p. 71). In my view, the clear-cut boundaries of such elaborated categories as described by Gans are actually blurred.

product of their social class. They were of lower-middle class origins and insisted on differentiating themselves from both the working and the upper classes alike. Under the label “upper class”, Eagleton includes those occupying the chairs of Literature in the top universities at that time. The results of the theoretical work carried out by *Scrutiny* or *The Minority Press* led to the *de facto* establishment of the separation between high and low culture in academic circles (which eventually would be defied and contested after World War II) leading to a similar separation of their practitioners from “the outer world”: “The gain was a resolute single mindedness of purpose, uncontaminated by wine-tasting triviality on the one hand and ‘mass’ banality on the other. The loss was a profoundly ingrown isolationism.” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 31)

The significant reaction of the proponents of the Great Divide against the mass culture phenomenon which was implicit in their proposals, was shared by other authors from a very different intellectual origin, among them Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Walter Benjamin developed the concept of “aura” or the “special authority that the unique work of art possesses and which sets it at a distance from us” (Benjamin in Witkin, 2003, p. 51). Mass production implies the separation of the art object from the tradition in which it has been conceived (Benjamin in Leitch Ed., 2001). However, Benjamin thought that liberating the “aura” of works of art would lead to the loss of exclusivity and the transformation of the work in an instrument of the “ordinary consciousness of ordinary people” (Benjamin in Witkin, 2003, p. 53). Adorno offered a more pessimistic version of mass culture as a way of domination imposed by power upon citizens:

As a focus of regression mass culture assiduously concerns itself with the production of those archetypes in whose survival fascistic psychology perceives the most reliable means of perpetuating the modern condition of domination. Primeval symbols are constructed on the production line. The dream industry does not so much fabricate the dreams of the customers as introduced the dreams of the suppliers among the people. (Adorno, 1991, p. 93).

Therefore, from two ideologically different positions, these authors considered seem to contribute to justify the division between high and low culture, the latter being “haunted” by the term “mass”.

After World War II and the recognition of the horrors suffered or witnessed during the conflict, this Great Divide faced, not precisely, its finest hour as it would soon be redefined, repositioned or contested:

Redefined by authors such as Pierre Bourdieu (1986) who offers a socioeconomic approach to the division between high and low culture explained in terms of “habitus”⁹ or the cultural categories through which individuals process the world and make decisions about what to do, linked to the so-called “cultural capital” or the set of tools that provides some members of the society with advantages which are used to socially reproduce inequality. Social class imposes upon artistic sensibility in terms of the different level of exposure to art forms according to social class which, eventually, leads to consider that upper classes are more appreciative of culture (and consequently literature) than lower classes as the former had the habitus of being in touch with high culture from childhood as part of the cultural capital of their class.

On the other hand, authors like Northrop Frye tried to recompose the relationship between high and low culture (focusing on literature) by defending popular literature but showing reservations about specific products of this popular fiction such as best-sellers or crime novels, thus questioning the assumption that “all types of culture –all movies, novels, television programs and so forth- may be accorded value regardless of how blatantly commercial they are”. (Graham, 2013, p. 97). This, in my view, leads to further (though minor) “divides” by not contemplating the totality of a literary, and therefore cultural, production as a whole, leaving aside works which can be significant enough to explain social, historical and economic facts, events or trends.

Repositioned by Terry Eagleton, among others, and his valuation of literary traditions in terms of historical context:

The so-called “literary canon”, the unquestioned, “great tradition” of the “national literature”, has to be recognised as a construct, fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time. There is no such thing as a literary work or tradition which is valuable in itself. (...) “Value” is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes. (Eagleton, 1996, p. 10)

Contested, according to Huyssen (1986, p. viii), by both the avant-garde during the first part of the 20th century with its development of an alternative relationship between high art and mass culture with attention to vernacular and popular culture, and Postmodernism from the second part of the 20th century.

⁹To this respect, see *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) and “The forms of Capital” (1986) in Szeman & Kapovsky, Eds. (2011).

From the cultural point of view, Postmodernism, with its pros, cons, evolution and contestation as well, implied that no cultural, and therefore literary, canon was to be imposed upon the work of art and sharp differences between high and low culture were to be erased. Fragmentation, plurality, incredulity, uncertainty were the new key words, useful when trying to explain culture and its products. It seemed that “the popular”, “the everyday”, shouldering its way from the margins of culture, was finally being given its deserved status within cultural realms.

All this applies to authors as well.¹⁰The expansion of popular fiction implies an adaptation to the reader on the part of authors (Darwinian as it may sound) due to the limited public that literature as a scholarly discipline counts on. According to Huyssen, Modernism insisted “on the inherent hostility between high and low” (1986, p. viii). Postmodernism represents, on the contrary, a challenge to this idea, taking into account that the so firmly established boundaries between both spheres have blurred. In doing so, the distance between both worlds has shortened and some flagships of literary Postmodernism have turned into very popular authors.¹¹In this sense, it has been pointed out that the gap between these worlds, previously apart, has been saved via the assimilation on the part of popular culture of high culture ideas (Gans, 1999, p. 21). This way, differences between both types of writers are not so wide given that, for example, “highbrow” writers are eager to have positive feedback from their audiences (in economic terms as well) and the relationship with their readers is similar, as in both cases, the authors generally have the same socioeconomic and educational background as their readers’ and therefore the topics that both types of writers are interested in eventually are the same -although possibly considered from a different perspective- taking into account that the absolute certainty of things is not possible any more according to the narrowest imaginable conception of Postmodernism.

However, a simple matter of logical evolution arises; moving from periphery to the centre implies actually reaching that centre at a certain moment therefore turning into a new centre around which other elements start turning around. This way, Postmodernism has evolved into a new “Great Tradition”, developing its own “Great –or small-Divides”. This position is sustained by authors such as East-

¹⁰he use of the term is not fortuitous; I am following Ken Gelder’s reflection on the differences between “writer” as the term traditionally preferred when referring to popular fiction versus “author” as the one preferred for “high” literature. (Gelder 2004, p. 14).

¹¹With respect to the concept of distance between highbrow and lowbrow culture, see Fiske in Grosberg et al. Eds (1992). John Storey also writes about “the quantitative dimension” of popular culture which in monetary terms may appear very attractive to highbrow authors (Storey, 2009, p. 6).

hope who studies the transformation of Literary Studies into Cultural Studies, giving way to a new paradigm expressed in the same terms as the previous one: “In attacking the former paradigm it was always concerned to pose alternatives to it” (2005, p. 127). In addition, as Butter (2010, p. 199) states, literary studies suffer from the “modernist bias” as Modernist normative is still used to judge a work of art. What is more, according to Gelder (2004, p.18) the differences between “literature” and popular fiction date back to fin-de-siècle considerations already expressed by Henry James which means that the fact that the cultural world continues to be a debtor to traditional dichotomies and the idea that Postmodernism has apparently overcome the division between high and low culture is a major contradiction which, eventually leads to a sole conclusion: although Postmodernism embraces popular culture and its manifestations, on many occasions, the judgement of those is still subjected to older canons and in the case of some works or authors (like Sue Townsend), to the new ones developed by Postmodernism as well.

2.2.1 British Literature: between dusk and dawn

Steven Connor studies the novel in contemporary history of the end of the 20th century highlighting one of the most striking characteristic of that time’s narrative, namely its addressive nature, defining narratives as composed by “events of communication” (1996, p. 9). In this way, novels and other literary forms do follow the scheme of any other type of communication, with a specific sender, receiver, message, code and channel and this is not different as far as the British literature of the last years of the twentieth century (its dusk) and the beginning of the twenty first (its dawn) is concerned, as it was not in other moments of history with different generations of writers and readers and diverse sociohistorical contexts. The lines followed by British literature at the beginning of the new millennium do not imply any radical separation from the previous years’ developments and no millenarian theories apply although the spread of new technologies might make someone think of “the end of the literature” as it once was. Nothing could be further from reality. However, no monolithic conception is possible and the conventions and convictions of being “postmodern” do not constitute so clear-cut a concept. It is not the aim of this research to dive into the turbid waters of literary critique to reveal a brand new theory of the postmodern condition but the term far from being worn out is still alive and kicking, reinventing itself and providing, in this case, the referential framework in which to insert Sue Townsend’s production.

Steven Connor (2004) analyses the evolution of Postmodernism and establishes four different phases: accumulation, synthesis, autonomy and dissipation covering precisely the years between the 1970s and the first ones of the new millennium. Initially, the Postmodernism password was “change”, and those certainties upon which Western culture had been built were discovered not to be so certain any more. Authors such as Hobsbawn, Harvey and Jameson stressed the importance of the 1970s as a turning point affecting ideologies, economy, society, etc. which resulted in the fading of the alleged emancipatory narratives developed from the Enlightenment and the rising of new identities, ethnicity issues and claims for social recognition of realities other than nation and state, everything supported by an overwhelming expansion of global communication networks and ICTs.

Rooted, therefore, in the 1970s, British Postmodernism is considered by authors such as Julian Murphet (2004)¹² as a product precisely of the years covered by this research, namely the period of Thatcher-Major-Blair and the fall of New Labour, and in this way, 1979 became a watershed with important consequences at all levels which would persist for several decades. By that time, a number of British novelists were reflecting upon the alleged decadence of Britain, they had the belief that the end of “something” was very close, they felt that something was about to happen although the scope of it was unpredictable. Those would be the senders of the new messages of Postmodernism; a new generation of writers who had not lived through World War II but had started writing in the sixties and 1970s; children of the welfare state who later would gather around the opposition to Thatcherite postulates. According to Bradford (2004) this group of authors would have never been reunited but for the rejection of Thatcher’s ways. They wrote against postwar realism as they identified it with literary and political conservatism. The fight Realism vs. Postmodernism was served, although, as Bradford states, the battle was over by the end of the century and neither side was victorious (Bradford, 2004, p. 70), the middle ground of the resulting fiction was shared by hybrid versions of both during the 1970s and the 1980s.

The relationship between fiction and reality is central to the understanding of British culture of the 1990s and it is the essence of the message launched by the practitioners of Postmodernism in a variety of shapes and modalities. As we have already seen, the coming of age of Postmodernism at the end of the century, implied coming to terms with issues such as historical past and the overcoming of the Great Divide. Bentley (2005) develops his study on the fiction of this

¹²Murphet sees British Postmodernism as the response at “the levels of form and content to and “americanization” of values and practices (Murphet in Connor, 2004, p. 718).

decade by describing it as a period culturally and historically bracketed between two main historical facts of greater symbolic significance; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the events of September 11th in New York. According to Bentley, the main characteristic of the literature of this period is its sheer diversity, which responds widely to the connections between contemporary issues and the interests in historical past and, therefore, part of the narrative of the period is devoted to revisiting previous narratives and genealogies of the past, by, for example, studying the relationship between private story and official history, revising the narratives of violence, catastrophe and war or using history as setting of the fiction.

By the end of the millennium, apocalyptic anxieties seemed to be overcome once Communism and the nuclear menace had been defeated, but the literary field saw the emergence of narratives and “discourses of exhaustion and closure” (Bentley, 2005, p. 7) on the one hand, and others focused on the definition of identity according to diverse categories (class, sexuality, body, gender, race, geography and nation). Their reflections over those topics were the messages conveyed by Postmodern writers of the time. Every category was questioned and revised, deconstructed and repositioned. In addition, according to Sheppard (Sheppard, 2000, p. 351), by the end of the 20th century a proper balance between realism and the experimental character of Postmodernism was eventually achieved.

The channels used by the practitioners of Postmodern literature to deploy their messages have experienced an important evolution from the 1980s which resulted in an ample expansion in the number of published works (Todd, 2006). Different facts have contributed to this expansion, namely:

- The growing importance of the book retail industry. Todd states that literary fiction is “more retail-driven than before” (Todd in English Ed., 2006, p. 20). This has come hand-in-hand with the increase in wealth among British book buyers, together with the decrease in prices of those volumes as, for example, in 2004, a hardback novel was five times cheaper than fifty years before (Todd in English Ed., 2006, p. 19). The globalisation of some book retailers such as Amazon also played a major role. This phenomenon is related to the spread of ICTs in the world of books with the development of devices for electronic reading at the beginning of the twenty-first century with numerous advantages such as the possibilities of storage and the adaptation of the book to the reader and not the other way round as the reader can alter the format and size of the font, for example, and the drawback

of free circulation of pirate copies thus generating the unsolved problem of copyright issues.

- The evolution of mass paperback publishing had started before World War II with the birth of Penguin Books in 1935. In the sixties, the British publishing industry had yet to recover fully from World War II and the shortage of paper in its aftermath. The situation evolved positively in the 1970s and 1980s together with the phenomenon of the increase of women-centered publishing, either in the form of academic journals (*Signs*) or publishers (Pandora, Virago, The Woman's Press, etc.). The end of the 1990s and the following years saw the diminishing of independent publishing houses which are now part of conglomerations as big as Random House, for instance, which absorbed Bloomsbury, Chatto and Windus, and Faber and Faber. By 2000 British publishing was "hardly British" (Mc Cracken in Marcus & Nicolls Eds., 2008, p. 646) as of the five biggest publishing firms, two belonged to German companies and one to Rupert Murdoch's empire. This must be linked to the role played by some literary magazines such as *Granta*¹³ or *The London Review of Books* as the flagships of change.
- The spread of book clubs, once considered as typically feminine, middle class activities, also contributed to the success of a novel by means of the word-of-mouth "system", together with the influence of other media in the selling of fiction, film and especially TV and film (particularly with programmes such as *Richard and Judy's Book Club* which introduced average citizens into fiction discussion. Film, in turn, has played an important role in shaping literary production and the literary culture in Britain, as literature has provided the plot for a number of films which have contributed, once released, to increase the international sales of some of the novels involved (e.g. *Trainspotting*).
- The importance of some book awards such as the Booker Prize (founded in 1969), the Orange Prize for Women, and others for novel authors and diverse types of literature, together with the Nobel Prize for literature, awarded to William Golding, Elias Canetti, Harold Pinter and Doris Lessing (just to name those award-winners of the period I am studying).¹⁴

¹³Its number 3 of 1980 displays a cover announcing *The end of the English novel*.

¹⁴These last three elements relate to another interesting phenomenon: the celebrity novelists which know how to attract popular fascination by means of their particular personality due to diverse factors (Martin Amis, J.K. Rowling and others).

However, despite all the discussions about new codes and messages launched by new authors, I consider the reader as the most important element in the communicative process of reading. The British reader by the end of the twentieth century is inserted within a context from which fiction cannot be divorced. With a wide access to fiction displayed in airports or railway stations, mobile phones and other electronic devices or acquiring novels which are directly delivered to their home from Internet repositories, most British average readers were probably unaware of the developments of Postmodern literary critique but some authors became household names as readers showed their favour for them, highly influenced by the above mentioned media discourse on fiction as commodity. Those readers of different ages lived through the end of the 20th century in a state of continuous change. Communism was not the enemy to fight any more, Friedman's theories were to have a deep impact on British economy, Blair eventually became Thatcher's favourite son, the remains of the Empire were given back to their legitimate owners and the country's involvement in alien wars was followed through ample media coverage as plots of American films. Everything passed at supersonic speed and the technology novelties arrived and expired in a matter of months. Maybe the postmodern condition of the reader is not the incredulity towards metanarratives but the overwhelming feeling that objects and commodities are faster than their owners and exert a controversial influence on society contributing to alter certain social processes, for instance, to widen and diminish the generation gap at the same time.

2.2.2 Townsend's singular blend: Postmodernity, popularity, wit, criticism, humour

The previous section has been devoted to summarise briefly the literary milieu in which Townsend's production developed. Following chapters will be devoted to explore whether it is possible to detect the same issues and formal requirements in her works as the ones found in other authors so highly valued by scholarly circles. In my view not only is this possible but it is also surprisingly effective as some of the central issues so dear to Postmodernism are unfailingly present in Townsend's narrative.

Townsend's fiction displays a set of characters in search not of an author but of an identity. These narratives of identity search are evident in the case of the adolescent Adrian Mole, Sita, the protagonist of the play *The Great Celestial Cow* or Edward Clare, the Prime Minister of *Number Ten*. They try to define

their identity in contrast with the background of their social entourage formed by family, friends, classmates and co-workers who seem to have a clear perception of who they are and what is the role and position they have in their own worlds. Identity is culturally constructed and develops through cultural categories such as gender, class, age, race, etc., all of them dealt with in Townsend's fiction. Gender, as a decisive component of identity plays a crucial role in her books which present the reader with strong female characters (Pauline –Adrian's mother-, Sita, Eva –the protagonist of *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year-*) who turn their homes into loci of contestation over patriarchal society. Sex and sexual identity are treated by Townsend with open naturalness. Sexual orientation is, as in the case of colour, just a trait of some characters but not in the least their most striking one. Gay characters feature and live their sexuality freely, with no further questioning. The body and the concept of beauty are of greater importance in Townsend's fiction. Never at ease with her own body, she used the ones of her characters to display or challenge the conventional modes of body and beauty, expressed in terms of class in most cases. Likewise, class is a basic element in Townsend's narrative as well, it is shown in most cases as the involuntary component of her characters' reality from which they are unable to escape. Class determines their place in the world more than gender or nationality, even their physical place in the world as settings such as council estates play an essential role in *The Queen and I*, *Number Ten* or *Queen Camilla*.

Postcolonial literature deals with a reflection on racial and colonial attitudes of support or opposition to the new social realities derived from the independence of former colonies from their metropolis. British culture was forced to come to terms with concepts such as "Englishness" which were to be redefined in light of this new reality. Townsend defies the old alleged traits of Englishness (in case its full definition was possible) via some characters who are "more English" than "usual" English people despite their Asian origin, or by increasing the presence of Muslim characters as a usual constitutive element of everyday life.

The writing of space is indispensable in Townsend's narrative where suburban contexts are the settings of most of her works, which impose upon her characters a set of specific movements from the suburb to the centre and the other way round, out of the suburb or within the suburb. Other spatial settings such as council estates are more restrictive and allow the characters populating them a lower level of displacement (in all senses).

Finally, in view of all this, we can deduce that that these issues are not "created" by the new literature representatives, the Postmodern authors, who question

themselves about them and in trying to provide an answer, proceed to turn them into literary matter. On the contrary, those issues are present in the real everyday lives of people and the writers, either “popular” like Sue Townsend or “highbrow” make them present in their respective works. Maybe the terms used to define and develop them are different but they are still the same, which only leads to one possible conclusion: literature is literature in whatever shape it takes and therefore, no “divides” are necessary or operative any more. In this sense, authors such as Michael Butter (2010, p. 214) have stressed the need to get rid of the term “popular” in “popular fiction” as the division between popular and literary is only one of the possible “binaries” in which we could structure the literary fields.¹⁵

In relation to the concrete realm of the historical context in which Townsend’s fiction developed, hers is considered, generally speaking, as part of the literary reaction to political developments in Britain from the end of the 1970s. Townsend belongs to a generation which did not live the triumphant spirit of the immediate post-war or suffered the pain of the loss of the Empire, the world was just emerging from that when they were children. They were the sons of the welfare state, born and raised drinking free school milk. Their coming of age found them contesting certainties which had been stated for long. They embraced that contestation and expressed it in different ways. In the case of Townsend, it took the shape of active rejection of the politics of the New Right imposed by Thatcher and the hollowness of the *cool Britannia* spirit instilled by Blair.

Her presentation as a writer took place coinciding with the first term of Margaret Thatcher’s tenure, in a period that, according to Head could only be termed as “paradoxical”: “The Thatcher era, systematically vilified in much of the literature it provoked, seems with hindsight, to have ushered in a period of renaissance in English fiction” (Head, 2005, p. 45). Together with names such as Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Jonathan Coe, Margaret Drabble, Salman Rushdie, etc. Townsend is an active member of that contestation to the “Thatcher effect” (Waugh in Higgins, Smith & Storey Eds., 2010, p. 119). At the same time, she is part of the cadre of intellectuals who having shown their support to the New Labour government at the beginning of the Blair era, were soon disappointed by the Blairite politics of contradiction between official discourses and reality. The writers who had challenged Thatcher’s policies were now in conflict with a government that, apparently, only represented the voices of those subjected under Thatcher’s yoke

¹⁵He lists others such as “subversive” versus “affirmative”, “conservative” versus “progressive” or “influential” versus “negligible”. See Butter, 2010.

(Romero, 2015).

This intellectual “reaction” or “contestation” implies several dimensions apart from the mere fictional shape of the narrative; class and ideology among them. Driscoll discusses how public discourse is transformed during Thatcher’s and Blair’s periods in order to “erase the category of class” (Driscoll, 2009, p. 3) either in politics or in academic environments. In addition the visions of the working class of the writers who, at any given time, had approached the issue were, in most cases, mediated by their own belonging to middle class contexts, as had happened in Victorian times. Ideologically, those writers opposed to the manipulation or “reorganization” of ideology performed by the new right welcomed the first New Labour government as a way out of the “obscurity” of Thatcher’s period and the values it proclaimed:

Its themes are made the more insidious by the way they vary certain radical themes: the libertarian impulse (for instance not to be harried by a bureaucratic state) is reorganized as aggressive individualism; the wish for a collective identification is parodied by racist ideology, the idea that the personal is the political is shrivelled to belief in “the family”. (Sinfield, 1989, p.295)

However, Blair’s politics contributed to the demolition of the traditional Labour discourse and therefore, those who supported him from a historical Labour position, received the blow and fought back with sharp criticism.

Either during Margaret Thatcher’s or Tony Blair’s terms of office, Townsend’s work displays an acid criticism of the politics of both leaders, generally accompanied by humour but on some occasions, no humorous or witty remark is able to soften the hardness of her lines, oscillating from kind satire to hard irony. This way, Townsend’s narrative contributes to both challenge and dismantle the official discourses and their influence on the everyday life of common people. The stuff countries are made of.

Chapter 3

SUE TOWNSEND, FROM SECRET WRITING TO WORLDWIDE SUCCESS

I left school one week before my fifteen birthday. They were glad to see the back of me. I was not disruptive but if I'd been in the army I would have been charged many times with dumb insolence. I was addicted to print, and I would smuggle books into lessons. I was once given an order mark for reading Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* during a [Religious Instruction] lesson. (Townsend, 1996, p.ix)

Sue Townsend's words in the preface of the first compilation of her plays offer the reader several clues to her life and passions, together with some inkling to the motifs of her works: school, fifteen, insolence, addicted to print. Books, literacy or education have undoubtedly played a major role in the author's life since the beginning, either as elements representative of certain spaces such as university or primary school, which eventually will acquire a literary dimension, or as tokens of personal achievement (or failure to achieve) of some of her characters.

Susan Lilian Townsend was born on April 2nd 1946 in Leicester, the eldest daughter of a family living in a house some distance outside the city, which allowed the author to enjoy the freedom of the countryside: "We were probably the last generation to be truly free to play," (Townsend in Clark, 2009) as the children used to spend their days in all sorts of activities including "stalking through the grand rooms of an abandoned mansion, foraging for berries and soft grass, building rope swings and rafts" (Townsend in Clark, 2009), etc. However, according to some sources, Townsend's was, in fact, an unstructured family with an absent father and a stepfather whose behaviour to her was unnatural and despicable.

This circumstance of her life must be treated with kid gloves and is not the scope of this research but it may account for the secrecy of her early writing and the self-deprecating way of considering herself either as a woman or an author. Particularly impressive are these words: “Chain smoking throughout her interview with Lahr, she referred repeatedly to the anxiety that consumed her at the thought of speaking out” (Townsend in Clark, 2009).¹

The topic of women’s secret writing has been approached by feminist critique whose contribution may shed some light when trying to analyse the importance of it in Townsend’s life.² Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their seminal work *The Mad Woman in the Attic* explain the dichotomy of women being termed as active monsters when they speak out and risk, at the same time, been driven crazy when they do not (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000). In my view, the intermediate step between both extremes is precisely the realm of secret writing, a position torn between the open expression of feelings, whatever the consequences, and the silent, insane introspection.

It is noteworthy that Townsend’s initial development in writing was secret like Adrian Mole’s -in both cases, as a way of isolating oneself from family circumstances and as an instrument to develop their inner selves-. The discovery and recognition on the part of the world, the openness, would arrive later. Not for Adrian though as his talent, either displayed privately or shown publicly, would remain disdained or unnoticed.

Despite the alleged happy memories of her childhood, what is sure is that Townsend was born in a difficult time, the aftermath of World War II, in a country which had incurred high debt and whose major role in world affairs had vanished with the disintegration of its empire. People, particularly in big cities, were suffering the consequences of the war effort and the destruction of major urban areas. Housing became a problem, rationing and shortages persisted in an even more acute way than during the war,³ with the subsequent flourishing of the black market. The

¹To this respect, see Mackenzie’s reference to a previous interview between Sue Townsend and the journalist John Larh in her article on *The Mail Online* (2014, May 10).

²Cfr. with: “Besides, you have written a little, but in secret. And it wasn’ t good because it was in secret, and because you punished yourself for writing, because you didn’ t go all the way [...] not to go further but to attenuate the tension” (Cixous, in Leitch, Gen. ed., 2001, p. 2041).

Crf with: “She is thinking of the changes that can happen to you once the way you speak and write and think has changed. She is wondering what will happen in her own life, in the silence she lives in. She enters the dark tunnel of the subway” (Michael, 1992, p. 168).

³Bread had to be rationed for the first time in United Kingdom due to a bad wheat harvest in 1946 and potatoes from March 1947 due to heavy frost and snow. In addition, the same year, a transport and dock strike caused the loss of tons of imported meat, until the Army broke the

country was exhausted. The Labour party made the most of this gloomy landscape to win the general election in 1945 and the Britain exemplified by Churchill, and his toil, tears and sweat gave way to the new values of the era: the welfare state, nationalization, employment, rebuilding, etc.

Leicester, although free from the massive bombing and destruction which affected other areas of the country, had to face at that moment the same problems as in 1918 after World War I. Housing and traffic were particularly significant and difficult to solve, together with the necessity of clearance of some deprived areas of the city. Between 1950 and 1955 new residential districts were built and middle-class families moved into them. Once the strict measures required by the government immediately after the war were abolished, industry and urban development flourished (Mc Kinley, 2006), accompanied by the nationalization of energy distribution, social services, education and health. The erosion of these measures and provisions and its effects on common people were to be a major theme in Townsend's works.

She attended Glen Hills Primary School. But, after failing her eleven-plus exams and changing school for her secondary education, she quit at the age of 15 and left school with no qualifications. This lack of formal education did not interfere with her passion for reading, fuelled, as she acknowledged, by the low prices of the Penguin collections and a special acquaintanceship with a second-hand book seller (Townsend, 1996). She enjoyed the Russian and later the American writers which may seem surprising considering that she had learnt to read, under her mother's tutelage, only at the age of eight after having to rest at home with mumps. Her mother gave her a set of William books and in a mere three weeks, Sue Townsend had been fully and successfully introduced to the world of words. Nevertheless, school provided Sue with a group of characters, names and settings for her own books but it seemed that this very lack of a diploma made her feel insecure of her own value as an author, not to mention as a lecturer of master classes on writing. Insecurity, incredulity towards success and a certain feeling of being a "fraud" to her guild followed her throughout her professional life:

I always felt a bit of a fraud before I embark on this teaching stint. I haven't got any O level or GCSE to my name, and the only time I ever set foot in a university as a young woman was to enter a twist competition. (Townsend, 2003, p. 110)

strike. (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2000, p. 38).

Reading turned into an obsession and writing soon followed. At the age of fourteen, the secret writing began. “Nobody ever knew. I learned to hide it. It was stories about a teenage girl, much influenced by the Russians. She certainly suffered privations” (Townsend, 2003, p.110). This secretive characteristic of her writing was going to persist for some time and the fictional character of the teenage girl would leave a special trace in *Adrian Mole* some years later. In addition, other topics appeared in these secret pieces, some of them quite amusing:

I’ve always had a soft spot for carpenters: I idolized Jesus as a child (...) During my secret writing period of twenty years I wrote hundreds of short stories. Many of them concerning wood-work teachers befriending illiterate yobbish schoolboys whose only talent was carpentry (Townsend, 2003, p. 209).

She later wrote for the school magazine and started composing short plays. Her love for theatre had sprung up some time before, when a Miss Morris, “a good English teacher” (Townsend, 1996, p. ix), offered her the opportunity to be a member of the *Orpheans Drama Group* playing all sorts of roles. From acting to writing drama there was only a short step, and some time later, Townsend took it enthusiastically not only writing pantomimes but also directing them, searching for the costumes and even being the property master.

After leaving school, she worked in a variety of jobs, including petrol-pump attendant, factory worker and shop assistant. At eighteen, she married and just one year later, her first son was born. Two more children followed and at twenty-two she was a young mother of a growing family and soon-to-be ex-wife, as her marriage was collapsing. Eventually she divorced and the series of economic difficulties so vividly portrayed in her books started. In 1978 Sue Townsend met Colin Broadway who would become her second husband and father of her fourth child. This encounter turned out to be a real inflection point in Townsend’s life. She admitted to her husband having been writing secretly for a long time and he encouraged her to join a writer’s group at Leicester’s Phoenix Arts Centre. She reluctantly accepted and that was the “beginning of it all”. Once again Gilbert and Gubar’s theory helps us explain this change in Townsend’s own mind regarding her writing: “In order to define herself as an author she must redefine the terms of her socialization” (Gilbert & Gubar, 2000, p. 49) It seems clear that the terms of Townsend’s socialization had effectively changed. She had found a supportive companion who was going to play a major role in her life, appearing in some of her articles, lending her his surname for some of her characters or typing

and transcribing her books when she was too ill to do it, thus helping her both personally and professionally.

Sue Townsend's participation in the Arts Centre meetings was not very successful at the beginning as she did not show or say anything at all. Finally, the group asked her to share some of her works during their following meeting and she presented *Womberang*, a play set in a gynaecological waiting room. In 1979, the play won a Thames Television Playwright Award which included a bursary as Writer in Residence for Thames Television. From this moment on, her genius, especially for the comedy, blossomed and success arrived. However, she remained in Leicester all her life, disregarding the siren chants from London which, apparently, seemed to be a better stage for the role of a famous writer which was her destiny once her first book of the Adrian Mole series gathered wide recognition and success.

Sadly, Sue Townsend passed away on 10th april, 2014 after a long fight against diabetes she had been suffering for more than twenty years. Some of us are still saddened by this loss.

3.1 Fiction and reality: Sue Townsend's life and work

In many aspects, Sue Townsend's life is closely intertwined with her written work and characters, and important components of her personality and her personal circumstances, all of which have left an indelible print on her works. Ruth Behar in her introduction to *Women Writing Culture* (1995) acknowledges the gendered connection between fiction and reality: "One of the major contributions of feminist literary criticism is its assertion that writing matters tremendously for women; that how we plot ourselves into our fictions has everything to do on how we plot ourselves into our lives" (Behar, 1995, p. 15). In this sense, Townsend's fiction, through male characters in many occasions, is a woman's one and her personal narrative is transferred to her diverse literary personae. Undeniably, she pictured some aspects of herself in Adrian Mole or the main characters of *Womberang* or *Bazaar and Rummage*, and spoke through the words of Jack Sprat in *Number Ten* or the Queen in *The Queen and I*. Therefore, the three main elements of this proposition: fiction, reality and writing are fully connected in the case of Townsend and, in addition, they play a key role -as I try to illustrate- in the depiction of the times in which they were inserted. As The Personal Nar-

ratives Group state: “narratives are particularly rich sources because, attentively interpreted, they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints within which those courses evolve. Moreover, each life provides evidence of historical activity” (The Personal Narratives Group in Bloom, 1998, p. 146).

All this is to be found in her countless lines distilling social criticism in which she lets her personal memories go contributing, at the same time, to the description of the social situation of the times she lived. For example, in the fact that being an almost adolescent mother-of-three woman abandoned by her husband she found herself living in very complicated circumstances that led her to depend on social welfare benefits for a time. To illustrate this point a number of references can be traced in her works. In *Mr. Bevan's Dream*, a short paper on different topics related to the deterioration of the Welfare State, social security provisions and National Health Service established, among others, by Aneurin Bevan (Rintala, 2003, p. 3), Townsend describes an almost surrealistic but terrible real situation partially reflected later in two of her most famous works, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* and *The Queen and I*:

The four of us [the three children and Townsend] were on our way to collect our weekly maintenance. I was expecting nine pounds. It wasn't there (...) No, she said [the woman at the office] no money has been paid in (...) You must go the Social Security office (...) I ran across the town pushing the little ones in the push-chair and urging the five-year-old to pretend he was in a running race (...) You are in the wrong office. (...) I explained I couldn't wait, I needed 50p in cash [for the bus fare]. An emergency payment. We'll send it to you. I was told. When? In a few days when we are looking into your case. We need your birth certificate, marriage certificate, and a copy of your legal separation documents. (...) I wanted to tell her I was a literate and intelligent person, not just the young mother of these crying children –for Christ sake I had read every page of War and Peace (...) and all I wanted from the Welfare State was a stinking, lousy, sodding 50p' (Townsend, 1989, p. 34).

Her number was called. The Queen had two minutes in which to state her case and leave with bus fare, food money and coin for the meter. It is impossible, smiled the youth (...) To get an emergency payment we need proof, a pension book? A gas bill? The Queen explained that she had not yet received her pension book (...) It was Friday night; the DSS would be closed for two days. They had money, she had none.' (Townsend, 1992, p. 23).

Sue Townsend's health deteriorated rapidly once she was in her forties. To the terrible consequences of diabetes (a kidney transplant and blindness), a long list of "growing pains" was added:

She ticks off a checklist of ailments, almost cheerfully: I've got the kidneys; sight; my hydraulics system doesn't work properly. I've got neuropathy in my limbs, oh and Charcot joint. They're the main ones. She greets them with admirable sangfroid. (Bignell, 2012)

This *sangfroid* is in most cases accompanied by high spirits, as she acknowledges her responsibility for some of her problems: "I looked like a human question mark. Bent but not curious. . ." (Townsend, 2003, p. 41), and gentle self-mockery: "due to diabetic retinopathy I am now partially sighted. It is an interesting condition to have and means that I am forced into bumbling around the world looking slightly more of a fool than I was before" (Townsend, 2003, p. 281).⁴

And together with Townsend, her characters sometimes face their various illnesses both, physical and psychological (agoraphobia and depression among the latter). Even Adrian Mole has been diagnosed with prostate cancer in Townsend's last book of the series of his diaries. The author's sudden death has left her readers in limbo with no news of Adrian's evolution despite the fact that Townsend herself had promised to write another volume of Adrian's misadventures. However, humour comes to the rescue, just in case the reader was tempted to take him and his cancer very seriously:

Dr. Wolfowickz said 'Please, sit down Mr. Mole. (...) I'm afraid that your tumour is more advanced than we had hoped. (...) Is there anything you'd like to ask?' I brought out the list I had scribbled down at breakfast [he produces a list with 9 items, among them]: 9.If the pain got too bad towards the end would he advise me to go to Switzerland and end my life in a clinic whilst listening to Mahler?' (Townsend, 2009, p. 146)

Further issues such as education and parenthood present an infallible connection with Townsend's personal circumstances. Despite not having a university degree, she took her personal education as something to fight for during the hard years of her single, economically difficult motherhood. Likewise, some of her characters struggle to be literate in a world that is not designed for them:

⁴The article where she describes her retinopathy is entitled "Mrs. Magoo" and is included in *The True Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman*.

George [he is referring to himself indirectly as a friend who wants to learn to read and write]: he can't read and he can't write. He's illiterate so to speak. But he's made up his mind to do something about it. (...) But he says he's had enough of guessin' and tellin' lies. He's fed up with it. (Townsend, 1996, p. 122)

Townsend acutely criticises the tragedy of a State unable to provide its citizens with proper literacy skills despite their long years at school, describing rampant illiteracy directly linked to class issues as we shall see:

We are leaving school in three weeks. Can you teach us to read? They were sixteen years of age, each of them had received eleven years of compulsory education, and yet, not one of those hulking quick-witted lads could read so much as a Cornflakes packet. (Townsend, 1989, p. 25)

As far as settings is concerned, Leicester is, by far, Townsend's preferred place to develop her characters' fortunes and misfortunes. This life ascription to her Leicester's well-known spaces proved to be very useful for her trade as she widely used a number of references to "the provinces" in her books, at times only with the aim of creating a comic distress when contrasting the urbanite pretensions of some characters with their real almost-rural life, for example in the case of the alleged Adrian Mole's "writer's ennui": "You may be wondering why I, Adrian Mole, a provincial intellectual working in a library and Sharon Botts, a provincial dullard working in a laundry are having a relationship" (Townsend, 1981, p. 430).

But Adrian is despising a highly influential literary entourage, Leicester and its surrounding county are also the setting for several Graham Joyce's novels, in addition, Julian Barnes was born there as well as Joe Orton, Stephen Friars and Richard Attenborough. It would appear that being the tenth biggest city of England and the fourteenth of United Kingdom has left a distinctive mark on British culture: "I can't wait to get back to the Tony & Guy salon in Leicester. The staff they haven't once called my hair 'thine' and they can do wonders with the savagery caused by Swiss army knife scissors" (Townsend, 2003, p. 19).

3.2 The essential Townsend

Sue Townsend's literary production is developed through articles, plays and novels, each of them with their own display of literary styles. Despite the success of some of her plays and adaptations for stage of two of her novels, it is her work as

a novelist which is most widely praised. Among all her novels, *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series and *The Queen and I* gained the highest recognition all over the world and a rightful place in popular literature.

3.2.1 *The Adrian Mole Diaries*

The Adrian Mole Diaries series starts with *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 and ¾*. Describing precisely the pains of a teenage boy, it was conceived first as a radio series for BBC4 but was soon transformed into book form.⁵ It was an immediate success as it had been on the radio and the teenagers of that time identified with the anti-hero character and his misfortunes (Walliams, 2014).

Adrian's "informal" birth took place in 1980 at the writers' workshop Sue Townsend attended at the Phoenix Arts Centre. Nigel Bennet, the actor who played the part of Adrian in the dramatised reading noticed the great possibilities of the character, used it for auditioning and, as secretly as Adrian's diary writing, sent it to John Tydeman, the BBC producer who will feature later in Adrian's pages, while, at the same time, Townsend was publishing some extracts in a Leicester arts magazine and turning the whole story into a radio script. After a first thirty-minute radio pilot, in January 1982, Townsend was asked to write a full series, formed by seven fifteen-minutes episodes. As the series continued, the readers had the opportunity to accompany Adrian through his journey into adulthood almost up to his fortieth birthday, growing up with him and remaining absolutely hooked on his misfortunes and constant faux-pass.

Adrian's appearance in the British panorama of children and teenagers' literature in the 1980s filled a gap that had been long vacant.⁶ The 1930s opened with Richmond Crompton's *William* series. William and his outlaws band were rebellious against a well-established world which soon would be shaken by World War II. Crompton depicted a parochial setting for William's adventures which, with the benefit of hindsight, seems extremely naive to modern children.

‘There were three lipsticks on my dressing-table yesterday, and today I can't find one.’ ‘I'm sure I never touched no lipstick, miss,’ said Emily in a tone of one rebutting a monstrous accusation. ‘But lipsticks don't just disappear. Where are they?’ [...] ‘Would you like me to hazard a guess, miss?’ ‘Yes, if it would get us any nearer my lipsticks.’ ‘You remember William was Big Chief Firewater all yesterday, and

⁵Crf. DWL- ST/11/2 and ST/1/1

⁶Please, note that this statement is based on the volumes of the best-known representatives of British literature for children and teenagers sold in Spanish bookshops at that time.

I know he was looking for some war paint.’ Ethel stared at her, horror-stricken. ‘Emily,’ she moaned, ‘you don’t mean that my three beautiful lipsticks—’ ‘It’s only a hazard, miss.’ The horror in the blue eyes changed to anger. ‘That boy—’ said Ethel. (Crompton, 1922)

The next step in this literary line I am tracing is represented by Enid Blyton’s books. Focusing specifically on the *Famous Five* series, we note, among other things, that events take place exclusively in rural areas: hills and mountains, valleys and moors, caves and small islands. The setting (neither as closed nor restrictive as an urban one), provides ideal conditions for secret criminal activity and the necessary amount of freedom for delinquents and little well-mannered detectives. The stories reflect a rural England with green fields and productive farms run mostly by extremely nice farmers, simple but warm-hearted people (particularly the farmers’wives) and trusty workers. There seems to be a sort of insistence on the values and ways of life which by that time were already disappearing into an overwhelmingly industrialized context:

She pointed to a tiny farmhouse on the hill opposite. It stood in a small clearing. In a field behind it were three or four cows and a horse. A small orchard stood on the side, and a vegetable garden lay in front’ (...) ‘We got eggs and butter and fruit, and even some bacon’ said George. ‘The boy’s mother didn’t seem worried about how much we had, and she hardly charged us anything. (Blyton, 1995, p. 19)

The last book of the *Famous Five* adventures was published in 1963 but the effects of the whole series would last for some twenty years. However, the world had changed and the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s were not the stable, traditional and conservative times the *Famous Five* had lived in. For some years, a kind of literary hero (or heroes) of children’s literature was, in a way, missing until Adrian Mole showed up. Neither a resolute, patriarchal Julian nor a naughty, transgressive William, Adrian was so tragicomic a character that he appealed to teenagers (especially boys) like no other literary character of his time:

Now I know I am an intellectual. I saw Malcolm Muggeridge on the television last night, and I understood nearly every word. It all adds up. A bad home, poor diet, not liking punk. I think I will join the library and see what happens. (Townsend, 1991, p. 50)

Some years later, as Adrian was turning into an adult, this literary line would be followed by J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series but in a different style. Although

inscribed within British traditional children's literature parameters (boarding schools, band of mates living adventures, Dickensian-like characters) Harry Potter's fight was not against adults who fail to understand his rebellion, petty crimes taking place on rural English soil or an acute contrast between personal and professional expectations and sheer reality. Potter's is the ultimate fight between Good and Evil, corresponding to a time in which teenage readers, having assimilated an inheritance of visual modes displayed by filmed super productions and especially keen on more and more realistic videogames are not amused any more by "simple and boring" mystery solving or family chaos narratives: "There is no good and evil, there is only power...and those too weak to seek it" (Rowling, 1997, p. 211).

Nevertheless, the wake of *Adrian Mole* has been, in a way, followed by other series of similar literary diaries, for instance the one started in 2005 by the American author Jeff Kinney, literary father of the "Wimpy Kid". *The Wimpy Kid* diaries narrate in first person, with the aid of illustrations and laced with tons of humour, the misadventures of Gregg Heffley at school with his friends and foes, and at home with his parents and brothers (he is the middle child). Gregg has a lot in common with *Adrian Mole* but due to the different social perception of childhood and adolescence nowadays, Gregg remains a character for children between ten and thirteen years old whereas *Adrian* appealed to teenagers from twelve onwards.⁷

Adrian put an end to children's and specifically teenager's innocent literature based on getting a disgusting little girl angry or pretending to be a boy running wild with her/his dog and cousins. *Adrian's* times saw the end of the Postwar consensus on the welfare state, and traditional components of British life such as trade unions or town councils were losing their spheres of influence in favour of new social and economic trends. In adulthood *Adrian* was not fighting smugglers or spies any more but living real wars where real people died. He has accompanied his readers throughout the years, maybe reflecting their own inability to come to terms with their adult lives and failed expectations, possibly relieved on reading that *Adrian* was much more lost than they were.

3.2.1.1 Adaptations

The diary format was perfect and very easy to adapt for radio as just one actor was necessary for the recordings. The series entitled *The Diary of Nigel Mole*,

⁷For an interesting testimony of how teenage diaries of the time were indebted to *Adrian Mole*, see Caldwell, 2011.

Aged 13 and 3/4 was first broadcast on 2nd January 1982. There was some controversy over the name of the protagonist between the BBC executives and Townsend. She was quite adamant on Nigel but, eventually, after some possible alternatives had been considered (Jeremy, Jason, Wayne, Malcolm, Lesley, Curtis) Adrian Mole was effectively born and the manuscript copy sent to Townsend's editor was already entitled *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole 13 and 3/4*. A star was born.⁸

Are you absolutely dead set against Nigel Mole? I am suffering severe withdrawal symptoms. I have lived closely with Nigel for a couple of years and Adrian can't take his place. I've tried to accommodate him but I have failed. Can you think again about the name change?. (Townsend, 1979)⁹

The character of Adrian Mole was closely linked to radio and it featured in a series of Pirate Radio Four programmes, a magazine of BBC Radio 4 for young listeners, broadcast in the morning summers of 1985 and 1986. Later on, the subsequent volumes of Adrian's diaries, *Adrian Mole the Wilderness Years* and *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years* were also adapted for radio and broadcast by BBC Radio 4 Extra. In 1994 a short piece entitled *Mole Cooks his Goose* about Adrian's stay with his girlfriend and future first wife Jojo at his parents' house for Christmas in 1993 was written for Radio 4 and later turned into a story for Radio Times, the TV magazine.

We left London at 5am on Christmas morning. Jo-Jo drove down the M1 like a woman pursued by demons. I sat in the back seat with the plucked goose. Both the goose and I were wearing seat belts. We arrived outside my parents' house in Leicester at 7.32 am. (Townsend, 1993, p.3)

The success of the radio series and the first two books (*The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*) favoured the turning of both into

⁸DWL ST/1/1/ 6-7

⁹DWL-ST/1/1/2/2. There was also some controversy on the title of the second book on Adrian Mole. In a letter sent by the Managing Director of Methuen, Geoffrey Strachan, in October 1983 he refers to The further diary of Adrian Mole. Townsend had called it *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 15 and 2 Days*. Strachan writes: "What would Richmal Crompton have called it?, *Adrian Mole Rides Again?*, *Adrian Mole Writes Again?*, *Adrian Mole Grows Up (a bit)*. Giles Gordon, Townsend's literary agent, proposed *More Adrian Mole*, *Adrian Mole Again*, *The Further Secret of Adrian Mole*, *The No Longer Secret of Adrian Mole*, *The Further Sorrows of Adrian Mole*..". Eventually, by November 1983 they all agreed on *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. (Strachan, 1983) (DWL-ST/1/2/6/1, ST/1/2/6/2 and ST/1/2/6/4).

TV series with the same titles made by Thames Television for ITV. The first one was broadcast between September and October of 1985 and the second between January and February of 1987 with Gian Sanmarco in the role of Adrian. Some years later, between February and March 2001, a third TV adaptation followed, this time that of *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years* with Stephen Mangan playing the part of Adrian.¹⁰

In 1984, Townsend wrote the stage adaptation of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* with music and lyrics by Ken Howard and Alan Blaikley. First performed at Phoenix Arts Theatre in Leicester, it soon travelled to London in December 1984 and is regularly performed especially in the countries of the Commonwealth.¹¹

In 2015, a new version of the play was premièred in the Curve theatre in Leicester, this time with Jake Brunger writing the book and part of the lyrics, and Pippa Cleary in charge of the score and rest of the lyrics. The first performance was on March 7 and counted on the attendance of Sue Townsend's family (the author had given her blessing to this version before her death). The play only touches superficially on the juicy references to Margaret Thatcher that are present in the book. It has been mostly turned into an atemporal story whose appeal to present-day teenagers is more than secured due to the special stress put on some elements of the original plot: the world of school, with teachers, bullies, assignments, friends and girlfriends and the family chaos caused by the love life of Adrian's parents. Nevertheless, although the mature reader of Adrian perceives the lack of these sociopolitical references, the excellent performances of the actors (particularly the younger ones), the effectiveness of the music, the lyrics and the dance numbers, the decoration of the stage which appeared like "framed" by reproductions of actual and perfectly recognisable fragments of Townsend's manuscript of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, and the general feeling of joy and celebration of such a great creation as the character of Adrian is, provided the audience with an unforgettable experience for teenagers and adults alike.

The fame reached by Adrian Mole in the 1980s made him appear in many different formats, not only did he feature on stage, radio and TV but also in a computer game launched by the company Level 9 and based on the first two books of the series.¹² In addition, he was turned into a journalist by his author at different

¹⁰See the first episode of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvLomeVy91s> See the first episode of *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVj_6tOBnCQ

¹¹To this respect, see, for instance, <http://www.stagewhispers.com.au/reviews/secret-diary-adrian-mole-sue-townsend>

¹²See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5i2cXEWz5I> and

times when his diary entries were published in *The Guardian* from December 1993 to November 2001 in a weekly column entitled *Diary of a Provincial Man*. These entries were compiled and published under the general title *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole (1999-2001)*.¹³ However, Adrian's career as a journalist had not ended as he "wrote" an exclusive story for *The Observer* due to the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.¹⁴

Though most of the times, the different adaptations of the same text are respectful of the original idea of the author, some supports allow a better development of certain episodes than others. For instance, in one of the funniest (and significant at the same time) episodes of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, the original written version gives the reader the possibility of imagining the real dimension of what is actually happening in the family life whereas the play develops the dialogue a little bit more. The TV series episode presents an in-between solution as the image is quite powerful and illustrative enough:

- The book:

Adrian and his father (his mother has abandoned them and has fled with the neighbour, Mr. Lucas), have been cut off for not paying the light bill.

After supper of cream crackers and tuna fish, played cards in the candlelight. It was dead good. My father cut the ends off our gloves, we looked like two criminals on the run. I am reading *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. (Townsend, 1991, p. 74)

- The play:

The candlelit living-room. George and Adrian are sitting around a small primus stove. They are wearing scarves and gloves. George is reading *Playboy*. Adrian is reading a hardback book, using a torch.

George: What's that you're reading?

Adrian: *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens.

George: Do you want some more beans, son? (He hands him a Heinz tin and a spoon)

Adrian: No, thanks, I don't like them cold.

George: Y'know this is good training for when civilization collapses.

You'll thank me one day. (Townsend, 1996, p. 302)

<https://videogamegeek.com/videogame/79890/secret-diary-adrian-mole-aged-13>

¹³Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/series/adrianmole>

¹⁴Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/apr/17/adrian-mole-royal-wedding-diary>

- TV version: The whole series can be watched in YouTube, and for this particular scene, see Sasdy, 1985, min. 47.41.

In the three cases, Townsend plays with the conventional iconic reference of lower class (or better said underclass) situations. But in the case of the written text, Adrian, despite the role swapping that he generally personifies as he is unnaturally more mature than the adults around him, seems to be unaware of the real dimension of what is happening for he terms the situation as “dead good”. George, the father, tries to make the most of it but the pun of the literary reference is the key element of the whole scene with a clear evocative power, explicitly triggered by the title of the book and his author, which links the whole scene with the darkest aspects of Victorian times, thus rendering evident the connection between the economic and social situation of that age and the one lived under Margaret Thatcher’s rule.

3.2.2 *The Queen and I*

The Queen and I opens with an alleged impossible premise and it soon turns into a dystopian vision of British society which, nevertheless, is highly recognizable by many people. The Republican Party wins the elections in April 1992 and abolishes the Royal Family and their privileges. The Royals abandon Buckingham Palace to live in a squalid council estate where they must carry on with their lives trying, with mixed fortunes, to adapt to their new situation. Two different thematic lines develop in the book: on the one hand, the struggle of most of the members of the Royal Family, especially the Queen, to fit in their new lives and on the other hand the communication failure between the Royals and their neighbours. Although living together within the strictly delimited and surveyed confines of the council estate, they continue to live in worlds (or indeed universes) apart. The Queen is depicted as a brave woman, the heroine of the story. In fact some members of the Royal Family never accept the situation (Prince Philip, Princess Margaret) but little by little, the rest of them try to do their best to cope with the reality and eventually some of them even enjoy it. Undoubtedly, the figurehead of the Queen is highly reinforced, portrayed as involved in a lightning-fast process which changes her from a living institution and pillar of the British nation (not a real person) to being an actual housewife, mother, wife and grandmother, a pillar of the family and a reference for the neighbouring community.

The book met opposed reactions. Some called it subversive, others simply entertaining and others, like Michel Fathers of the *Independent*, who termed it as a

“gentle tale of working-class survival”, were able to perceive the deep social and economic implications of the story (Fathers, 1992). Traditionally, the monarchy had been linked to the idea of British nationhood but at this time in history, the citizens who made up the nation were truly angry with the Royals. The Queen’s attitude and sluggish reaction to Princess Diana’s death positioned her as a cold distant ruler, a stranger to her people. But there was a clear-cut distinction between the institution of Monarchy and the Queen as a person. And this is precisely the line that Townsend’s book follows. It is funny and highly amusing to imagine how the head of the highest British institution and her family, who seemed to be light years away from the body of their people (to follow the medieval simile), try to adapt, with better or worse fortune, to working class life. Nevertheless, as it would happen some years later with the film by Stephen Frears *The Queen*, the figure of the sovereign remains untouched, a person abiding by the rules of her trade, always on duty. In addition, in Townsend’s book the Republican government is clearly ridiculed. Let us not forget that British public is still fully supportive of the monarchy (YouGov UK, 2015).

The Queen and I reached media attention partly because it was published in 1992. The first edition sold quite quickly but the circumstances surrounding the British Royal Family were worsening so as to impel Townsend to delete the character of Sarah Ferguson who appeared originally in the story. It gathered media attention as it was published amidst the turmoil generated by the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the British Royal Family from 1992 to 1997, from the divorce of Princess Ann to the death of Princess Diana when the popularity of the Queen reached its lowest point.¹⁵

However, the shocking contrast between the royal character and the derelict entourage in which she is placed was highly appealing to British readers which resulted in the book being shortlisted for the *Sunday Express* Book of the Year Award. Some years later a second book *Queen Camilla* followed, this time with Prince Charles already married to Camilla Parker-Bowles. The setting and most of the characters remain the same although the dystopian element is taken to an extreme when the council estate where the Royals are living is turned into a sort of open prison whose inmates’ movements are controlled with cameras, police officers and special devices attached to their bodies as if their working class condition should be kept contained and isolated.

¹⁵Only 48% of the population thought that UK would be worse off without the Queen compared to 69% in 2012 (Clark, 2012). To this respect, see Zaperta (2008) on media perception of Monarchy.

3.2.2.1 Adaptations

The Queen and I was turned into a musical, as *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* had been previously. It was premièred in March 23, 1994 with songs by Ian Drury and Michael Gallagher. It was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre and Leicester Haymarket, directed by Max Stafford and later by the Out of Joint Touring Company up to June 7. It finally was taken to the Royal Court Theatre in London and a toured around Australia.¹⁶

There was a project to turn *The Queen and I* into a film and initial contacts between Sue Townsend and LWT Productions were started. Some names were juggled for the director (including Blake Edwards, Terry Jones and Mike Leigh among others). Chanel 4 was interested in the film as it was expressed by Stephen Garret of Kudos productions (part of Pathé) to David Aukin of Channel 4 in October 1994 summarizing the main ideas around the story:

1. Create a sense of topicality and immediacy, that spine-tingling sensation that this is a story unfolding the day after tomorrow'
2. Give the story a structure, a good old-fashioned, beginning, middle and end (...).
3. Make a black subversive and surprising comedy, not least by turning the Queen into a kind of radical heroine.
4. Make it about the state of Britain, but with universal appeal that resonates outside the UK.
5. Find a device that protects it from any change in circumstances (whether through death, stupidity or divorce) that may befall the actual Royal family between now and the date of the release. (Garret, 1994)¹⁷

The film was thought to be highly profitable as the instalments for the ancillary rights were established to be paid monthly, with an initial figure of £250.000 plus some bonuses linked to the success of the film in Britain and the United States. However, the film was discarded, as Rachelle Wilder, Head of Development of Pathé Pictures, refers in a letter dated on February 6th, 1998:

After the recent events that have affected the Royal Family we were aware that a film involving the monarchy might have a negative reaction from the general public and, after waiting several months to see how the dust would settle, we are convinced that this is not the

¹⁶It seems that Townsend insisted on the first cast grasping the real feeling of living in a council state and make them visit one of Leicester's and talk to its neighbours (Information retrieved from a private conversation at David Wilson Library, March 2015).

¹⁷DWL-ST/1/7/35/3 (i), ST/1/7/35/4 (i) and ST/1/7/35/ 9 (ii)

right time for such a film. As such Pathé has regretfully decided not to continue with the development of the project. (Wilder, 1998)¹⁸

The Queen and I was also serialized for radio, starring Miriam Margolyes as the Queen and the recordings were (and still are) sold by the BBC.¹⁹

From some letters swapped between Townsend and her literary agent Geoffrey Strachan it is clear that Townsend had the intention to start writing *The Queen and I* in February 1991 and finish by the end of the year which implied it would have been ready for publication by the summer of 1992.²⁰ However, due to the situation with the Royal Family (let us remember the famous Queen Elizabeth II's "annus horribilis") Strachan thought the first major chunk of the book was "very hot material" and should not be leaked to anybody. "Once the book is completed and we have a final edited text to go to the printer I think we will need to consider carefully how we show it around" (Strachan, 1992).²¹

In another letter of January 1993, Strachan confirms the existence of different versions (as usually, for Sue Townsend edited and re-edited her works): "I have lots of versions of the typescript and I feel these belong in your archives for the use of future scholars" (Strachan, 1993).²² Thank you Mr. Strachan.

3.3 A best-selling author

At the beginning of this section I have mentioned Townsend's books gaining the highest popular recognition. But this appraisal on the part of the readers and the publishing industry, had its monetary counterpart, as both *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series and *The Queen and I* had such big sales that can fall under the category of best-sellers. The implied economic benefits associated to the term best-seller has traditionally undermined the possible quality of the works in question, as Sara Garland states:

The best-seller connection to cold hard cash, real readers and royalty payments suggests that its tradition might conceivably constitute one

¹⁸DWL-ST /1/7/35/10 (ii)

¹⁹Cfr. A sample of the full recording at <http://www.amazon.com/The-Queen-BBC-RADIO-COLLECTION/dp/B0013RFQ40> with the original printed version (Townsend, 1992, p.18-21). Other works by Sue Townsend were also adapted in different supports. Her plays *Bazaar and Rummage* and *The Great Celestial Cow* were adapted for television in 1983 and 1985 respectively.

²⁰DWL-ST/1/3/31/3 (i)

²¹DWL- ST 1/7/31/4

²²DWL-ST 1/7/31/54

of the most concrete structures of literary studies. However, significant problems arise when we try to correlate the historical flow of this real and obvious cultural activity with actual mathematical volumes of sales. (Garland in Churchwell & Ruys Eds., 2012, p. 37)

Therefore, apart from the “cold hard cash” generated by the sales, it seems quite difficult to define the limits of the term “best seller” and even more to establish its relationship with the wider category of popular fiction. Bloom describes best selling fiction as an important part of the broader concept of popular fiction, being the best seller “one acute example” (2000, p.17) of the wide range of sociological, political and aesthetic areas covered by popular fiction which is not necessarily related to mass sales. In this sense, Townsend’s best-sellers were just a by-product of the primary trait of her fiction, that is, the appeal to a reality which was clearly identifiable by the average reader, either teenager or adult but not necessarily defined according to other categories such as class or gender.²³

In order to justify my statement about the immense popularity of *The Adrian Mole Diaies* series and *The Queen and I* have gathered some data from the Sue Townsend Archive. These data are scattered across Townsend personal correspondence, newspaper literary reviews of her books and scraps of magazine and newspapers lists of best-sellers and therefore, it has been quite difficult to obtain useful information and this is the reason why I have mixed the number of sales and the actual figures in the same column in the tables, as the information about sales was not available so as to obtain regular statistics. However, just to have an idea of the dimensions of the popularity of these works I tried to arrange the material I retrieved about *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, *The Queen and I* and *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years* in the most clear manner.²⁴

Having a look at the figures, it can be easily perceived that *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* featured number 1 best seller in provinces before doing it at a national level. Whether this was due to the identification with the setting of the book on the part of the readers from decentered areas or not it is difficult to say. In the tables this is deduced thorough the fact that the provincial newspapers

²³To this respect, Bloom explains that “Mass literature has nothing per se to do with merely working-class readers, and mass culture has nothing per se to tell us about working-class life in any clear sense. Rather, popular fiction when it reaches best seller level tells us about a condition of reading which has been proletarianised, whoever reads such work and from whatever background” (2012, p. 28).

²⁴See Appendix 1. *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years* is included as a reference for the sales of *The Queen and I*.

position *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* as number one in the best-sellers list before the national newspapers do it.

What is clearly visible is that Sue Townsend had on several occasions two books positioned as number 1 in the best sellers list at the same time although in different format. It happened in October 1984 when *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* was number one in paperback and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* in hardback. And again in September 1993 when *The Queen and I* was number one in paperback and *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years* in hardback. This implies that the publishing of the new book boosted the sales of the previous one as if new readers involved in the adventures of Townsend's characters wished to trace back the origins of their misfortunes or engage in previous works by the same author which were still easily available.²⁵ Clearly, the character of Adrian Mole had reached incredible quotes of popularity as it is proved by a comment made by Jane Cox, organizer of the exhibition of the Domesday book in March 1985: "After the Bible and The Diary of Adrian Mole, the Domesday is probably England's most famous book" (Cox, 1985).²⁶ A new term, "adrianism", was coined, and Adrian Mole's constant complaining was used as a reference of certain writing styles: "Heat treatment and massage at 3.00. Actually took my clothes off this time! Mustn't do exclamation marks, it's so Adrian Mole. That's all Mummy's fault, she does them in letters to the milkman, everything, "Thank you' and so on" (Fry, 2014, p. 253).

In order to launch *Adrian Mole. The Cappuccino Years*, Townsend took different roadshow trips organised by Penguin Books together with some other authors such as Jamie Oliver and Maryan Keys, with numerous interviews in national newspapers. This time the merchandising was intense and the campaign reached even the Leicester buses. The 14th October 1999 was declared the Mole Day in Leicester. At the time, Townsend had a whole generation engaged in Adrian Mole's adventures; it was not a book for teenagers any more and therefore, the

²⁵Other data, not included in the tables and retrieved from Sue Townsend's archive as well, help describe the popularity of Townsend's books:

-An article in The Leicester Mercury (October 7th, 1999) by Joan Stephens says that *Adrian Mole. The Cappuccino Years* has sold in 1999 more than 300.000 copies and was at the top ten best sellers for five months (DWL-ST 1/13/32/6)

-The spokesperson of the publishing house Michael Joseph, says in October 2004 that the diaries have sold so far ten million copies and have been translated into forty-two languages. (DWL-ST /1/13/32)

-In an email dated on December 2004, Jonathan Loyd of the Agency Curtis Brown rejoices with the sales figures of *Adrian Mole and The Weapons of Mass Destruction*; "last week over 10.000 copies"-10.000 copies in just one week" (Loyd, 2004) - (DWL-ST /1/13/28/33)

²⁶DWL-ST/1/1/7

merchandising appealed to those adults or young adults who had grown with Adrian.

This immense popularity was transferred to The United States where *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* were published together under the title of *The Adrian Mole Diaries* by The Grove Press. Foreseeing the possible difficulties of American readers when finding “too English” terminology in the books, a special appendix was added by the author explaining to Adrian’s American pen-friend most of these terms in order to solve the loss of social references which could result in the loss of the comic and satiric effect. However, some critics considered the differences between the American and British realities were too deep for the book to reach the same quotes of popularity, as Nancy Rehnquist Spears acknowledges in her review for the Sunday Telegram in September 1986:

The children in Britain are much more politically aware than their American counterparts (...) The Moles are often without money and various utilities are disconnected, but there is no sense that they will ever slip through the cracks of the system. The national health doctor makes house calls, although he grumbles a lot. Adrian goes on and off the free lunch program at school and somehow they keep eating and feeding the dog. (Rehnquist, 1986.)²⁷

Adrian was mostly compared to a young Woody Allen referring to his social clumsiness and to Haulen Caufield, the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Some critics questioned if there was going to be a Mole Mania in America as there was in Britain and, although not comparably, the book was also very successful.

In Spain, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* was translated into Spanish by Manuel Sáenz de Heredia and published both by Destino (now part of the Planeta Publishing Group) and Orbis. Contacts with the publishing houses in order to obtain some information about the sales figures or the circumstances surrounding the editions of the diaries have been so far unsuccessful. However, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is nowadays part of the compulsory reading curriculum of numerous public schools for students between 12 and 14 years old and the text is widely known and worked in these courses.²⁸

²⁷DWL-ST/1/2/8

²⁸*The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is a compulsory reading in British secondary schools since 1992-1993. See Colomina Ribas (2004) to check the possible uses of the book in the Spanish language class proposed by the author.

Chapter 4

SUE TOWNSEND'S WORKS THEMATIC KEYS: TIME, SPACE, IDENTITY

Time, space and identity are the three thematic axes around which this research into Sue Townsend's narrative spins. Despite their diversity, they do not operate independent of one another and their literary construction is primarily based on a sort of interconnectedness which results in specific ways of defining the components of identity against a background of historical circumstances and spatial constraints.

Precisely, the historical circumstances surrounding any literary production provide it with a special and distinctive character to be detected in the narrative modes chosen by the author. The extent to which that temporal stamp is evidenced relies upon the author's intention and the kind of narrative chosen. In the case of Sue Townsend, the historical limits of her production influence, greatly in some cases, some of her characters' lives and, at the same time, present a relevant framework of reference to contrast her work with other authors' of her time.

In an increasingly globalised world, locality as a literary constituent may be of lesser importance in contrast to the number of narratives of diaspora which reflect both physical and mental mobility. However, this sense of locality may also encompass a cosmopolitan reality that the characters populating Townsend's work accept or contest, depending on the degree of threat to their vital coordinates it represents.

Either in real life or in literary worlds, identity is defined by the role its different components play in its constructive process. Elements such as class, gender, race,

sexuality and age are the foundations upon which identity constructs are erected. How they are lived and perceived, and their development and evolution within certain historical and spatial references has been the object of much research in the field of Cultural and Literary Studies. In this sense, the analysis of those components of the literary identity of Townsend's characters relies upon these very same categories.

In turn, those three elements constrain the everyday of Townsend's characters in a distinctive way. Official policies of the time, the diversity of possibilities to move inside and outside their sphere of agency and the sociopolitical regulations on identity constituents define the ways in which the character's everyday is performed and perceived, and could help provide a general impression on how to understand the everyday of certain sectors of British population in this period.

4.1 Time

Most part of Townsend's production develops under Margaret Thatcher's and Tony Blair's terms of office, which results in a sort of happy coincidence as it offers the reader the possibility to establishing a series of invaluable connections between fiction and reality. Not disregarding the references to John Major, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, these are generally depicted by Townsend as mere heirs of their respective predecessors' policies, and have a certain presence in this research due to the cross-cutting character of some issues at stake. Thatcher and Blair feature vastly in Townsend's books either as references for her fiction characters' remarks or in various literary shapes.

4.1.1 The spirit of the 1980s: Margaret Thatcher and her impact on British life

Margaret Thatcher arrived at 10, Downing Street after winning the general election in 1979 with 339 seats in Parliament against the 269 of Labour. This victory was the result of a fortuitous combination: on the one hand, the series of rampant problems which had led the country to an almost permanent state of conflict during the 1970s and which had reached its peak in the sadly famous "winter of discontent" of 1978-79, when an unprecedented wave of strikes in diverse vital sectors of British economy swept over the country. On the other hand, the intelligent manoeuvring of Thatcher within the Conservative party to marginalise Edward Heath and obtain the party's nomination as their candidate.

In Thatcher's three terms of office, Great Britain experienced an upside down transformation. Present-day realities date back to the Thatcher years and so-called "Thatcherism" turned into a phenomenon of paramount importance in the history of the country as acknowledged by Stuart Hall who insists on the its distinctive character which provided the period with special characteristics, transforming it into a turning-point in British history (Hall, 1988).

Margaret Thatcher's first term was mainly dominated by economic policies with the implementation of a series of measures intended to control the crisis which provoked a "seismic" effect (Jackson & Saunders, 2012, p. 6). In the first two years of Thatcher's government, the manufacturing sector decreased some 25%, the interest rates rose to 17%, GDP contracted by 2%, etc. The recession was longer than anticipated and eventually, unemployment reached 3 million in 1983. Thatcher's pro-free market and Friedmanesque liberalism was the landmark of her first years as privatisation was the password of her second term. The programme of privatisations resulted in launch of the "right to buy" policy, with the sale of council house properties to rent-paying tenants, the sale of British Telecom, British Gas, British Airways, Rolls-Royce, reaching a figure of £10 billion (Jackson & Saunders, 2012, p. 7). The third term was defined economically, among other things, by the unpopular "poll tax" which, eventually, precipitated Thatcher's fall.

Essential changes were also experienced at both social and political levels as, according to Hall, Thatcherism implied:

A fragmentation of the historic relations of representation between classes and parties, the shifting boundaries between state and civil society, "public" and "private"; the emergence of new arenas of contestation, new sites of social antagonism, new social movements, and new social subjects and political identities. (Hall, 1988, p. 2)

The miner's strike represented the end of an era of union intervention in governments' economic policies. The conflict between Thatcher's government and the members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) exemplified the new modes in which these relations were going to develop. The miners were defeated in their claims not to close a number of pits considered unproductive due to, among other reasons, the conflictive personality of the NUM leader, Arthur Scargill (who had refused to hold a national ballot on the strike which eventually led to it being declared illegal), Thatcher's immovable position and the lack of or weakening support on the part of other strategic sectors to the strike. However, the miners'

struggle remained in British imaginary, especially that of the Left and the working class, as a historical momentum; the strike changed the relations between workers and government forever. The clash between “uz” and “them” had deepened and Thatcher’s triumphal rhetoric on the fierce miners was no longer convincing once the miners had gone back to work (Howell, 2012 in Jackson & Saunders, Eds.).

The economic programme developed during Thatcher’s first term at such high social cost gave way to a slow improvement and was responsible for the birth of the “Loadsamoney” culture which glorified economic growth based only on lavishing state assets and North Sea oil revenues, together with extreme consumption (and subsequent debt) and house price speculation.¹

The “Big Bang” or deregulation of financial markets and the changes in the London Stock Exchanges rules in 1986 implied important transformations in the structure of the market as old companies were taken over by large banks. The situation give birth to a new class of “money executives” or “yuppies”, surely not the most harmed by privatizations and unemployment but, according to Judt, the exponents of an “individualistic ethic that discounted any unqualifiable assets (...) the public space became a market place” (Judt, 2005, p. 543).

Social antagonism and conflict were exemplified not only by the miner’s struggle -which reached its peak with the so-called battle of Orgreave- but also by the different poll tax riots and demonstrations against government nuclear policy and unemployment figures, among other things. However, not only must we refer to conflict against the government but also to conflict (although not overtly declared but intrinsically latent) among different social sectors. Unemployment divided the country affecting some areas such as the North of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in a higher degree (Vinen, 2009), as it did to black people, young unqualified workers or older ones working in declining industries. Re-centralization of educational policy and regional economy planning implied a conflict between centre and periphery (Judt, 2005). In addition, the highly praised working class solidarity did not exist any more and unemployment payments did not permit any kind of sociological turning to the Left. People, although unemployed, still voted Conservative:

Benefit payments were sufficiently low to cut down many unemployed people off from the company of those who remained at work, which itself reduced the possibility of working-class solidarity, but they were

¹Cfr. Fry, 2010 for an interesting account of the origins of the expression “loadsamoney”, popularized by the British comedian Larry Enfield.

not so low that they induced the desperation that might have come from the prospect of starvation (...) To the chagrin of left-wing sociologists who interviewed them, large numbers of unemployed people accepted government explanations for unemployment. (Vinen, 2009, p. 132)

British projection outside the country's borders in Thatcher's times was marked by her strong wish to reposition the country to the place it had occupied in world politics before Suez in 1956. To do so, three main working lines were favoured. Firstly, a strong alignment with American policies in the diverse Cold War scenarios, particularly thanks to Thatcher's personal connection with President Reagan: "Thatcher was determined to reverse British decline. But she came to realise that this was only possible by reinvigorating the ties between Britain and the United States and rekindling the ideal of English speaking civilisation" (Gamble in Jackson & Saunders Eds., 2012, p. 230).

Secondly, extreme Euroscepticism, although not so acute as it had been before her second term, was also pervading in Thatcher's policy abroad, a swift which accompanied the repositioning of world and European powers alike (Vinen, 2009), exemplified by the Bruges speech in September 1988 where Thatcher's view of a Europe united but not uniformed was clearly stated:

If you believe some of the things said and written about my views on Europe, it must seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence! (...) The European Community belongs to all its members. It must reflect the traditions and aspirations of all its members. And let me be quite clear. Britain does not dream of some cosy, isolated existence on the fringes of the European Community. Our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community. That is not to say that our future lies only in Europe, but nor does that of France or Spain or, indeed, of any other member. The Community is not an end in itself. (Thatcher, 1998)

Finally, the Falklands war represented a modern conflict inserted within outmoded imperial coordinates. The conflict allowed Thatcher to present herself as a war leader in the fashion of Winston Churchill and World War II rhetoric and, in more practical terms, it fuelled her victory in the elections of 1983:

Conservative Central Office provided four helicopters to fly her and the press to the Isle of Wright. In front of the British Hovercraft Corporation's hanger doors, which featured the biggest Union flag in the country, she was captured on films with arms outstretched. She

then made an amphibious landing on another section of the island and was photographed posing like a figure on the prow of a military hovercraft. (Cockerell cited in Nunn, 1988, p. 140)

This imagery stems for Thatcher's concept of British identity, based on militarism and the perception of a British nation's destiny to be met no matter the cost. The social price of all this was, nevertheless, very high.

Thatcher's times have been defined as "revolutionary" for they represent a long-lasting shift from the traditional guidelines of British politics to new ways which would pervade through time. From a social perspective, Judt refers to the "catastrophic long-term consequences" [of the] "serious harm to the fabric of British public life" (Judt, 2005, p. 543) that Thatcher's politics implied.

But essentially Thatcher had a deep impact in the subsequent history of Britain at all levels through her persistent presence either to be praised or contested. In this sense, the world of culture in its different manifestations eagerly assumed a highly critical role of Thatcher's policies which, in some sectors led to a flowering of creative talent with exceptional final products. This is the case of British cinema which experienced a kind of renaissance thanks to a new group of talented directors and actors performing films which reflected the impact on British life of those policies, particularly the ones constraining the arts world, treated under Thatcher with the same market principles applied to other economic areas (Friedman, 2006). Films out of the mainstream were commissioned by Channel 4, giving way to independent productions deeply rooted in the real, everyday lives of British people touched by Thatcherism: "The majority of British films in the 1980s never engaged in open critiques of Thatcherism, but the ethos she created seemed to become the implicit or explicit subject of many of the period's best films" (Quart in Friedman, 2006, p. 22).

Films depicting different aspects of the miner's strike were released only some ten years after the actual strike and it seems the profound impact it provoked needed some decades to be decanted, assimilated and adequately told about. The episode of the 1996 drama series *Our Friends in the North* is about the events of the strike and counted on the participation of many of those actually involved in the conflict with the police. The films *Brassed Off* (1996) and *Billy Elliot* (2000) have their main plot lines inserted in the miners' strike context, but as early as 1988, *Strike* a satirical episode of Channel Four's *Comic Strip*, describes the transformation suffered by a left-wing screen play written by a former miner about the strike once a Hollywood studio buys the rights of the script and turns the episode into

an action film. In 2005, *Faith*, analysed the strike from the perspective of both the police and the miners. *Pride* (2014) is based on the true story of a group of lesbian and gay activists who raised funds to support families affected by the miner's strike and the reluctance of the NUM to be publicly associated with them. Other films such as *Raining Stones* (1993) or *The Full Monty* (1997) are set in the hard years of strong unemployment and depict, although each of them in a different tone, a social context similar to the one portrayed by Italian neorealist films with a set of characters sank under the burden of unemployment finding just a momentary relief from their grim situation. On the other hand, *This is England* (2006) represents a gritty account of working class life in 1983 and the skinhead subculture.

Thatcher attracted what in the mildest possible way could be termed as “reject” on the part of musicians of all kinds from punk to soul. Songs against her featured in demonstrations and protest marches, occasionally gaining positions on *Top of the Pops*. Music was also a weapon to be used against the Thatcherite government and musicians such as Elvis Costello (“Tramp the dirt down”, Costello, 1989), The Clash, Paul Weller, The Communards, Madness, Morrissey (“Margaret on the Guillotine”, Morrissey, 1988), Billy Bragg, The Notsensibles, etc. fought actively from stage and recording studios. They responded to a narrative of battle and war developed by Thatcher who had termed certain social groups as “the enemy within”, and their response was equally strong in their hatred for her. Even at the time of her death, the wound so deeply inflicted in British society was reopened and the song from *The Wizard of Oz*, “Ding, dong, the Witch is Dead” (Arlen and Harburg, 1939) was listened again and eventually banned from public broadcast.

Margaret Thatcher also left her mark in British literature and the 1980s were a highly productive time, especially as far as the novel is concerned, bringing together a series of writers who, otherwise would have had no special link among them: “Never before in the history of English fiction had a group of writers who might otherwise have differed in temperament and outlook been so assiduously fascinated by the prevailing political regime and united in their unreserved contempt for it” (Bradford, 2007, p. 33). As in films, British novel experienced an evolution in the most successful terms:

It is an apparent paradox that the Thatcher era, systematically vilified in much of the literature it provoked, seems with hindsight to have ushered in a period of renaissance in English fiction.(...) Thatcherism, as an international political phenomenon, was a radical and divisive political strategy that stimulated outrage from the novelist, whose

broadly liberal sensibilities were deeply offended by the attack on traditional collective values. (Head, 2002, p. 45)

British novel flourished in the Thatcher period either as contestation or mere depiction of the spirit of the age. Among the best representatives there are *Money* by Martin Amis (1984), Hilary Mantel's *Every Day Is Mother's Day* (1985), *The Radiant Way* by Margaret Drabble (1987), J.G. Ballard's *Running Wild* (1988) or *What a Carve up* (1994) by Jonathan Coe, -to name but a few- all of them portraying, although from different points of view, the ethos of Thatcher's times and the authors' concerns regarding the "disappearance of traditional modes of social responsibility" (Head, 2002, p. 39), the chaos of a society facing the end of the welfare state or the new modes of British life, based on greed and competitiveness.

4.1.1.1 Townsend vs. Thatcher

Margaret Thatcher left her stamp on Sue Townsend's works, either as a catalyst of action and reaction on the part of her characters or as a character herself, in both cases with the most comic results wrapping a, not exactly subtle, criticism which, in turn, contributed to the current of mocking discourse of the figure of the leader. In the case of Townsend, this mocking discourse is to be found mainly in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* and *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts 14 and 1/4*, with occasional hints in *Adrian Mole*, *The Cappuccino Years*. It relies fully on the active role of the reader whose reading, especially of *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts 14 and 1/4* operates "with the benefit of hindsight (...) as the complete meaning of the diary entries is only disclosed when contrasted with actual facts" (de Mingo, 2015, p. 109) and articulates mainly around two components: gender and morality.

Questioning Thatcher's gender was a must for her satirists and Townsend was no exception:

Naturally I asked her what the 'Grand Plan was'. She said 'I'm to be the first Woman Prime Minister in Britain'.
I said, 'And Mrs. Thatcher? She never existed?'
'Mrs. Thatcher is a man in drag, everybody knows that' she said contemptuously". (Townsend, 1999, p. 246).

However, as a response to criticism, Thatcher toyed skilfully with gender assumptions presenting herself as a matter-of-fact housewife and caring mother while

displaying, at the same time, a full repertoire of strength and domination. Thus her public image offered a full array of readings, some of them tainted with an angry criticism which was awakened during the days of her passing and subsequent reflection on her time in April, 2013, as we have seen: “I could end up as Prime Minister. Is it so inconceivable? Not, in my opinion. Mrs. Thatcher was once a humble housewife and mother. So, if she can do it, why can’t I?” (Townsend, 1989, p. 24).

Thatcher broke the mould of gender stereotypes which ruled the condition of female politicians of her time, apparently more inclined to deal with “compassion issues” related to children, health and education (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). She presented herself also as a business and military leader, ready to discuss markets and troops deployment, started the process of dismantling the British Welfare State and vanquished the tough miners of the NUM. This calculated blend of feminine delicacy and male strength confounded public opinion and a wide sector of it retaliated with mockery, on many occasions focused on her alleged “gender-switch”:²

I am not sure how I will vote. Sometimes I think Mrs. Thatcher is a nice kind sort of woman. Then the next day I see her on television and she frightens me rigid. She has got eyes like a psychotic killer, but a voice like a gentle person. It is a bit confusing. (Townsend, 1991, p. 163)

Thus, Thatcher performed her own gender in a double-sided way which had its impact upon public opinion, combining a traditional and slightly old-fashioned image with a self-definition as “the best man for the job”. This contradiction was artfully controlled and displayed and caused havoc among the feminist lines as Thatcher, a woman who had made her way up to premiership struggling in the traditionally all-male milieu of politics was, at the same time, a Conservative model widely rejected by feminists (Nunn, 2002).

Nevertheless, Townsend’s discourse on Thatcher is not destructive nor aimed at radical political changes but it operates “with quite closed and traditional categories which is, in turn, a surprising contrast with part of Townsend’s narrative with a clear feminist tinge” (de Mingo, 2015, p. 111). Sue Townsend’s satire on Margaret Thatcher has got a complementary perspective displayed in *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts*, the fictive diary of young Margaret

²To this respect, see Thatcher’s puppet in *Spitting Image* (Fluck, Law & Lambie-Nairn, 1984)

Roberts whose strong personality features from her early years. On this occasion, Townsend mocks Thatcher's morals and Methodist upbringing. Thatcher's own discourse played with both religion and morality as the main sources of social values and the basis of moral regeneration (Grimley, 2012).

The Methodist conception of free will is turned by Thatcher into the main moral argument for her political measures. Townsend, for her part, contests this morality and describes young Margaret working at her father's shop in Grantham, fooling customers by altering the quantity and quality of the goods on sale, thus bending religious precepts to the family's own benefit:

Help father to water down the dandelion and burdock. Out of two dozen original bottles we managed to eke out one dozen more. Father, *who is a good Methodist*,³ explained that our actions were perfectly moral, and that Jesus's trick with the loaves and fishes was an honourable precedent. (Townsend, 1989, p. 147)

For Young Margaret strict Methodism results in a constant exercise of self-discipline:

Woke up at 4 am, refreshed after an hour and a half's sleep. Just for fun read Intermediate Chemistry and committed to memory the more difficult formulae. However, life cannot and should not, be one endless round of pleasure, so at 5 am rose and went downstairs. (Townsend, 1989, p. 146)

Margaret works hard in order to be qualified for eternal salvation but on her way she ends up gaining more than one enemy:

“Dear Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, Margaret's behaviour has been giving me a great cause for concern. At all times she is neat, clean and controlled. She is top of every subject (...) but Margaret is wearing out my staff with the constant requests for more work (...) This morning I came to school early and found her mopping the lavatories. All very laudable, you may think, but her mania for work is making her very unpopular with the other girls. (Townsend, 1989, p. 143)

Her antipathy for permissiveness is born in her adolescence but her criticism comes to naught:

³My emphasis.

School dinner (...) was unnecessarily extravagant. I counted two sultanas per square inch in the spotted dick. I complained to the school cook but she rudely told me to ‘move along’ claiming that I was holding up the second helpings queue” (Townsend, 1989, p. 149)

As in other examples of Townsend’s narrative, the reader plays an important role as previous knowledge of the circumstances that surrounded Thatcher’s premiership places them in a privileged position so as to understand fully the references of Townsend’s satire. In the following quotes, the author mocks both Thatcher’s decision to remove free school milk for pupils older than seven:

A traveler from London (...) passed on a rumour he had heard that a future socialist government would introduce free milk to schools. Father went the colour of barley and had to sit down. (...) If the filthy socialists ever do take power, I shall refuse to drink free school milk. (Townsend, 1989, p. 137)

And Thatcher’s future attitude towards industrial action, with a clear reference to the miners’ strike:

Glancing through the accounts I noticed a new entry: ‘Mrs. Roberts, wages. Sixpence a week’. [Her mother had declared herself on strike unless paid for her services] So, Father has capitulated to industrial action, has he? How despicable! That is something I would never *ever* do.⁴ (Townsend, 1989, p. 159)

4.1.2 Tony Blair and the multiple meanings of “new”

On May, 2 1997, Tony Blair entered the doors of 10, Downing Street as the successor to the conservative PM John Major, after a landslide victory. The milestones in his career prior to this day, demonstrated perfectly well the ways in which his premiership would develop. Among them word, language and speech would turn into the key elements in helping to (de)construct his public image which, at first, was irresistibly attractive as he appeared like a breath of fresh air in the stale atmosphere of British politics: “The appearance of a youthful, attractive and impetuous glad-hander was like that of Prince Charming in *Sleeping Beauty*. Blair’s sheer difference from the run of Labour leaders was dramatic?” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 206). This undeniable charm was clearly exploited by Blair in order to shape a public image multiplied by the media. The political marketing machine

⁴Emphasis of the author

contributed to create the brand “New Labour” personified by its leader and supported by the zealous Alistair Campbell together with a centralized organization located in the very same 10, Downing Street, in charge of coordinating communications between the government and the citizens. Tony Blair was perfectly conscious of the pressure of different media opposed to Labour, particularly those owned by Rupert Murdoch, especially *The Sun*, and did his best to reverse this. The Sun which had supported the Conservatives in 1992 rejoiced in the Labour victory some years later. Nothing was for free and Labour “would do nothing to antagonize corporate interest in the media industry” (Freedman, 2003, p. 169).

For a significant number of Britons, Blair personified the hope of a better future that they envisaged free from the constraints of Thatcher’s restrictive policies. In order to raise these hopes and channel the discontent of public opinion towards the Conservative Party, Blair played the public image card masterfully and was able to sell the country the continuation of some Thatcherite policies wrapped in Labour paper:

I even decided to own up to supporting changes Margaret Thatcher had made. I knew the credibility of the New Labour project rested on accepting that much of what she wanted to do in the 80’s was inevitable, a consequence not of ideology but of social and economic change. (Blair, 2010, p. 99)

Blair’s appealingly convincing personality had shown its mettle in 1995 when he obtained from the Labour party the abolition of Clause IV which, closely read, advocated for nationalisation or collective property of the means of production. Thus, Blair, following in Gaitskell’s wake, was able to persuade his party of entering a process of updating remake from which it has not still recovered.

The abolition of Clause IV was just the beginning and, in due course, gave way to New Labour, a re-branding process starred by a new leader and a new programme; the so-called “Third Way” (neither Old Left nor Thatcherite Right). Blair was able to impose his views on his party, supported by Gordon Brown, his closest ally and Chancellor of the Exchequer-to-be and exposed those ideas in the New Labour manifesto of 1997, aimed at “no less than to set British political life on a new course for the future” (Labour Party, 1997). Although not so “new” as Blair wanted to convey, for some taint of innovation had been present during the sixties,⁵ the makeover was effective and Blair became the first Labour leader to

⁵Blair referred to former Labour ministers as unable to see that change was coming and should be accepted, which gave an impression that “Old” Labour was not open to innovation,

win three elections in a row, the first time with the biggest Labour majority of its history.

Following the paths traced in the 1997 New Labour manifesto, the New Labour governments worked on the new centre and new left politics based on core components of British sociopolitical reality:

- Regarding industrial relations and economic management, Blair designed a programme aimed at “partnership not conflict between employers and employees” (New Labour, 1997). New Labour maintained the unions where Margaret Thatcher had positioned them, under the rule of government and unable to blackmail it via extreme striking. New Labour supported risk-taking and wealth creation in its most Thatcherite way but protecting all productive sectors from the eager demands of capital. However, this resulted in a considerable support for neo-liberalism.
- “Education, education, education” was Blair’s and New Labour’s motto. Advocating in their 1997 Manifesto for a reform of the comprehensive system which took into account “the distinct abilities of individual pupils and organises them in classes to maximise their progress in individual subjects” (Labour Party, 1997),⁶ this opposed to previous Labour education policies of the 1950s. The New Labour programme devised a system with better academic results, highly motivated teaching staff, new buildings and equipment, together with the inclusion of diversity in a system of high quality choice of school on the part of parents. Academic results, number of teachers and funding had certainly improved in 2007 (Smithers, 2007) but the levels of truancy increased, more teachers were quitting and the comprehensive school system was still under question. It seems the achievements were not as expected.
- As for health and welfare, New Labour aspired to “safeguard the basic principles of the NHS, *which we founded*”⁷ (New Labour, 1997). An old system for a new management perspective. The service had been under continuous reform since the mid-1980s. Patients’ concerns were reflected in surveys and interpreted by politicians with negative effect in many cases.

but, according to Thorton (2009) it was in the 1950s and 1960s when, for instance, some ideas regarding public- private partnership began to be exposed by Labour politicians.

⁶Thatcher’s presence is clearly visible in this sentence. Cfr. with her famous “Let our children grow tall and some taller than others if they have the ability in them to do so” (Thatcher, 1975).

⁷My emphasis.

The NHS has not effectively improved as Blair wished and private-public partnership led to situations of overcrowded and understaffed health care centres and hospitals. By the end of Blair's era, the general perception was of government failure as welfare reform was concerned. Blair's plans amounted to nothing but words:

Thus, the ten-year NHS plan, I didn't think I would last ten years and neither did Alan, but we were conscious of the need to set a framework to construct a platform that would place the NHS on a different trajectory. (Blair, 2010, p. 271)

Despite all the above mentioned domestic and party affairs which were of greater importance for British citizens, Blair is to be remembered by his foreign affairs policies. The, already traditional, link with The United States, produced a "romance" as intense as Reagan and Thatcher's between Blair and Bill Clinton with the subsequent intervention of Britain in foreign scenarios such as Kosovo and Sierra Leone. After September 11, 2001, the so-called war on terror, linked Blair and Bush as leaders of a multinational force to fight Saddam Hussein as an Al-Qaeda sponsor and destroy his alleged weapons of mass destruction. Blair led Britain to a war which was not supported by British citizenship. It even found opposition among significant sectors of Labour and some members of Blair's government. Blair could not (or was not able to) secure support for the war and finally "his directive and hands-on decision style ensured that the significant opposition to the policy within his cabinet and foreign office was marginalized at the crucial decision points" (Dyson, 2009, p. 98)

In his political biography, *A Journey*, Blair devotes lines galore to justify Britain's intervention in Iraq which eventually precipitated his resignation. However, he blames his losing "that common touch which had defined the earlier time in office and which had created the bond [with British people]" (Blair, 2007, p. 659), disregarding the fact that the generalized lack of support of the war on terror was part of this failure to connect with British citizens:

The impact of the Iraq war on Blair's leadership was similar to that of the Falklands on Thatcher. (...) but for Thatcher the Falklands was positive, for Blair was negative. the reason was that Blair in Iraq, unlike Thatcher was never in control of events. He had involved British troops whose course, conduct and outcome were in the hands of the Americans (Jenkins, 2006, p. 248).

New Labour, under a new Leader, new relationships with the media, new ways of depicting the everyday reality of British citizens...all these changes amounted to nothing in public perception which, according to Seldon & Kavanagh (2005) implied:

A mismatch which reflected the climate of mistrust that developed around the government [and entailed] the inability of New Labour to construct a convincing narrative around either its constitutional or its welfare reforms which meant that too often it appeared vacuous and shallow, with no anchoring principles. (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005, p. 437)

The impact of Tony Blair in British popular culture might not be considered as deep as Thatcher's. Unlike Thatcher, his telegenic qualities made his image a common presence and he appeared in films, for TV and the big screen, and TV shows either as a fictional character or in cameos. Some films depicted specific episodes of his life or particular circumstances of his premiership, among them, *The Deal* (2003), portraying the alleged deal which took place in a restaurant between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown to decide who would be the PM and who the Chancellor of the Exchequer, *The Government Inspector* (2005), describing the facts about the death of Dr. Kelly, an expert on biological warfare who, off the record, disclosed information on the weapons of mass destruction dossiers, *The Queen* (2006) showing Blair's first steps into premiership and the rising of his popularity levels due to the circumstances surrounding Princess Diana's death or *The Special Relationship* (2010) illustrating the relationship between Blair and Clinton. Particularly interesting is *The Ghost Writer* where Pierce Brosnan plays Adam Lang, a British PM based on Tony Blair. However, Blair was openly rejected precisely by the cultural sectors which had welcomed him at first, especially those of a left-wing ideology such as Townsend herself. Eventually, the open wound of the Iraqi war was the catalyst for Blair's mounting levels of criticism and opposition from intellectual and artistic fields.

Nevertheless, as it usually happens with PMs and Presidents, satire was the most fruitful field to depict Blair's personality and political actions. He was impersonated by Alistair Mc Gowan in *The Big Impression*, turned into a singing leader in *TONY! The Blair Musical* (2007) and had his spitting image de rigueur. He also appeared in cameos in *The Simpsons* and as himself in a sketch for the Red Nose Day of 2007 and was openly mocked in "Sermon from St. Albion's" (1998) and the column in *Private Eye*, "St. Albion Parish News" (1997-2007). He was even satirized in music by the band Chumbawamba whose song "Tony

Blair” (1999) is written like a letter to an ex-lover who has broken his promises. In a way, British citizens perceived in the projection of Blair’s public persona that almost from very early stages of his premiership nothing but words was left.

4.1.2.1 Sue Townsend’s narrative of speech and reality under New Labour

The day after tomorrow on May 2nd, as dawn breaks, I predict that the Labour party will just scrape in, and will form the next government. Talk of a landslide victory is hysterical rubbish whipped up by the media. (Townsend, 1999, p. 8)

With his characteristic lack of insight, Adrian Mole forecasts the Labour victory, albeit wrong in his prediction. Sue Townsend starts *Adrian Mole. The Cappuccino Years* with the diary entries dated right before Blair’s victory. Adrian describes in depth the voting process and the assistance given by Labour party volunteers by driving people (those sick, pensioners or mothers with no baby-sitters for their kids) to the polling station in the hope that they vote Labour. And hope is precisely the crucial word in this episode and in the whole volume. Blair represented the hope of many voters to regain lost rights under Thatcher and Major. Blair’s image conveyed a series of things which had not been present in British politics for long:

First I spelled out the strengths and weaknesses of Blair’s position. His strengths were ‘freshness and a sense of change; confidence and self-assurance; that Tony Blair is a new kind of politician; that Blair changes what it means to be Labour. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 96)

He represented exactly that, fresh air in British politics for he belonged to a generation who had not lived through World War II and was brought up in the sixties, which implied a totally different approach to politics. He also knew how to portray an image of “a normal person” one could come across in the street and at the same time, absolutely convinced of what his mission was, what Britain needed and how to provide the means for meeting the country’s needs “Tony Blair will give you a work, George” (Townsend, 1999, p. 22).

The intention of Blair’s successive governments for business, market and labour were clearly described in the launch of 2005 Labour Party Manifesto:

Labour as a party not only believes that economic dynamism and social justice must go hand in hand, but that creating and maintaining

the right environment for enterprise and wealth creation is a policy priority. It is business and not government that creates wealth but I do not accept the dogmatic view of the Conservatives that government can have no role in fostering enterprise and innovation. (Labour Party, 2005)

That is, the famous “Third Way”, contemplating an economy based on a liberalization of markets -both financial and labour- but with the government support, therefore, a mixture between Conservative neo-liberal positions and traditional Labour values (Seldon & Kavanagh, 2005).

Some of Townsend’s characters were victims of unemployment and its consequences in Thatcher’s times, with shirking welfare provisions and bleak perspectives of improvement, as we shall see later:

She said it was about time my father pulled himself together. She said she knew my father felt humiliated, alienated and bitter because he was unemployed, but that he was setting a bad example to an impressionable adolescent’. (Townsend, 1991, p. 124)

Although unemployment had reached its peak before Blair’s first term of office and a slow recovery had started, it still continued to be one urgent problem to be addressed, mainly due to the increase in earnings inequality with a direct consequence in the fall of pay levels for those unskilled workers, giving way to the so-called “working poor” (Finn & Schulte, 2008): “We drove to our first of our pick-ups; an old woman called Ida Peacock whose house smelled of dead cats. She walked with sticks. She told me that Tony Blair was going to give her two new hips” (Townsend, 1999, p. 34). However, the Labour promise of 1997 to not increasing the top rates of income tax was difficult to combine with the alleged rebuilding of the NHS and things did not improve when both customers’ choice and competition were introduced into the service, with private companies opting for public services as hospital suppliers (Glennister, 2005).

As the rest of the country, Townsend’s characters are carried along by the mixed image of faith in a leader and expectation of a better future conveyed by Tony Blair: “Mrs. Clough was excited by the prospect of a Labour victory. She thought that Tony Blair would ‘support single mothers’. she had heard him say so on the Jimmy Young programme, so she knew it must be true” (Townsend, 1999, p. 43). Although they are still unaware of the profound changes that Labour conceptions had experienced: “Yeah, well, that’s what you think, Moley. Tony Blair’s gonna

look after me from now on. I'm workin' class, an' Labour's always looked after the workin' class" (Townsend, 1999, p. 77).

And the Labour leader, prior to his first victory, exploited this narrative of hope masterfully by reinforcing the link between the ruling class and the people, in short, by renewing the social contract:

The vision is one of national renewal, a country with drive, purpose and energy (...) I want to renew our country's faith in the ability of its government and politics to deliver this new Britain. I want to do it by making a limited set of important promises and achieving them. This is the purpose of the bond of trust I set out at the end of this introduction, in which ten specific commitments are put before you. Hold us to them. They are our covenant with you. (Labour Party, 1997)

Adrian Mole, his family, his friends, his true love Pandora (who will become a Labour MP for their city), all of them share and spread that feeling of renewal and true connection with Blair, almost at a religious level:

I tramped the streets of Soho looking for them. Within two minutes of leaving home I was offered lesbian sex, heroin and a Rolex watch (...) A Labour government will change all that. Mr. Blair is a committed Christian, and I forecast that a religious revival will sweep the land. (Townsend, 1999, p. 9)

Sue Townsend's political tendency was clearly pro-Labour as she acknowledges in her non-fiction *True Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman*: "It's not a secret that my politics are to the left of Lenin and Livingstone, so it came as a shock to find that I was actually enjoying *The Daily Telegraph*" (Townsend, 2001, p. 63) and *Mr. Bevan's Dream* "Because of him [Aneurin Bevan] I became a socialist and a supporter of the Welfare State" (Townsend, 1989, p. 9). However, this support of the Labour Party did not impede her from exposing the failures of Blair's policies by condemning repeatedly the disparity between New Labour narrative and the reality of the everyday which is absolutely evident in both *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* and *Number Ten*.

The contrast between both elements results in a series of satirical diary entries in the case of *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*. They are directly targeted at the events prior to the direct participation of Britain in the Iraqi war and while representing the official discourse on the war the pervasive irony they distil obtain, precisely, the opposite result: "Mr. Blair was speaking about the

danger to the world if tyrants like Saddam Hussein were not challenged. How anybody could doubt Mr. Blair's word is a mystery to me. The man radiates honesty and sincerity" (Townsend, 2004, p. 154).

Honouring his surname, Adrian, as usually is unable to see the reality that is evident to most of the British population of the time. Townsend's "narrative trick" (de Mingo, 2015) counts on the reader to "join the dots" and grasp the criticism to be read between the lines when comparing Adrian's position to the historical facts of the time:

Mr. Blair looks at the camera lens with such a knowing expression, as if to say, I am privy to top-secret information. I know more than I can say. That is why the British people must trust Mr. Blair. (Townsend, 2004, p. 259)

In addition, Blair's aptitudes for acting -he took part in some plays in his youth (Hinnman, 2007)- are also stressed which, in turn, reinforces the theatrical impression of the whole picture.⁸

So Mr. Blair and Mr. Bush stand alone against tyranny. Our Prime Minister has been making the speeches of his life. His nostrils flare, his chin sets in a determined way and his eyes blaze with passion. (...) what an actor Mr. Blair would have made. The National Theatre's loss is the British public's gain. (Townsend, 2004, p. 154)

Townsend condemns the makeover of the everyday performed by the Labour Party, turned into New Labour, by means of renaming its most usual components as if changing the name of things would automatically imply an improvement of their condition:

David outlined his plans. 'We take 'Labour' out of the party's name. The word Labour has totally negative connotations; it's associated with sweat and hard work, trade unionism and protracted and painful childbirth' (...) Alexander said drily 'If we drop the 'Labour' from 'New Labour' We're left with one word, 'New' (Townsend, 1999, p. 16)

Tony Blair's literary persona, Edward Claire (note the rhyming similarity of both names) is one of the protagonists of *Number Ten*, Townsend's witty satire on the loss of connection between British citizens and their P.M. The novel opens with

⁸In October 2000, 46% of the populace rated Blair trustworthy. In September 2006 the figure had decreased to 29%. (Page, 2007).

a comic description of the universe of 10, Downing Street where Edward and his family, his Cabinet members, his assistants and the policemen and secret service agents try to coexist.

"Anyroadup,' says Alexander Mc Pherson⁹ can we sort out a few things Ed? We've got an arse of a week. there are half a dozen reports out, crime' s up (...) and the mortuary workers are striking on Monday unless they get a ten per cent pay rise and a thirty -five hour week'. Edward said 'In Africa a little kid dies every ten seconds from a water-borne disease.' Alex replied, 'Yeah, my heart bleeds at the thought, but we'll be knee-deep in fuckin' corpses if we don't sort the body-washers out.' (Townsend, 2002, p. 13)

Townsend's mockery reaches every corner: "Adele's nose was extraordinarily large. Her father Guy Floret had remarked on seeing her for the first time, only moments after she had been born 'Mon dieu, ma pauvre enfant. Elle est Pinocchio' (Townsend, 2002, p. 18).¹⁰

The starting point of the novel is a terrible situation experienced by Edward Claire at one of the Question Time sessions of British Parliament. Asked about different issues he must account for, on that particular occasion, he spectacularly fails to know the price of a pint of milk. This leads Edward to realise that he has definitively lost contact with the British electorate and in order to solve it, he starts an incognito trip with one of the bobbies guarding the door of Number 10; Jack Sprat. To stress the comedy of the whole situation, Townsend decides that Edward Claire will tour the country disguised as a woman.

This plot results in several different dimensions to be addressed in different pages of this research. The most relevant one as far as this section is concerned, is the confrontation with the reality of the country that Edward Claire is forced to experience which is used by Townsend to contrast official discourse and everyday life. Edward will experience in flesh and blood the, sometimes absurd situations the average citizen faces; the decay of the National Health System, derelict neighbourhoods, constantly-increasing crime rates, etc.

The story is started as a journey narrative and progresses towards a road movie as it "provides a ready space for exploration of the tensions and crises of the historical moment during which it is produced" (Cohan & Hark, 1997, p. 2). In

⁹The name chosen to represent Alistair Campbell. The Scottish echoes of both surnames are evident.

¹⁰Adele Floret stands for Cherie Blair. Note both French names.

this sense, Edward must face the other side of the coin of his own reality and the disparity between both realms:

Jack said, ‘During the war there was a day nursery on every corner so that the women could go to work.’ The Prime Minister replied irritably, ‘There are innumerable measures in place to facilitate single parents going back to work, Jack.’ (...) When he got back inside the car he said savagely to the Prime Minister, ‘It was twelve-fifteen on a Wednesday afternoon, so why wasn’t the library open?’ The Prime Minister said nothing but he felt vaguely ashamed. (Townsend, 1999, p. 150).

Luckily for the reader, irony and humour pervade the different episodes:

While Jack waited to request a trolley he read a scrawled notice (...) Welcome to the Casualty Department: waiting times Children: 2 hours / Minor injuries: 2 hours / Major injuries: 2 hours. (Townsend, 1999, p. 159)

Throughout the whole plot, Townsend confronts the real country with the one created by Blair’s discourse and, as she usually does, takes sides with the regular citizen whose perception of the Prime Minister has been dramatically altered since the hopeful times prior to his first election.

In addition, the dimension of gender performance gains importance from the moment the guidelines of the story are traced. Cross-dressing features as a comic device in a number of well-known books and films¹¹ and it operates the same way in Edward’s transformation into Edwina. This implies an assumption of the conceptual frameworks of gender display (Suthrell, 2004), which are sustained by belief systems difficult to rule out for their pervasiveness in all areas of life. Once again, humour is displayed as Townsend’s indisputable trade mark. The passage of the transformation process of Edward into Edwina is an opportunity for both comedy: “It took only thirty-five minutes (including a close shave and eyebrow tidy) to transform Edward into Edwina, and it would had taken less had Edward not insisted initially on wearing a suspender belt and stockings” (Townsend, 1999, p. 68) and mockery of Tony Blair’s perceived gender which Townsend had already addressed in *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole 1999-2001*:

In fact, Tony has undergone a feminization: his hair has turned fluffy, his voice has softened, his expression is girly, his hands move as

¹¹See for example the display of cross-dressing in some stories by Mark Twain or the main narrative line in the film *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959).

gracefully as a geisha on a course of hormones that will eventually transmogrify him into Toni –the first woman Labour Prime Minister. (Townsend, 2008, p. 99)

Therefore, Townsend plays with both traditional gender assumptions and how these are used by public opinion to mock their political leaders and the real vision of a country which has discovered that the political discourse of New Labour is as disappointing as its leader.

4.1.3 The discourse on welfare

Although provisions of welfare support for disadvantaged sectors of the population date back to medieval times and had been shaped as specific laws during the 19th century, World War II was a crucial moment in the development of modern welfare, understood as a socio-economic solidarity system in which the State plays the key role as a fund collector –via taxes- and re-distributor among the population according to their needs with the aims of avoiding poverty and solving social inequalities.

From the early years of World War II British politicians had started to develop different proposals which tried to involve the State in diverse areas of welfare provision (Johnson, 2004) as part of the post-war reconstruction program, among others, the *Education Act* (1944), the *White Paper on Employment Policy* (1944), and William Beveridge's *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942), better known as *The Beveridge Report*.

The Beveridge Report main objective was to provide a global system of social insurance “from cradle to grave”. The basis for this provision would be formed by the weekly contributions of all working people to the state. In return, the unemployed, the sick, the retired and the widowed would be given a quantity of money sufficient to ensure an acceptable minimum standard of living, below which nobody should fall. Johnson states that both the optimism generated by Britain's victory in El Alamein and the ambiguity of the Report were the main factors to account for the enormous publicity and public support generated by the proposal: “almost everyone could find something in it with which they agreed” (Johnson, 2004 in Floud & Johnson Eds., p. 217).

State provisions were implemented by the postwar Labour government of Clement Attlee (1945-51): in 1946 the *National Insurance* and *National Health Service Acts* were passed, followed by the *National Assistance Act*, the *Children's Act* in 1948 and the *Housing Act* in 1949.

Several elements must be taken into consideration when analysing the evolution of welfare schemes up to the last part of the 20th century and onwards, which is so vividly portrayed in Townsend’s works. First, the idea of welfare as a “right” of universal character, opposed to the traditional idea of “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. On the other hand, the general political consensus to support the welfare state. Both elements are indispensable to understand the perception of welfare state on the part of British citizens who, since *The Beveridge Report* were, by law, entitled to be supported by the State when time came or the necessity arose.

What the *Report* failed to design in an effective way was not the structure of the welfare system but the financing of it. British population figures raised after World War II due to better health conditions and a global improvement in the quality of life. With the passing years, the ratio between the expenditure in welfare and the real growth of the country was more and more unbalanced (Johnson, 2004). By the end of the 1960s this eventually led to question the organization, contradictions and limited possibilities of modernization of a system seen by many as inefficient and useless (Powell, 2008).

As the welfare schemes failed to cover the growing needs of the population, a whole discursive construction of welfare informed the political narratives developed by Conservative and Labour alike. In the 1980s, politics was dominated by open hostility to welfare. Margaret Thatcher’s discourse turned around “blame”: “She wanted to remind those who fell back on it [welfare] that they were creating a burden that other people had to carry” (Vinen, 2011, p. 132). The implicit negativity of the statement could be traced back to a traditional “mistrust of the poor which crystallises into the dominant social convention (...) Part of that negativity remains entrenched within modern welfare provision” (Charlesworth, 2010, p.9). The unemployed and the single parents (women most of them) were considered the main culprits of the situation as their dependence on welfare provisions was bigger. Virginia Noble (2009) stresses the implicit gender bias of this idea; for men, their failure as breadwinners; for women, their failure to secure the support of a breadwinner for themselves and their children. Welfare was considered by Conservatives of the Thatcher era as a deviation from the traditional relief net created by families and charity:

Charity is a personal quality—the supreme moral quality—according to St Paul, and public compassion, state philanthropy and institutionalised charity can never be enough. There is no adequate substitute

for genuine caring for one another on the part of families, friends and neighbours. (Thatcher, 1979b)

The changes carried out during Thatcher's years were, as a whole, less radical than they appeared either to her supporters or her opponents. However, the main outcome of Thatcher's measures was the erosion of the political consensus in favour of the welfare state nowadays understood more in terms of cost-effectiveness and based on a mixture of public-private initiatives. No "from cradle to grave" any more.

Labour had criticized this position on the part of the Conservative party but their leaders used the same discourse, trying in addition to capitalize the renewal of their own party as they linked the failures of the system to its roots after World War II, therefore, exposing the illnesses of "Old" Labour in contrast with "New" Labour. Conservative governments were said to term State intervention negatively for it prevented creativity on the part of individuals and families as they were cared for and did not feel the pressure to find the solution to their difficulties, the State being the sole provider thus foreseen the alleged collapse of the system. In the same line, New Labour gave way to private intervention in welfare, not by stressing the economic side of measures but by placing the responsibility on individuals as counterparts of the state in the welfare system and calling every single Briton to contribute with personal and group effort to the renewal of the nation. Insistence on the individual's value is the main asset of the laissez-faire philosophy and the basis of the so-called American values, so opposed to socialism. New Labour assumed its contradictions in quite a natural manner:

I said that the job of refashioning welfare and the job of refashioning government are inseparable. The Social Exclusion Unit is a big step towards putting these ideas into practice, *helping government* to work in a more coherent, integrated way, across departmental boundaries, and with *all the agencies - public, private and voluntary* - that can help turn things round. It will be a dynamic unit- there to solve problems and to achieve results. (...) At the heart of all our work, however, is one central theme: national renewal. Britain re-built as one nation, in which *each citizen* is valued and has a stake; in which no-one is excluded from opportunity and *the chance to develop their potential*. (Blair, 1997).¹²

¹²My emphasis.

What Conservatives could not do, New Labour was able to achieve, British citizens started to consider the benefits for unemployed were too high and disregard the role of government in welfare provision. According to the *British Social Attitudes Survey* of 2003, 53% of people interviewed in 1989 considered unemployment benefits to be too low, whereas in 2002, this figure had reduced to 29%. That same year 51% of interviewees thought the government should redistribute from the rich to the poor. Only 39% thought so in 2002. The perception of welfare state by British citizens was changing. (Park et al. Eds., 2003)

Townsend's narrative of the welfare state pervades practically all her works. It features especially in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, *Number Ten* and a very short non-fiction essay, *Mr. Bevan's Dream* and it is developed around specific topics, namely, general provisions, the National Health Service, unemployment, transport, officials, schools, and housing and neighbourhood. Most of the times, to stress the incoherence of political measures which amounted to nothing, as the results are just figures written on paper, not actual solutions:

Will your pension pay for the nursing home of your choice? Or will you be thrown into a state-run institution and left to rot? (...) The Prime Minister could not remain silent. 'Sorry, Mr. Baker, but (...) The Stakeholder Pension Scheme launched by the government in the last parliament is an extremely tax-efficient vehicle and available to all, no matter what they income....'(Townsend, 2003, p. 94)

Her characters are often confronted with the consequences of government cuts and void promises of improvement. Class issues are clearly intertwined in all sorts of situations, covering from absurd to open desperation: "I have had a letter from the hospital to say that I have got to have my tonsils out on Tuesday (...) My father says I have been on the waiting list since I was five years old!" (Townsend, 1991, p. 128).

On many occasions, these same characters either find themselves involved in a series of situations they can control, sometimes, unable to break the vicious circle provoked by officials and bureaucrac...:

I skived off school and went to the Social Security offices with my mother (...) The interviewer was also behind the glass screen, so my mother had to bellow out that she hadn't received her giro and was financially destitute (...) [the official got the wrong records and the giro has not been posted yet] 'Your giro will be put in the post tonight' 'But I need my money now,' my mother pleaded. 'There's no food in the house and my son needs school trousers' 'There's nothing I

can do,' the bloke said wearily. 'Can't you borrow some money?' My mother looked the man straight in the eyes and said, 'OK, will you lend me five pounds, please?' The man said 'It's against the rules'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 263)

...or appear completely defenceless against the situations they live:

The Queen peeled back the sheets and blankets and saw at once that her husband's pyjamas were wet (...) When she and Chantelle removed his wet pyjamas, both of them were shocked by the angry-looking bedsores that had developed on the pressure points of his body. His heels, buttocks and elbows were fiercely red. Bunion said, 'This is a care home, Mrs. Windsor. But nobody cares. (Townsend, 2006, p.83)

Most of the times, Townsend's criticism places the responsibility of the destruction of welfare on politicians from any colour of the political spectrum. However, as we will see later as well, on some occasions co-responsibility is acknowledged, that is, the State must provide for the welfare of the citizens and, conversely, these must abide by the rules and respond to what their country requires from them in order to help the system work properly, no such behaviour is totally despicable:

I'm fiddling the Social and that's why they send my Giro once a fortnight. I got a pensioner's bungalow in Leicester and I get a Giro sent there an' all. And I've got a friend who keeps a boarding house in Yarmouth, so I'm registered there. I'm what's known as a Social Security Scrounger, and I'm not ashamed of it either. (Townsend, 1989, p. 59)

In addition, those people immerse in difficult (if not terrible) situations must have, as much as their strength allows, the will to overcome their own circumstances when given the opportunity to do it. In Townsend's case, this applies mainly to literacy and education:

Even Jack's first clothes (...) had been stolen in one daring expedition from a Mothercare shop by his auntie Marilyn (...) -but Jack knew that if he abandoned his studies he would be lost forever and would become an invisible and expendable person like most of the people he knew. (Townsend, 2003, p. 31)

Nevertheless, as in most of her works, humour is Townsend's favourite tool to stress welfare inequalities, although the more we delve into her works, the more

acid her remarks turn. In the case of *The Mole Diaries*, this corresponds as well to the evolution of their protagonist whose vision of things changes according to his age:

No giro! My mother cracked today. She phoned up the local radio station and told them that she was going to abandon her child at the social Security office unless she was given her giro (...) I was only abandoned for forty-five minutes before Mr. Gudgeon gave my mother and ‘Emergency Needs Payment’. (Townsend, 1991, p. 273)

Pandora is in the constituency tomorrow. She is the guest of honour at the closing-down ceremony at St.Barnaba’s library. [Pandora] made a speech saying that libraries are now redundant due to the growth of the internet. One man in the crowd shouted: ‘I can’t afford to go on line on 75p.a week’ (Townsend, 2008, p. 77-78).

The Out of Hours Clinic was a bit Third World. The waiting area consisted of a dimly lit rectangular room with patients sitting around the edge on plastic chairs. Some were bloodied, some were bowed. Most were obviously poor. (Townsend, 2011, p. 101)

Mr. Bevan’s Dream (1989) is Townsend’s contribution to a collection of pamphlets published by Chatto and Windus on social and political issues. It is structured in a series of very short episodes on several topics related to the derelict situation of the welfare state provisions. These episodes are bracketed between an initial short summary of the launching of *The Beveridge Report* and the effects it provoked, even at a personal level, as the author was “saved” by a National Health System which provided her with penicillin to cure her pneumonia when she was a child, and a final dystopian (albeit comic) vision of the wave of privatizations of big companies that swept Britain under Margaret Thatcher’s terms.

In the preliminary essay, Townsend cites the three principles of the Beveridge Report with special emphasis on the second: “to abolish the Five Giants: Poverty, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, Idleness”¹³ (Townsend, 1989, p. 5). The subsequent episodes are displayed to prove that in that moment, not only have successive governments failed to abolish the Five Giants but the situation is worsening more and more. Townsend proposes a further rationalization of resources and processes as a practical way to solve the problems, that is, although it would be necessary to allocate more resources for social provisions, if this were not possible, perhaps a better distribution and control would solve many problems. She acknowledges

¹³It is noticeable the way in which Victorian terms and values persist in Britain, the idea of idleness is clearly related to the poor laws of Victorian times and, once more, to the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor.

the necessity of welfare not only for practical but also for altruistic reasons which transcend the sphere of budgetary problems: “We need to be allowed to express what is great and good in all of us. We need to demonstrate our unselfishness and our love for our fellow human beings” (Townsend, 1989, p. 5).

The narrative is developed mainly in generational terms, as the necessity of the welfare is based on the preconceptions of insecurity inherited from the generation who lived World War II who passed on their fears to their siblings: “We need our Welfare State, it should free us from crippling insecurity and hardship” (Townsend, 1989, p. 10). It also reels on the optimistic rhetoric of welfare as the trigger of society global improvement: “it should allow us to soar above the everyday and release the energy and creativity and joy we were born with. *From cradle to the grave*” (Townsend, 1989, p. 10). However, this argument would be reversed by Conservative and Labour alike when insisting implicitly on the third Beveridge principle; “to preserve individualism” (Townsend, 1989, p. 5) as this individual spirit is the source of energy and creativity otherwise nullified by a provisional welfare which impedes citizens to develop their potential to the full.

The series of episodes of *Mr. Bevan's Dream* are related to welfare state hot issues such as the situation of the National Health Service, the limitations of child benefit, the mounting figures of illiterate students unable to read or write after years of attending school, the relocation of elderly tenants, the wave of privatizations of essential services Britain was being subjected and the incredible amount of bureaucracy to fight with when trying to obtain any subsidy from the state. Townsend's narrative progresses from her personal experience in the past, to current accounts of terrible situations first-hand lived and encountered in diverse formats. Either she introduces her personal recollection of memories in the first place and contrasts it with a general current situation: “It is now possible to save babies even smaller than my son, yet such is the state of National Health Service in 1989 that premature babies are dying because there are not enough incubator to go round” (Townsend, 1989, p. 15). Or, the other way round, she starts from the present, and develops a flashback structure:

One wet morning my sister and I were in a car passing my daughter's junior school. A van drew up in front of us and stopped. We watched as the driver of the van opened the back doors and took out metal boxes from the inside (...) the school diners had arrived (...) The head of my primary and junior school was a Welshman (...) and a passionate supporter of the Welfare State. One tangible example of his commitment to this great ideal was the school dining hall and the quality of the food served in it'. (Townsend, 1989, pp. 21-23)

In this Townsend's recollection of excellent school dinners properly cooked by skilled ladies in the very same school in contrast with the cold, ill-prepared, fatty meals, catered by external companies her daughter "suffers" it appears a key element; the headmaster's personality. In many occasions Townsend puts the blame on some individuals who are in charge of certain institutions and, despite the squalor to face, not only do not try to do their best to overcome the situation, as they are bestowed with the power to juggle with budgets and provisions, but also rejoice in abandonment and desolation. The introduction of this individual element is of greater importance as, generally, Townsend positions herself on the side of the average, working class citizen which is absolutely unprotected when facing the dissolving welfare protection. No individual responsibility is acknowledged by those who resent the budget cuts and unfair official policies but Townsend does not spare bitter criticism on those who could, unless, try to instil some positive spirit around them and work as efficiently as the limits established by State allows. As we see, particularly pungent is her criticism on school headmasters, who feature highly as partly responsible maybe not of the low standards of their schools, but of the lack of vocation and stamina to fulfill their duty:

They had said that the headmaster was mad and violent and given to sudden attacks of rage, (...) I told the boys I'd like to make an appointment to meet Squeers. 'Oh, come any time,' they said. He never does no work' (...) He explained that he was having staff difficulties –teachers left suddenly, giving no reason. 'No backbone!' He said that most of the children in his school were mongrels –the result of in-breeding. Did we know that there had been two public meetings called by parents to protest at the low standards of his school? It wasn't his fault if the children were too thick to pass exams, was it?' (Townsend, 1989, pp.28-31)

Townsend's narrative of welfare is permeated by the nostalgia of the 1950s when things seemed to work properly, the country was well protected from adversity and the average citizen had social coverage, scarce worries and opportunities galore:

The summers were hot, the winters were cold. We children had free milk and orange juice. The National Health Service looked after us from the cradle to the grave. There was plenty of work for your dad and your mam (...) If you were a clever-clogs you could go to university and it wouldn't cost your mam and dad a penny. They scrapped national service, and if you went to hospital the matron would make bloody certain that none of her patients got bedsores' (Townsend, 2006, p. 84)

The evolution of the distribution of welfare provisions and the impact on British citizenry gave way to a country which was not recognizable any more by Townsend's generation. The previous conception of welfare state had reached a point of no return and it was not longer valid. The notion of "welfare state" is, perhaps, the last socioeconomic metanarrative to have been cancelled.

4.1.4 The battles of Britain

Townsend's production covers some thirty-five years from the beginning of the 1980s to, more or less, the first decade of the 21st century, a time span in which Britain, far from remaining out of conflict after the traumatic experience of World War II, took, and still takes, part in international conflicts either on its own or as part of multinational or "allied forces". For this reason, war features in some of Townsend's works, mainly in *The Adrian Mole Diaries* and in *Number Ten*, although in different ways.

The treatment of war, particularly in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, evolves along with Adrian's vision which, logically, changes in time and develops in accordance with his personal involvement in the diverse conflicts. Under his very eyes, war is described just as part of the different facts narrated in his teenage diaries, particularly in *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, as a terrible disruptive element of his social entourage in *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole*, or becomes the most important issue in *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*, when Glenn, Adrian's son, is deployed to Iraq as part of the British forces and therefore, personal feelings are intermingled with the narration of the circumstances which led Britain once more to war.

During World War II and its aftermath, Britain, and particularly London suffered the German bombings of unprecedented intensity. British reaction to its "finest hour" gave way to the so-called "myth of the Blitz" which, in turn, contributed to support the idea of "British or English moral preeminence" (Calder, 1991). That feeling of moral superiority when facing strenuous circumstances was definitely over after the Suez Crisis in 1956. The consequences of Suez were going to leave an indelible mark in British foreign policies for years to come and reflected two essential facts: Britain, unable to maintain its colonial presence, proved not to be an empire anymore. In addition, Britain's world affairs were going to be indissolubly linked to the guidelines marked by The United States (Judt, 1999). Consequently, the social optimism of the beginning of the 1950s attenuated greatly and, although the country moved on, with the challenge of new social and

economic realities to face, the Suez thorn was still in its side.

The British humiliation was undoubtedly present in the minds of the troops that fought the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands in 1982 (Vinen, 2009). The war would remove that thorn, boost Thatcher's image and lead her to her second term of office:

The significance of the Falklands War was enormous, both for Britain's self-confidence and for our standing in the world. Since the Suez fiasco in 1956, British foreign policy had been one long retreat (...) Victory in the Falklands changed that. Everywhere I went after the war, Britain's name meant something more than it had' (Thatcher, 1993, p. 173)

For Adrian Mole, who did not live World War II or the Suez Crisis, the Falklands war was, at the same time, exciting and tragic, just like some kind of adventure. His father's reaction to the announcement of the war was that of many Britons who were absolutely unaware of the Falklands existence and location: "At tea-time I was looking at our world map. But I couldn't see the Falklands Islands anywhere. My mother found them; they were hidden under a crumb of fruitcake" (Townsend, 1991, p. 190).

However, with the passing weeks, the Falklands presence is more visible in the book and Adrian's family and friends show diverse reactions, from extreme jingoism: "Grandma came round to check our pantry for Argentinian corned beef. We passed the test because our corned beef was made by Brazilian cows" (Townsend, 1991, p. 192) to open opposition:

We had a dead good debate in Social Studies this morning. It was a bout the Falklands. Pandora put the proposition 'That this class is against the use of force to regain the Falkland Islands. (...) I made a brilliant speech in favour of the motion, I quoted from *Animal Farm* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. (...) Barry Kent [the school bully] spoke against the proposition. He said 'Er, I er, fink we should, er, you know, like, bomb the coast of Argentina' He was quoting from his father' (Townsend, 1991, p. 196).

This way, Townsend expresses a tacit divide between well-read minds representative of a pacifism supported by literary antecedents which reflect on the consequences of political manipulation and national economic distress, and the modelling of common people's opinions to obtain the desired political effect on the grounds of national interests.

Teenage Adrian fails to see the real effect of the Falklands war with his typical lack of perspective which will become a constitutive trait of his personality:

Stayed in my room all day bringing my Falklands campaign map up to date. I am very aware that I am living through a historical period and I, Adrian Mole, predict that the British People will force the government to resign. (Townsend, 1991, p. 216)

Adrian, as usual, was wrong. British people did not force the government to resign, what is more, as a direct consequence of the conflict, Margaret Thatcher won the following general election with almost sixty seats more for the Conservative party clearly capitalising the “Falklands effect” (UK Political Info, 1983).

As for Townsend’s position towards the conflict, her criticism is clearly visible just in one simple paragraph: “The working classes are toiling around the clock to mend Britain’s old battleships. Britain is planning to spring a surprise attack on Argentina in six weeks’ time” (Townsend, 1991, p. 192). For Townsend, war is a class issue as well, the working class manufactures and operates the war machine and most casualties are privates of common origin. At the time of the Falklands war, Britain is no longer a world power nor a sea world power, its ship industry is obsolete and needs to be mended and it has been deeply affected by the government cuts (Vinen, 2009). In addition, the great distance imposed the absurdity of a war tactic based on a well-known secret (Mc Smith, 2011)

But the impositions of war, albeit a faraway one, appear in front of Adrian’s eyes, for young people of the neighbourhood were being sent to a war that consumes the country’s resources:

The Canberra has gone to the Falklands and taken Barry Kent’s older brother, Clive, with it. (Townsend, 1991, p. 192).

It was on Radio four that the government is spending a billion pounds on buying war equipment. Yet one of our science laboratories at school is closing down, because our school can’t afford to pay a new teacher. (Townsend, 1991, p. 302).

Townsend stresses the fact that the results of the conflict amount to nothing but suffering:

I took the dog round to Bert’s and watched the Falklands Memorial Service on television. St. Paul’s cathedral was full of widows and bereaved people. I went home and chucked my Falklands campaign map in the bin. (Townsend, 1991, p. 241)

Luckily for us, humour never fails to alleviate the momentary tensions of some lines: “Grandma has got a funny look in her eyes. My mother says it is called Jingoism but I think it is more likely to be cataracts” (Townsend, 1991, p. 192).

The first Gulf War which followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was “sold” to the British citizens as necessary in order to keep Kuwait a democracy which eventually proved to be no more than an irony: “The emir of Kuwait has yet to announce the date for democratic elections to be held in his country. Puzzling considering all the trouble and expense the allies went to only recently” (Townsend, 1994, p. 113).

Adrian’s reaction to the war is World War II-like (as it was the one of many citizens in other European countries (Spain included):

We are at war with Iraq. (...) bought sixteen bottles of Highland Spring water in case water supply is cut off owing to bombardment by Iraqi air forces. It took me four trips from the Spar shop on the corner to the flat, but I feel more secure knowing I will not go thirsty during the coming Blitzkrieg. (Townsend, 1994, p. 25)

But, above all, the war was a media event. War was broadcast live and every single citizen in the world had the opportunity to watch it, if not to participate, in an actual war sitting comfortably in their sitting-rooms: “I have hired a portable colour television, so I can watch the Gulf War in bed” (Townsend, 1994, p. 25).

Rejection to the whole stupidity of the war led to some critics and scholars like Jean Baudrillard in his collection of essays *The Gulf War did not Took Place*, to denounce ‘the masquerade of the war’:

We are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war just as we were once led to believe in the revolution in Romania, and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters. We are already all strategic hostages in situ, our site is the screen on which we are virtually bombarded, day by day, even while serving as exchange value. (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 25)

Once more, only in a short paragraph, Townsend summarised the main characteristics of the First Gulf War; the presentation of war as a show broadcast by the media, a very expensive reality show whose producers and presenters introduced to the audience as the ultimate operation in the process of setting the world free: “I was awake last night, watching ‘Operation Desert Storm’. I feel it’s the least I can do –after all, it is costing H.M. Government thirty million pounds a day to

keep Kuwait a democracy” (Townsend, 1994, p. 32). However, what Townsend’s reader is unable to avoid is laughter, or unless a smile, when reading certain comments about some of the actors performing in the war show: “The spokesman for the USA military is a man who calls himself ‘Colon Powell’. Every time I see him I think of intestines and the lower bowel. It detracts from the gravity of war” (Townsend, 1994, p. 25).

The First Gulf War was, as denoted by the very same combination of its words, just the first step in an escalating series of events which eventually would lead to the Iraqi war in 2003, after the terrible massacre of World Trade Centre in 2001, and the prolonging of allied intervention in Afghanistan with the eventual capture and murder of Osama Bin Laden. However, the *casus belli*; the alleged weapons of mass destruction deployed by Saddam Hussein contravening UN resolutions, proved to be false, and the realisation of a certainty which caused so many casualties among allied and Iraqi forces and Iraqi civilians was something difficult to accept by a large number of British citizens,¹⁴ actual and fiction ones alike: “Glenn keeps asking me awkward questions about Britain’s role in the protection of the no-fly zone. Such as ‘Ow can it be called protection Dad, when old people an’ little ‘uns got killed’ (Townsend, 2008, p. 201).

Tony Blair based his foreign policy in a persistent term: “values”, whose pursuit would support the exercise of power which, in turn, would allow Britain to deploy a proactive attitude as far as the extension of these values, shared with The United States, was concerned. Britain should rule (or unless co-rule) again (Clarke in Seldon, 2007). As we saw in Townsend’s works, Blair’s position confronting British citizens is a constant tension between truth and lie: “An appalling statistic: 63 per cent of Britons believe that Mr. Blair misled them about Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction; 27 per cent believe he deliberately lied. I don’t know what I think any more” (Townsend, 2004, p. 386).

Official discourses pervade all instances of everyday life:

Dear Mr. Mole, In this time of national crises, it is incumbent on us all to support our government. During a senior pupil’s debate, chaired by myself, your son Glenn succeeded in undermining the morale of teachers and pupils alike by his passionate denunciation of the bombing of Afghanistan. He also called our great leader, Mr. Blair, ‘a leading twat’. I have therefore excluded him from the school premises for the duration of the war’ (Townsend, 2008, p. 273)

¹⁴Cfr. Syalm, Alderson & Milner, 2003 and Barkham, 2013.

Citizens are made deliberately confused by the use of official language, as if the entity of the conflict diminished when linguistic terms are swapped as described in a poem by one of the members of Adrian's book club:

It was not a bomb, it was an ordinance,
It was not a war, it was a conflict,
Nobody was hurt, nobody was killed,
There was only collateral damage' (Townsend, 2004, p. 432)

Eventually the pursuit of those alleged British –Western- values leads to death and destruction, something very difficult to accept by many British citizens, for instance, Mr. Carlton-Hayes, the owner of the library where Adrian works:

Mr. Carlton-Hayes has been quiet all day. I overheard him talking to old Mr. Polanski from the delicatessen this afternoon. He said, 'I have been a Labour man all my life, Andrezj, and I did not think I would live to see a Labour prime minister taking the country to war.' Mr Polanski said sadly, 'We are old men, Hughie. We know about war'.(Townsend, 2004, p. 263)

Both old men know about war, but soon, the youngest man in *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* will know about it. Glenn, as part of the British troops trained in Cyprus and sent to Iraq, offers the reader a personal perspective of war whose main component is fear:

Dear Dad,
I am sorry to bother you, but I have got a bit of a problem, which I hope you can help me with. Is there a book in your shop that tells people how to stop being scared? I am scared every time I go on patrol in Basra. Sometimes it is so bad that I am shaking. (...) Dad, I feel like running away when the crowds start throwing stones and petrol bombs (Townsend, 2004, p. 373).

In response to Glenn's demand, Mr. Carlton-Hayes sends him a poetry volume to reassure him that fear is a familiar feeling to all men who face death in a war:

My dear Glenn,
I hope you don't mind me writing to you, but your Father showed me your letter. I served in the Second World War as an infantry man. I spent most of my war service in a state of terror. It is entirely normal to feel as you do. I hope Sigfried Sassoon's poetry will reassure you (Townsend, 2004, p. 375).¹⁵

¹⁵Cfr. "Counter attack" by Sigfried Sassoon, particularly verses 22-24 (Sassoon, 1928).

This link between World War I poets, represented by Sassoon, World War II veterans and present British soldiers fighting in Iraq is symbolized as well by the inclusion in practically all of Townsend's volumes of *The Adrian Mole Diaries* of a reference to the Remembrance Day celebrations:

- *The Growing pains of Adrian Mole:*

Watched the poppies falling onto the heads of the young kids in Westminster Abbey. My eyes started running. (Townsend, 1991, p. 289).

- *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years:*

To Grandma's for the Remembrance Day poppy-laying ceremony. I am proud of my dead grandfather, Albert Mole. He fought valiantly in the First World War so that I would not have to live under the tyranny of a foreign oppressor. (...) The truth is that my poor, dead grandfather fought in the Great War because he was ordered to. (Townsend, 1994, p. 187).

- *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole:*

I passed a group of ancient men and women marching towards the war memorial. Some were carrying wreaths of poppies, others had medals pinned to their anoraks. An old bloke, a double amputee, was being pushed in a wheelchair by his wizened wife. William asked in too loud a voice, 'Where's that man's legs gone, Dad?' I answered, 'He left them in some corner of a foreign field, so that we English could be free men and women, son.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 279)

Somehow it seems acceptable to fight for one's own freedom but it is not so when freedom is "imposed" on others: "So far the Iraqis have not thrown rose petals in front of the coalition forces' tanks. On the contrary, there has been widespread looting, pillaging and armed resistance. Mr. Blair's liberation is their invasion" (Townsend, 2004, p. 347).

The same way as Glenn embodies the working class, provincial and, eminently expendable, youngster that fills the the British army, his friend in the barracks, Robbie, personifies the sensitivity and innocence of youth despite the high-tech, practically illiterate, television driven world where he lives. Robbie likes reading (which for Townsend is always a positive trait of a character, being herself a compulsive reader) and both, Adrian and Mr. Carlton-Hayes send Robbie books

to read when not in action. However, the values which shall prevail are not those represented by Robbie, but the ones represented by the officials who send young people to war, for whom casualties are just numbers on paper or a screen:

Robbie is dead. A home reserve officer from his regiment, Captain Hayman, knocked on my door last night. (...) I asked him why I had been formally notified. He said, 'Robert put you down as his next of kin.' (...) I wanted to cry, but I couldn't in front of this good man who had been deputed to break the news of death.' (Townsend, 2004, p. 448)

In situations like this, Townsend's words reveal that, for her, it is not so *dulce et decorum* to die for one's country.

4.2 Spaces: Mapping Townsend's fiction

As we have seen, the insertion of Sue Townsend's works within specific temporal coordinates is a basic constituent of her narrative for this is not alien to the development of historical facts, particularly those referred to the erosion of welfare provisions, the wars in which Britain was involved in her time or the particular events during Thatcher's and Blair's premierships.

In the same way, the spatial ambit in which Townsend's narratives are located provides them with specific references for her characters. In this sense, Reuschel & Hurni acknowledge, "the spatial dimension is essential to fiction" (2011, p. 293), which may account for the special relationship that Townsend's characters establish with the space they move in; a space they both live and perceive in a distinctive way.

The mapping of fictional spaces has been accomplished from several points of view and by different fields of study, which explains its interdisciplinary character (Piatti et al., n.d.). Its development stems from Simmel's conception of space as socially produced and evolves by including, among others, Bakhtin's notion of "chronotope", Foucault's "panoptikon" or power control through spatial design, the growing importance of environmental studies, in a more technological context, the developments based on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), or the research under the label of neogeography.

Referentiality as the relationship between actual and fictional spaces is paramount in Townsend's narrative and contributes to facilitate the reader's immediate iden-

tification with it by easily spotting names, routes and locations. However, the task of mapping Townsend's fictional world has presented several difficulties.

The spaces she describes could be arranged into binary oppositions as far as their definition is concerned. With the term "binary oppositions" I refer to the particular series of relationships those spaces establish with the rest, either explicitly described by the author or easily deductible by the reader. These spaces follow a general pattern of antithetic pairs, based on the opposite set of qualities they display, e.g. city centre-suburbs, provinces-capital city, public-private spaces. etc.

The different characters populating Townsend's works move around the narrative spaces portrayed by Townsend, either functionally or for pleasure, in a very distinctive way. They do not remain statically in the places their author conceived for them. They are described not only moving around their closest personal "hinterland" but also leaving their either material or affective commodified bubbles and engaging in travel narratives that, apart from the ones described in the previous section, take them out and about.

In this section I will address the analysis of the various spaces that appear in Townsend's fiction by paying attention to the narratives displayed around the functionality of her character's movements, the routes and the means of transport they use and the emotions provoked by the travel (ranging from pity or criticism, to mock or disappointment), as well as to the close connections between official policies, actual facts and their narrative reflection.

According to Headicar's analysis of travel patterns in Britain, among other factors, travel depends on what people choose to do with their time (2009, p. 36), although a second factor could be added, that is, what people *are forced* to do with their time. Therefore, the displacement "out of home" may be of two types; functional, with an important compulsory component referring, for example to the act of commuting, and for leisure (including tourism and excursions). Both types are extensively present in Townsend's narrative.

The depiction of what her characters see and live varies according to their own predisposition and emotions as spaces provide a stage for a variety of situations in which these are highly involved with so close a connection that it is impossible to separate the three elements: space, movement and emotion. In this sense, the analysis that follows is based primarily on those binary oppositions with further consideration of the movements the characters display and the emotions provoked by the combination of both elements and how this affects their lives. It tries to conjugate the dynamics of their different movements with the statism of some

of the spaces described, the extent of the characters' agency when transferring from one place to another and their performance of the different spaces and movements. All these variables result in a number of narratives of different length and character which, when brought together, offer the reader an interesting global vision of Townsend's fiction.

In addition, these elements are not alien to the political trends of the time. On the contrary, Townsend's narrative geography is clearly influenced by the changes in Britain at both political and social levels which results in an interesting fresco of the British (if not Midlands) reality in the 1980s.

4.2.1 Centre-periphery or London vs. provinces

The first conflicting pair turns around the dispute between centre and periphery, namely between London and the provinces: "I may drop in and see you in my next visit [to London] personally, I am ossifying in this provincial hell" (Townsend, 1993, p. 189).

With these very few lines, Sue Townsend is wittily connecting Adrian's feelings with those of Pushkin referred in Feodor Dostoevsky's *A Writer's Diary*, Dostoevsky being a favourite writer of hers: "But even he begins to be visited and troubled by "the noble demon of secret ennui": "Deep in the provinces, in the heartland of his native country, he naturally feels out of place and not at home". (Dostoevsky, 2009, p. 495)

The object of Adrian's contempt is Leicester and its surrounding area in the East Midlands. Leicester dates back to the year 48 AD when a Roman garrison under the name of Ratae Corietavorum was established to control the area inhabited by a local Celtic tribe. The city has been evolving since that moment on, especially during the nineteenth century with the hosiery and shoe-making industries. It was declared a city in 1919 and a cathedral city in 1972. Apart from being the home town of important figures of the cultural world, institutions such as Leicester University have made it possible to identify and quickly locate the name of the city in the map of knowledge and culture.

The city lived through a very special event in March 2015 with the official reinternment of the remains of Richard III, as the corollary of an extraordinary research project which led to the location of the king's burial site and the genetic identification of his remains. The city welcomed the last king of the York dynasty, who was buried in the cathedral during an emotive ceremony.¹⁶

¹⁶The exceptional circumstances which resulted in the identification of the bones found in

Nowadays, Leicester is a renowned multicultural city, with the second biggest population of Asian origin in Great Britain (Gosh, 2014) which exemplifies perfectly the evolution of British society. In 1987, Keith Vaz was elected MP for Leicester East, and in 1988, Ghordan Parmar was the first Asian Mayor. Asian women have also taken part in public life and in 2009 Manjula Sood was the first Asian woman to become mayor of Leicester. For all these reasons, “Leicester is now seen widely as a successful model of multicultural practice”. (Begley, 2013, p. 256)

Sue Townsend was born and lived there all her life and this created a special connection between author and city which features in most of her books (to Adrian's despair on many occasions).¹⁷ The role played by Townsend in the spread of the city's name was more important than the one of other Leicester's literary figures who had also been born in Leicester, as Townsend's name is immediately linked to the city; therefore, her contribution to the “fictionalization” of Leicester is paramount in this sense. Nowadays, the Phoenix theatre where she started her career has been re-branded as *Sue Townsend Theatre* as a way to make her presence vivid. (Hemley, 2015)

The background clash of the negative feeling of Adrian's towards Leicester is the rivalry between centre and periphery, between regions and London and especially the so-called “North-South divide”, a term which describes the contrast between the difficulties faced by the post-industrial North with high rates of unemployment, and the affluent South with a renewal based on the service sector (Gonzalez, 2011). Despite the different attempts dating back to pre-war years to solve regional inequalities through the creation of government schemes, the passing of laws and the design of plans to foment employment or promote the location of

a car park as the those of King Richard are literary matter themselves. The excavation of the site seems to have been “previewed” in a way by Sue Townsend who devoted a complete episode of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* to describe the digging and discovery of some interesting “remains”. The episode was eventually deleted from the final version but one cannot help but imagining which Townsend's account of the remarkable historical facts that Leicester witnessed in March 2015 would have been:

Eureka! At 3 p.m. my spade came up against a weird pot object. When I scraped the soil off I could see that I looked like a skull! I am going to be famous and have a card with my name on it in the museum. (...) Took the skull to the museum and left it with the skull expert. He is giving me his verdict tomorrow. (...) The skull is a china doll head. I took it round to the old lady. She said. 'Oh, it's Miranda. I lost her sixty years ago!'. She made me dig until I found the doll's torso, arms and legs. She was too excited to remember that she owed me a pound. Just my luck! (Townsend, 1981) (DWL-ST/1/7/31/5)

¹⁷Cfr. Chapter 3.

industrial development, Conservative and Labour alike failed to bridge the open division in British territory.

The regional development in Britain was, according to Hansel, Higgins & Savoie (1990) more complex than in other countries as the possible promotion of regional development was related to issues such as “urban decay, congestion and sprawl in parts of Britain, especially in the Midlands, the south east and London” (1990, p. 89). Therefore, what Adrian conveys with his gloomy perception of the provinces is not far from reality: *Lo! The Flat Hills of My Homeland* [the ‘experimental novel’ Adrian is writing before moving to London] explores late twentieth-century man and his dilemma, focusing on a ‘New Man’ living in a provincial city in England” (Townsend, 1993, p. 18).¹⁸

The situation during Thatcher’s and Blair’s terms was not very different from previous times. The Thatcher government introduced new measures for regional development through a programme of “enterprise zones” (Hansel, Higgins & Savoie, 1990, p. 82) with the aim of reducing the government intervention in the economy. Private companies were eligible to take part in the programme, benefiting, among other things, from tax exemption. Areas on Tyneside, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, London’s Docklands or Clydeside in Scotland were designated as enterprise zones. The East Midlands were left out of the programme and they would have to wait until the creation of the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) in 1999, an entity wishing to make economic development turn around a regional focus. It was later abolished and replaced by local enterprise partnerships in March 2012. By 2009, the vision of the Agency was:

That by 2020 the East Midlands will be a flourishing region. A region made up of growing and innovative businesses. A region where skilled people are employed in good quality jobs. A region where we all feel part of healthy, inclusive communities and live in thriving, attractive.
(East Midlands Regional Committee, 2009, p. 3)

By 2009, Adrian Mole was living in a converted pigsty side by side with his parents in a suburb in the middle of nowhere, with no car or possibilities to commute to Leicester but by bicycle, working in a bookshop about to close and with no cultural life whatsoever. A marked contrast with the good intentions of the EMDA.

Nevertheless, after a long detachment from “the dreary provinces” Eventually, Adrian comes to terms with them mainly due to maturity and unimpressive Lon-

¹⁸Note the pun referred to the Blairite use of the adjective ‘new’.

don experiences which were necessary for him to realise the full implications of living in the periphery:

Pandora's eyes glittered and she said, 'But Westminster is intoxicating. One is loath to leave it for the dreary provinces.' I bridled at this and said, 'It's the dreary provinces that made this country rich. Dr. Johnson came from Lichfield, Shakespeare from Stratford-on-Avon. And the scientist who discovered the DNA fingerprinting, Dr. Alec Jeffrey, is a Leicester man!' (Townsend, 2009, p. 154)

London, as the capital of the country and on some occasions the focus of one of those binary oppositions I described, also features in Townsend's works although in a supporting role with respect to Leicester. In *Adrian Mole's* case, London implies the other side of his everyday Midlands reality. However, when he finally moves from Leicester he does not settle down in London first but in Oxford and, moreover, not in order to pursue an academic career but to share a room in his first-love's house. He moves around Oxford but Oxford does not "penetrate" him. And neither does London as his decision to move there was determined by the presence of his new girlfriend Bianca in his life which, once there, will lack the glamour and intellectual allure he would have liked, for he can only afford to live in Soho, an area he was strongly prejudiced against: "I am hardly ever in London, but I may drop in and see you on my next visit. Isn't Soho a dangerous place in which to live?" (Townsend, 1998, p. 189). With this simple sentence, Townsend condenses Adrian's provincial vision of London, permeated with "the ways in which middle-class ideologies of class and gender in general and domestic ideology in particular shape this image of London" (Sipe, 2002, p.70), in this case as the container of foci of danger for provincial men like Adrian who has hardly ever left Leicester.

In addition, Adrian's movements within London, do really lack the glamour of the literary flaneur. Poor Adrian is toiling, washing pots in a restaurant in the area and does not enjoy anything but more than casual walks around Trafalgar Square and once to the National Gallery. In addition he seems not to notice that Townsend has placed his tiny apartment in Old Compton street, right in the middle of the theatre district and not far from Leicester Square. Too much of a coincidence.

However, in some particular moments, London is Adrian's choice as the provinces represent a restrictive environment on a very specific sense. In Townsend's hands this turns into another chance to display the wittiest humour:

I bought a Guardian and sat outside the bar Italia in Greek Street. My friend Justine, who lap-dances at Secrets, joined me for an espresso (...) She told me that her boss, Large Alan, had been 'worrying his bollocks off' about a possible change of government. He had forecast massive redundancies for Soho's sex-industry workers should Labour win. 'It's the Conservative MP who kept "the discipline" side of the business going.' (...) After she hurried off to work, I pondered on the nature of our Soho village conversation. I couldn't imagine speaking of such wordly things in any of the villages in Leicestershire, apart from Frisby-on-the Wreake where, if the rumours are true, paganism is practised on a large scale. (Townsend, 1999, p. 68)

London is also the starting point of Edward Clare's adventure around England in *Number Ten*. For him, London is the location of his residence which, in turn, is the location of effective power, the very centre of his life and also of his worries. His life is fully scheduled and his tour dressed in his wife's clothes is being monitored at all times:

Even when he had been most carefree, growing his hair and playing the guitar in a rock band, there were arrangements to make, rehearsals to attend; and nowadays, when he wasn't, his so-called leisure time was calibrated to the last minute? (Townsend, 2003, p. 67)

For Edward, his trip around Britain and the fact of leaving London to tour the provinces up to Edinburgh is the opportunity to feel free for once in his life.

Do you think we are being watched, Jack? Under surveillance? Asked the Prime Minister. Jack nodded glumly and in a room overlooking the Thames, Clarke and Palmer [agents of the secret service] shouted with laughter. Palmer said, 'Too right we're watching' (Townsend, 2003, p. 71)

The journey of both protagonists is linked to previous similar narratives, among them Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) by Mark Twain whose main plot line is also about a ruler estranged from his subjects who decides to see their reality for himself and tours the country in disguise:

We were dressed and barbered alike, and could pass for small farmers, or farm bailiffs, or shepherds, [...] yes, or for village artisans, if we chose, our costume being in effect universal among the poor [...] We slipped away an hour before dawn, and by broad sun-up had made eight or ten miles, and were in the midst of a sparsely settled country. (Twain, 2005, p. 283)

Both stories are related to the extended folk tradition of the hero's journey,¹⁹ which starts with a disruption of the events that take place in the ordinary world and proceeds, through several stages, implying both a journey of realization and real contact with actuality and an inner journey which leads to self-discovery and entails a repositioning with respect to the original issue that triggered the journey (Vogler, 2007). Eventually, this turns into a quest-narrative, in order not to find a magical object but an answer to non-resolved, personal issues.

Both protagonists represent antithetical personalities and positions and, due to his being conversant with the codes of the world outside 10, Downing Street, Jack becomes a sort of experienced "mentor", in turn, a key element in the travel narratives (Vogler, 2007), the one who provides the hero with the necessary insight and guidance into the "Special World":

During the Prime Minister's absence, Jack took the opportunity to talk to Mick [a man who had been making a pass at Edward—dressed like a woman—on the train to Edinburgh] 'You say one more word to my sister and I'll tear your head off your shoulders and sell it to the lion house at the zoo'. (Townsend, 2003, p. 86)

However, Townsend does not fall into Quixote-Sancho-like grandiloquence with her usual humorous touch:

Jack had pointed out that the Prime Minister would be displaying rather a lot of hairy flesh, [...] an hour later, when Jack was smearing the depilatory cream behind the Prime Minister's knees with a little spatula, he thought to himself 'this is beyond surreal' (Townsend, 2003, p. 97)

Adrian's and Edward's trips follow the same pattern but in opposite directions, from periphery to London and from London to periphery although neither of them finds satisfaction in the displacement as both of them return to the starting point. Have their trips changed them? Indeed they have for, as in real life, travelling changes the traveller. Edward returns convinced he must alter the way he is conducting his life, and a more mature (despite himself many times) Adrian finally accepts and values his provincial origins as we have seen.

In addition, there are other characters that move from Northern periphery to affluent South and particularly to London, namely Pandora Braithwaite and constable Jack Sprat, both born and raised in Leicester. In the case of Jack, Leicester

¹⁹For a complete study of the trope of the hero's journey, see Hobby (2009), of course in debt to Vladimir Propp's previous analysis on folk tales.

does not appear as a “text inmanent name” (Reuschel & Hurni, 2011) until late in *Number Ten* but indirect references are inserted, for example, the time he takes to travel from London, up North to visit her mother; some two hours and a half, which implies that indirect referencing is operating in the majority of the cases in which Jack's geographical origins are alluded to.

For Pandora, London implies the fulfilment of part of her dreams as she has been elected MP and becomes one of Tony Blair's ministers.²⁰ Highly educated with a doctorate from Oxford University, fluent in Chinese and Serbo-Croatian, London means the place where her ambitions may take shape: to be the *first* woman Prime Minister in Britain. Leicester and “the provinces” are just the means to reach her goal, she hardly ever visits her constituency and most of the times utilizes Adrian for her own benefit to obtain useful information for political issues. Therefore, in her case, the provinces-London divide is much more acute than in Adrian's case and she uses it fully consciously and to her advantage:

Pandora rang me today and sought my advice on whether or not she should confess to having smoked cannabis at Oxford,' Why are you asking me?' I said. 'You are the voice of Middle England,' she snapped. 'You are a perfect barometer of public opinion' (Townsend, 2003, p. 134)

Jack Sprat leaves home up North in Leicester to become a policeman and ends working as the constable at the door of 10, Downing Street. Not only is his a physical relocation but it also implies a social upward movement, as he leaves a life in a council estate house and a family of petty criminals to become a respectable bobby, that is, his life journey becomes a sort of personal, *mutatis mutandis*, American dream. He only retraces his steps back to check on his mother from time to time on a sort of perfunctory visits (not exempted of love for her, though) which just contribute to increase the feeling of displacement that accompanies him from his early years:

He switched off the kitchen light as he climbed the stairs towards the box room where he would sleep the night (...) He slept badly in the cheap pine bed with the bargain-price mattress, a slight callus on his foot kept catching on the non-iron nylon sheets that his mother preferred (Townsend, 2003, p. 37)

²⁰See Cooke, 2007.

4.2.2 City centre-suburbs

A second conflictive opposition we find in Townsend's works is the one between city centre and suburbs. The suburbs, either real (Ashby-de-la Zouch, North West of Leicester) or imagined (Mangold Parva) are an indispensable component in Townsend's narrative of space as they form a world in themselves, a world to be loved, rejected or contested; composed of a myriad of realities with their correspondent portrayal.

Literature, cinema and television have offered a number of films and TV series introducing the suburbs as sites of secrecy and hidden commotion, with characters conducting obscured lives and showing their false, nice faces to neighbours while crude reality is concealed behind picket fences, stained glass doors and drawn curtains. However, the suburbs are one of the three "major contexts of British life" (Clapson, 2005, p. 59) and constitute a thematic scenery in themselves.

According to Clapson (2003), the suburbs represent the blurring of the boundaries between town and country and therefore they possess characteristics of both. Clapson includes in his definition of suburb the list of itemized traits established by the sociologist David C.Thorns (1973). He describes the suburbs as located beyond the heart of the town but within his urban orbit, its urban geography is intermediate between the town centre and the countryside, they are placed usually within commuting distance of town and city centres and are usually dependent upon the town or city centres as a source of goods and services (shopping, leisure activities).

In the case of the literary suburbs described by Townsend, the city is only important for adult characters. Adrian's life as a teenager only revolves around Ashby-de-la-Zouch, therefore his world is quite restricted and he seldom surpasses the limits of the suburb, whereas most adult characters are forced to commute which for them may imply living in a kind of split reality at home and at work: "The big end has gone on my father's car. I had to show him where to catch a bus into town. A man of forty not knowing where the bus stop is!" (Townsend, 1991, p. 28).

The in-between position occupied by suburbs is particularly visible in several excerpts of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* as certain areas, located not far from the residence of some of its characters, have been reconquered by nature that imposes its presence upon man's industrial debris:

Pandora has got a little fat horse called 'Blossom'. She feeds it and makes it jump over barrels every morning before school. I know be-

cause I (...) followed her to a field next to the disused railway line. (...) It took ages to get there. Bert walks dead slow and he kept having to sit down on garden walls. But we got there eventually (...) Blossom went on for a run about so we sat on the scrap car. (Townsend, 1991, pp.38-47)

During the 1970s, there was a “significant displacement of middle class inhabitants of cities to the suburbs” (Clapson, 2005, p. 60). This movement was seen negatively by some scholars and theorists of geography who blamed the suburbs for the drainage of city life in a period in which the urban contexts experienced a general decay due to the failure of the authorities to solve problems such as housing, immigration and unemployment, directly connected to the dereliction in the so-called “inner cities”.²¹

But the biggest antipathies were a product of the social component of suburban life. Once the middle classes abandoned the cities to live in domesticated areas far from urban chaos, they were soon followed by affluent lower middle-classes and finally by well-off working classes, which seemed to account for the general objection to suburbs. As Clapson poses:

There was an increasing penetration of owner-occupied housing by the skilled working classes; it was no longer the preserve of the middle classes. Volume building companies played safe, mostly, and provided hundreds of thousands of updated versions of new but nonetheless traditionally styled homes. Thus did the working classes enter en masse into the suburban housing market. (Clapson, 2005, p. 66).

This way, the alleged uniformity of suburbs was far from being real as the corresponding social reality was manifold. Adrian, Pandora or their friend Nigel, belonging to different social strata, do effectively share the same suburban setting: “There were a lot of visitors at Pandora’s house [not far from Adrian’s]. I could hardly get up the drive for Jaguars and Rovers and Volvos” (Townsend, 1991, p. 207).

However, the aspirations of working class dwellers of the suburbs are mainly to be attributed to their better off neighbours. Sometimes, these aspirations focus on a single, simple element conveying the complete set of grievances felt by the characters:

²¹The term “inner city” is of American origin and during the 1970s became popular as a synonym of urban decline exemplified by dirty and dangerous streets, over imposing urbanisation, poverty and physical closure (Clapson, 2003, p. 59)

This weekend with Nigel has really opened my eyes! Without knowing it I have been living in poverty for the past fourteen years. I have had to put up with inferior accommodation, lousy food and paltry pocket money. (...) Nigel's father has worked like a slave to create a modern environment for his family. Perhaps if my father had built a formica cocktail bar in the corner of our lounge my mother would still be living with us. but oh no, my father actually boasts about our hundred-year-old furniture. (Townsend, 1991, p. 62).

In addition, the negative image of suburbs has been expressed by some critics in terms of gender. The suburbs have been considered as a feminine realm in which the queens of the home carried on with their insubstantial lives and developed specific suburban pathologies: "too much home and too little access to the life beyond it, was courting sadness" (Clapson, 2003, p. 137). The contestation to this idea on the part of Sue Townsend's female characters will be developed in pages to come.

The last component of the suburban population to be added is, undoubtedly, the growing presence of minority groups in suburban contexts (Clapson, 2005). From the 1970s, Asian and black migration into the suburbs has accompanied the movement of white population from the inner cities. The topic of race will be under consideration in other sections of this research although it must be noted that Townsend's literary suburbs do follow the same ethnic pattern as the real ones:

A brown-skinned family are moving into Mr. Lucas's old house! I sat in my deckchair and had a good view of their furniture being carried out of the removal van. The brown-skinned ladies kept taking massive cooking pots into the house so it looks as if they are a large family. My father said it was 'the beginning of the end of our street'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 91)²²

In Britain, politically speaking, the suburbs were strongly connected to the Conservative party as they were thought to represent the traditional values of middle-class order, hard working families and low taxes. Margaret Thatcher epitomized the suburban way of life: "Her immaculate grooming, her imperious manner, her conventional and somewhat forced charm, and above all her plummy voice stamp as *the quintessential suburban matron*, and frightfully English to boot" (Sanchez, 2013). Thatcher's rise to power was felt like a "sort of lower-middle-class revolution" (Gilbert & Preston, 2003, p.196) on the part of the same social group which

²²Cfr. with the quote in the section devoted to Race.

embodied the values of suburban life. The feeling was supported by the access to property of tenants of council houses after the *Housing Act* of 1980 (known as the *Right to Buy*) was passed.

Margaret Thatcher insisted on conducting the business of the country like that of a household and she presented herself as an archetypal suburban housewife. Born in Grantham, a town in the hinterland of Nottingham, Thatcher was elected MP for Finchley constituency, a suburb in North London, and some years after her first term, she bought a house in an elegant suburb also in London. Therefore, her whole life was linked to this suburban reality which she seemed to represent and their opponents loved to mock.²³

On the contrary, Tony Blair had no ascription to any suburban area to be clearly identified with. Labour discourse had traditionally targeted working classes but Blair's new rhetoric was clearly addressed to middle-class inhabitants of suburbia as the representatives of the "Middle England", recipient of "Middle Way" politics. As Gilbert and Preston point out, Blair "was the man that made it safe for suburban England to vote for the Labour party" (2003, p. 199). Prior to Blair's first victory Labour had to face the difficulties of obtaining the votes of a changing working class that had altered its socioeconomic panorama and still remained politically linked to post-war modes. New Labour, although not clearly discarding its working class roots, sought the support of that "Middle England" embodied by the image of "the Mondeo Man" inspired by the vision of a man in a Ford Sierra and exemplified by Adrian Mole himself driving his Montego.²⁴

As I was tearing open the Opal Fruits on the way back to the car, a tall man in a lorry-driver's overalls approached me.(...) 'Are you the dick'ed in the Montego?' he said. 'The one who's been hogging the middle lane at sixty-five miles an hour?' (...) 'You've had a bleeding truck behind you since Watford' he said. Didn't you see me flashing my bleeding lights?' I replied, 'Yes, I thought you were being friendly.'
(Townsend, 1999, p. 10)

²³For an analysis of the influence of John Major's suburban roots, see Gilbert and Preston, 2003, pp. 197-199.

²⁴The origin of the term refers to a story told by Tony Blair about the moment in which he received the news that Labour had lost the general election of 1992: "I met a man polishing his Ford Sierra. He was a self-employed electrician. His dad always voted Labour, he said. He used to vote Labour, too. But he'd bought his own house now. He'd set up his own business. He was doing quite nicely. 'So, I've become a Tory', he said...In that moment, he crystallized for me the basis of our failure, the reason why a whole generation has grown up under the Tories." As the Ford Sierra was not manufactured since 1992, the media coined the term 'Mondeo Man' as Ford Mondeo was the car model that replaced the Ford Sierra. (Moran, 2005, p. 102).

Unlike his provincial origin, Adrian seems to acknowledge his belonging to the suburbs as a matter of course with no further implications, apart from commuting into town for work or leisure:

‘The provincial returns,’ he bellowed. ‘How is dear old Leicester?’
‘My family live in Ashby-de-la- Zouch now’ I replied coldly.
‘You’re such a f—pedant,’ spat out Savage. (Townsend, 1999, p.72)

4.2.3 Suburb-council estate

The council estate is the second major setting of Townsend's works, where her characters in their struggle to make a living, sometimes fall into illegality. Council estate areas are portrayed by Townsend mainly in terms of class as opposed to suburban areas, even the ones with a higher component of working class population:

My own [Adrian Mole's] life goals are as follows:

1. Buy a large detached house in respectable suburb.
2. Find soul mate with huge intellect (...)
3. Have modest hair-weave (Townsend, 2008, p. 20)

Council estates and their inhabitants feature in Townsend's books, with special significance in *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla*, corresponding to the importance they have in British life at all levels.

Historically, the development of council estates was a slow one. According to Ravetz, due to the difficulties instilling to carry out with the idea that “it was both possible and worthwhile to bestow decent houses on people from the slums” (2001, p. 22). She dates the appearance of the term “estate” back to the December 1920 issue of the official journal *Housing*, which was circulated free to local authorities when they were beginning to implement the 1919 *Housing Act*. However, the idea of council estates dates back to the nineteenth century and it is related to the Victorian and Edwardian suburbanization and the attitudes to poverty, with the implementation of the Poor Laws (Ravetz, 2001).

Upper-class beliefs about poverty laid the foundations of council housing as the idea of eliminating slums was directly connected to eliminating immorality. Re-allocating poor inhabitants of the slums implied the erasing of those foci of sin as, for the Victorians, both physical and moral conditions of the poor were inseparable. However, this process took a long time to get started. In this sense, the development of Utopianism joined forces with upper-class ideas and, in turn,

would contribute to the future creation of the Welfare State: "It was while engaged on the monumental task of creating the National Health Service, therefore, that Bevan also had to deal with the revival of council housing" (Ravetz, 2001, p. 95).

The projects benefited as well from the garden city movement that originated as a reaction against the environmental and social consequences of the industrial revolution. Some of its main characteristics were:

- Spaciousness of layout providing for houses with private gardens, enough space for schools and other functional purposes, and pleasant parks and parkways.
- A close town/country relationship with a firm definition of the town boundary and a large area around it reserved permanently for agriculture, providing a ready market for farmers and access to the countryside for residents.
- Pre-planning of the whole town framework, including functional zoning and roads, the setting of maximum densities, the control of building as to quality and design while allowing for individual variety, skilful planting and landscape design. (Grossop, 2006, p. 2)

With the passing time, both the Utopian idea and the influence of the garden city movement dissolved into reality and gave way to the housing areas depicted in such negative fashion.

Geographical changes were also introduced thanks to the expansion of council estates. Before their creation, there had been a traditional link between the working class and city centres:

In its centre was a specialist business district where shops, warehouses, banking and government building were located. This was surrounded by areas of crowded slum and working class housing, followed by concentric rings of increasingly high status housing, with the most prestigious residential suburbs at the periphery. (Morris, 1999, p. 1)

Council houses implied the application of suburban design to working-class dwellings. The new ones were thought to include all sorts of appliances and new technologies in order to favour, at the same time, both privacy and neighbourhood life (Ravetz, 2001). However, the development of council housing in tower blocks during the 1970s, though responding to the newest architectural modes, proved to be rather problematic:

Oscar Newman's theory of 'Defensible Space' has been influential in perceptions of the failure of council housing as a social experiment in Britain. Newman (...) suggested (...) that higher crime rates existed in high rise apartment buildings than in lower-density housing projects because residents felt no control or personal responsibility for those public areas within such estates that contained large numbers of people (Harrison, 2009, p. 244).

In addition, some council estates were designed with physical barriers separating them from the rest of the city which contributed to the isolation and lack of integration of its inhabitants. In some occasions, the access was designed with a system of decks giving the image of a fortress. Even some of the estates were surrounded by walls and were given nicknames such as "Colditz" and "Alcatraz" (Ravetz, 2001, p. 178).²⁵

From the social point of view, access to council housing could be defined mainly in terms of class as, to start, it implied a possibility of social improvement for those inhabitants of city centre slums. On the other hand, council estates had their own social hierarchies represented by two opposing groups: tenants and managers. Antithetical forces, sometimes in open conflict as the situation of certain council estates deteriorated. Managers embodied the officialism present in the estate, the reference for tenants but, little by little, their influence diminished and they lost control over the technical or monetary matters of the estate. However, as the people qualified to choose tenants, they exerted their power through lists, quotas and allotments (Ravetz, 2001).

The turning point in the evolution of council estates took place during Margaret Thatcher's first tenure with the passing of the *Housing Act* in 1980, although the selling of council houses started as early as 1925 (Balchin & Rhoden, 2002). Publicized under the motto "the right to buy", it established the possibility for tenants to become owners of the houses they lived in. Most tenants were keen on buying as, despite the low rents with respect to the global market and the comparative economic advantage of buying over renting, they aspired to be owners of their houses (Balchin & Rhoden, 2002).²⁶ Nevertheless, very few could afford

²⁵As late as March 2015, a council built a massive "Berlin Wall-style" metal-spiked fence around a housing estate in south London. Residents protested: "But residents told the Standard they were furious about being penned in behind the wall and left with only one access point to their homes, manned by private security, when it appeared three weeks ago" (Marshall, 2015). Cfr. Chapter 5.4.

²⁶Balchin and Rhoden reproduce a table by Kilroy with the differences between the purchase price and the rent to be paid for an average council tenant and the results are quite shocking as the usual price to be paid was around £8,400 (market value of £14,000 and the total rent of 35 years at a constant value was nearly £16,000 (2002, p. 161).

the prices to be paid. In addition, for those who could do it, buying their houses represented a sort of up-ward movement in the social ladder, as identified by Townsend in the following lines from *Rebuilding Coventry*:

‘But there aren’t any violent gangs around here, Derek,’ she said.
‘Those gangs drive round in cars Coventry. They come out of the inner city and pick on affluent suburban houses.’
‘But this is a council estate, Derek.’
‘But we’re buying our house, aren’t we?’
‘How would a car-load of yobs know that?’
‘Because of the Georgian doors and windows I’ve put in, of course.’
(Townsend, 1989, p.11)

The access to property had become a core feature of the conservative programme with Margaret Thatcher. The results were that more than 370,000 former tenants turned into owners by the end of 1982 and almost 1,5 million by the end of Thatcher’s period (Jones & Murie, 2006) which, in turn, implied an increase in the conflict between tenants and owners:

The overall effect of the right to buy was [the removal of] the mechanism by which, however controversially, managers had accommodated a fairly broad social cross-section, leaving it with a ‘residualized’ stock and populations analogous to the poorest and most immobile slum clearance tenants of former years. At certain places and times, less fortunate right-to- buyers found themselves unable to re-sell their houses at any price and sometimes, having been tempted into home ownership beyond their means, they were repossessed and made homeless. (Ravetz, 2001, p. 203)

Eventually, the background idea of the council houses sales was the reduction of the power of councils, many of them traditionally opposed to conservative policies: “I reaffirmed that I wanted to get local authorities out of managing and owning housing” (Thatcher, 1993, p. 606).

Despite the manifold criticism of Conservative housing policies, things did not improve as far as housing tenancy was concerned under New Labour, and new housing schemes contemplated the association of public and private instances to promote housing:

Most families want to own their own homes. We will also support efficiently run social and private rented sectors offering quality and choice. (...) We support a three-way partnership between the public, private and housing association sectors to promote good social housing. (Labour Party, 1997)

New Labour council housing was deeply rooted in the so-called *Third Way* and therefore, it envisaged an implementation of council housing schemes with a high degree of individual intervention together with further elements of local character such as mutuality, voluntary organisations and local community based agencies, areas which had been neglected by “Old” Labour: “At the same time, such thinking (using these further elements) also draws attention to some of the neglected roots of the Labour and trade union movement including self-help, friendly societies, cooperatives and voluntary organisations” (Passmore & Brown Eds., 1999, p. 249).

Socially speaking, council estates have been traditionally perceived in a negative way by the non-residents and depicted in such terms so as to create a sense of exclusion and difference quite difficult to change (Ravetz, 2001, pp.178-183). In addition, over the last two years of the 20th century, the perception of the need for housing policies (and therefore for building council estates) changed significantly as proved by the *20th Report of the British Social Attitudes* survey which reflects that the importance given to different spending areas changed over the years. Housing importance was reduced by almost 50% from 1983 to 2000 meaning that the policies favouring full private property or mixed schemes on the part of New Labour Government were quite fruitful. (Sefton in Park et al. Eds., 2002, p. 11).

Council estates, their tenants and managers, their barriers and borders are such an indispensable component of British life that they have been turned into literary matter as they provide authors with a complete set of tools (settings, characters, plots, etc.) to compose their stories. Susanne Cuevas has studied the so-called “council-estate” novels as a specific type of fiction focused on characters whose destinies are marked by the entourage of the council estates (Cuevas cited by Korte & Zipp, 2014, p. 60) although in recent literary developments stories have overcome the usual issues around material deprivation.

In Sue Townsend's fiction, council estates feature as important narrative spaces, opposed to suburbs and city-centres alike and it is possible that their depiction corresponds to the council estates to be found in Leicester where the major impulse to housing was given in the years between the wars with the building of “cottage estates”. However, the construction of housing estates took off after 1945 especially in areas in the south and south-east of the city, outside the inner ring of the Central Business District (CBD). The current “corporation suburbia” encompasses about a third of the total area of suburban Leicester with 75,000 houses which were originally part of the council stock (Crookston, 2014, p. 7).

Townsend's representation of council estates turns around two main issues; physical decay of the areas, and class. Both elements interact giving way, in the case of *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla*, to a dystopian reality in which their inhabitants do their best to carry on with their lives, sometimes bordering on illegality (as we shall see in the following chapter).

The social clash between the inhabitants of the council estate and the rest is described very clearly in Townsend's narrative: "He also offered me the Corporation Row evening round, but I decline his offer. Corporation Row is where the council put all the bad tenants. Barry Kent lives at number 13" (Townsend, 1991, p. 41).

The physical detachment and the sense of negative difference are overtly visible:

After some time they found themselves in the middle of what appeared to be a ghost-town council estate. Whole streets were boarded up. A row of houses had been burned out (...) Looking at the estate you could be forgiven for thinking that it had been separated somehow from the rest of Great Britain. (Townsend, 2003, p. 124)

And the segregation is visible as well at all levels, and signaled through different means, most of them with a clearly negative reference imposing that negativity upon their inhabitants and even projecting it outside the area thus creating an adverse image which, most of the times, is difficult to eradicate (Dean & Hastings, 2000; Parmentier, in Van Ham, 2013):

She took the dog for a walk but when she got to the end of the close she was turned back by polite policemen manning a hastily constructed barrier. (Townsend, 1992, p. 44).

Glenn and William have got mixed feelings about the move [to a council estate house]. They are happy to have a bedroom each, but Glenn said, 'I ain't 'ard enough for the Gaitskell [estate], Dad, and neither are you.' William asked, 'Why have all the shops got barbed wire over the windows?' (Townsend, 2008, p. 30)

Even the name of the estate conveys a pictorial reference to its quality:

She looked at number eight Hellebore Close and shuddered. (...) the street sign at the entrance to the close had lost five black metal letters. HELL CLOSE it now said, illuminated by the light of a flickering street lamp. (Townsend, 1992, p. 31)

On other occasions, the names of the estates are quite significant and not all all innocuous whatsoever as they refer to key figures related to Welfare provisions:

“My last job before the polling station closed at ten o'clock was to pick up a Ms Clough of Bevan Close, Beveridge Estate” (Townsend, 1999, p. 43).

Official institutions neglect the estates at all levels, for instance, the houses are not taken care by the council: “The outside of the Kent's council house looked very grim (Barry told me that the council have been promising to mend the fences, doors and windows for years)” (Townsend, 1989, p. 6).

Neither are the common leisure areas: “Ali parked beside an open space covered in mud and grass that may once have been a park” (Townsend, 2003, p. 137).

Townsend's characters are involved in a sense of general decay of which they seem unable to get rid of by themselves:

He was surprised by the untidiness of the back gardens and yards of the houses they passed and the dilapidated conditions of their sheds and outhouses (...) The man in the camouflage jacket said 'It will cost you £150 to hire a fucking skip since the fucking government brought in a landfill tax'. (Townsend, 2003, p. 83)

Despite the generalized decadence, the inhabitants of council estates make their most of things to adapt to their situation although some of them do not reach that point in which a house is transformed into a home. Sometimes this is quite difficult in such a small space like the housing units that are well described in *The Queen and I*:

This two-bedroomed semi-detached, pre-war property situated in the area of the Flowers State has been recently redecorated throughout and briefly comprises: Front entrance, entrance hall, Lounge, Kitchen, Bathroom, Landing, Two Bedrooms, Boxroom and separate WC. To the outside, driveway and front and rear garden. (...) PLEASE NOTE: We can give no warranty as to whether or not any boiler or heating/water system to the property is operational. (Townsend, 2003, p. 28)

4.2.4 New dwellings-traditional residences

Closely linked to the idea behind the creation of council estates are the new towns. According to Alexander the *New Towns Programme* started in 1946:

By 1950, eight sites had been identified in a ring around London to meet the policy of decentralisation, plus a further one in the Clyde Valley to decentralise population from Glasgow, which also had appalling

slum conditions. In addition, a further five sites for New Towns had been designated: two in the North East, one in the East Midlands, one in Fife, Scotland, and one in South Wales. These additional sites sought to provide improved living conditions or housing for workers in new sites for mining or industry. (Alexander, 2009, p. 28)

New towns also feature in Townsend's books, either as mere geographically, referential points like Milton Keynes or as representatives of the type of population which inhabited some of them:

He [Rick Lemon the leader of the youth club who is organising a journey in the mountains] is unqualified but experienced in surviving bad conditions. He was born and brought up in Kirby New Town. (Townsend, 1991, p. 126)

The so-called eco-towns seem to have been a personal bet placed by Gordon Brown during his term of office. The new settlements defined as eco-towns should abide by the rules of sustainability, control their carbon footprint and be as self-sufficient as possible in terms of energy use. At the same time, important improvements in housing and affordability in these new areas were contemplated. In a way, what Brown's government attempted was a renewal according to 21st century standards of the garden cities already developed in the 19th century. However, despite official efforts, eco-towns seem not to have been as successful as previously thought.²⁷

These new habitats were not particularly criticised by Townsend. Her concerns are aimed at the fuss around them and the attention they gathered from the government in comparison to really essential issues which required more urgent measures:

'The government is trying to streamline the planning laws,' she said, 'and bloody newts and rare orchids are preventing hard-working stakeholder families from living in decent housing in our proposed eco-towns.'
'Hasn't Mr. Brown got more important things to address? I asked. 'Such as Iraq, the Labour Party's twenty-million-pound debt and the fact that National Health Service hospitals are full of rampant life-threatening infections.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 99)

In her narrative, Townsend seems to favour either traditional residences in suburban communities or city apartments, both corresponding to different ages and

²⁷Cfr. Peterkin, 2008.

life phases. Houses are more adequate for families, or in the shape of bungalows, for elders:

The Lawns won an architectural award when it was built in the late 1970s. It was designed for entertaining: the downstairs rooms flowed into each other but were on several levels (...) now it was a creamy, decluttered, multi-levelled 'space'. Tania Braithwaite had certainly had the builders in since my father left her. (Townsend, 2004, p. 187)

And apartments or lofts for urban adventures and bachelor fancies:

I viewed a loft apartment at the Old Battery Factory, Rat Wharf, today (...) It's in a great location, five minutes' walk along the towpath from the workshop where I work (...) Before we left I went out on the balcony for one last look. the sun was setting behind the distant multi-storey carpark. (...) A brown creature (a water vole, I think) slipped into the canal and swam out of sight. The swans floated majestically by. The biggest swan looked me straight in the eye as if to say 'Welcome to your new home Adrian.' (Townsend, 2004, p. 6-7)

4.2.5 Public spaces-private spaces

The clear-cut distinction between public and private spaces stems from the development of the bourgeoisie from the 16th century, with its insistence on family values epitomised by the household and its sphere of domesticity, as the recipients of social and economic principles. In the British context, this is particularly represented by the Victorian house and its link to the conception of privacy.

The possible tensions between both the realms of the private and the public seemed to have been solved at the same time that the material evolution of Western societies occurred, thus resulting in apparently well-established categories. In this way, although intermediate positions are also acknowledged -as I will refer to later in these pages-, the dichotomy has proved to be very useful for text analysis purposes.

I have chosen to focus on Townsend's world of the house, not only as a private domain but also as opposed to the concept of *home* as the product of the interaction between a house and its dwellers. I will also deal with two special spaces whose borders between the public and the private are blurred, and further spaces totally public that, in turn, imply juggling with a couple of associated ideas: sociability and obligation.

4.2.5.1 House and home

For Townsend, there seems to be a clear distinction between house and home. She describes different types of houses although not all of them are considered homes by their own dwellers for they do not perceive and live in them as such. This is precisely the case of Adrian Mole's residence.

Adrian's working class house in the suburb of Ashby-de-la-Zouch is located in a cul-de-sac, which provides a special character to his narrative and metaphorically describes his feelings. He finds himself trapped in a chaotic family life, with his wits unnoticed and a constant clash between his aspirations and the surrounding reality. He feels there is no possible way out. His is a working class detached house, with toilet, kitchen, pantry, hall, lounge and breakfast room, and three tiny bedrooms upstairs, plus a small garden and coal shed (Townsend, 1991). But his perception of what a home must be is mediated by the traditional conception of family. As his does not respond to it, according to his teenager vision which is much more adult than the adults' around him, his home turns into a nightmarish place to live due to the parental conflict and especially the feminist awakening of his mother:

My mother has got an interview for a job. She is practicing typing and not doing any cooking. So what will it be like if she gets the job? My father should put his foot down before we are a broken home. (Townsend, 1991, p. 24)

This perception of mothers as "creators" of homes is repeatedly sustained by Adrian and transferred to the women around. Some of them actually fit into this model due to their age and the embodiment of the traditional values in which they were raised. His grandmother is the best example:

I cleared off to my grandma's at dinner time. She cooked me a proper Sunday dinner with gravy and individual Yorkshire puddings. She is never too busy to make real custard either. (Townsend, 1991, p. 32)

Other women in Adrian's life react negatively to his pretension like his mother and Pandora, his love.

Pandora and I had a frank talk about our relationship tonight. She doesn't want to marry me in two years' time!. She wants to have a career instead! Naturally I am devastated by this blow. (Townsend, 1991, p. 134)

Adrian's conservative thinking mirrors the official Thatcherite discourse as far as home and family are concerned:

In spite of all the difficulties, by the time I left office, my advisers and I were assembling a package of measures to strengthen the traditional family whose disintegration was the common source of so much suffering. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 630)

For Adrian, the perfect home is, undoubtedly, his grandma's:

I rang my grandma and she came round in a taxi and took me to her house and put me to bed. I am there now. It is very clean and peaceful (...) I have just had a bowl of barley and beef soup. It is my first proper nourishment for weeks. (Townsend, 1991, p. 44)

Houses can be transformed into homes independently of the social environment in which they are placed. Pandora's house is middle class, her parents' relationship is not as conflictive as Adrian's parents (unless at the beginning of the diary series), they have a full social life, they take care of the garden, that is, they have created a home for themselves. Even the cat provides a sense of homely atmosphere:

Got up at six o'clock for my paper-round. I have got Elm Tree Avenue. It's dead posh. (...) Early this morning I saw Pandora walking down the drive of 69 Elm Tree Avenue (...) So now I know where Pandora lives! I had a good look at the house. It is much bigger than ours. It has got rolled-up wooden blinds at all the windows and the rooms look like jungles because of all the garden plants. I looked through the letterbox and saw the big ginger cat eating something in the kitchen table. (Townsend, 1991, p. 37)

On the other hand, Jack Sprat's family council house is also a home, despite the bad conditions of the neighbourhood, the state of the building and the irregular situation of most members of the family in their relationship with law:

There was no room for the desk in the bedroom Jack shared with his acquisitive brother Stuart, so the furniture in the small living room was moved around to accommodate his ambitions. The television was shifted from one corner (...) and the three-piece suite was reconfigured, which meant that the dog's basket had to be moved and placed under the kitchen table.(...) Once at a Sunday dinner, seated at the kitchen table with his feet on the dog's back, Jack had tried to explain to his family that with exams he would be able to get ahead

in the world. (...) Most nights Jack sat at his desk with his back to the television doing his homework. Occasionally (...) he would turn round and look at the screen. His mother enjoyed these brief moments. (Townsend, 2002, p. 30)

On the contrary, Jack's apartment in London can barely be called a home:

Very few people had been inside Jack's flat in Ivor Street (...) he found impossible to share his living space with another human being. (...) It caused him pain if a towel was not hanging in the exact middle of the heated towel rail in the bathroom and anguish if a pickle jar was not lined up in order of height (...) He had once let chaos into the flat in the form of Gwendolyn Farmer (...) Jack had capitulated and invited her back, but within half an hour of her walking in dislodging the doormat slightly and moving sofa cushion a little to the right the relationship was over. (Townsend, 2002, p. 79)

From all the above mentioned, we can deduce that for Townsend there effectively is a difference between a *house* and a *home*. Houses can possess diverse characteristics, they can be high, middle or working class, well or badly furnished but homes are created by the feeling of family, by the love ties that bond their dwellers together which grow independently of the physical environment.²⁸

At this point, it would be interesting to acknowledge the nature of two special places which feature in Townsend's books and share characteristics of both public and private realms. They are, at the same time, private residences and public buildings, imbued on the other hand of a particular symbolic character. These places are Buckingham Palace and 10, Downing Street.

10 Downing Street, traditionally the home of Britain's Prime Minister, is also seen as belonging to this in-between realm by Margaret Thatcher as she writes in her memories:

Number Ten is more than an office: it is intended to serve as the prime minister's home. I never had any doubt that when the Callaghans had left I would move into the prime minister's small flat at the top of the building.(...) The deep freeze was always kept well stocked and the microwave, when it appeared, did sterling work when sudden meals were required ...) On these occasions we used the small dining-room in the flat, which was next to the even smaller kitchen; secretaries

²⁸Special reference must be made to *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year* (Townsend, 2012) and the equation of house to prison. Eva, the protagonist, turns her bedroom into her only home, her special world, like an island apart from the rest of the house which lacks the warmth of a loving family.

from the Political Office, *not paid by the taxpayer*, would always lend a hand. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 20).²⁹

Tony Blair in *A Journey*, also acknowledges the “iconic nature of the most famous address in Britain” (Blair, 2010, p. 368), a place to work but not exactly a place to live with children although they did their best to turn it into a home:

When we first went into Downing Street, we were the youngest family to have lived there since Lord Russell's time in the 1850s and 60s (...) The introduction of children was at one level lovely; at another, the place was completely unprepared for it. Once Leo arrived, we then had a baby in the building, which was immense fun for everyone and the staff adored him, but it wasn't exactly geared up as an institution to crèche-style working. But we managed. (...) People used to be amazed that we had no staff in the flat to cook and so on, but in fact we preferred it like that. It was quieter and more private. (Blair, 2010, p. 368)

Townsend's treatment of 10, Downing Street links both public and private spheres of the Prime Minister's life with absolute naturalness:

It was an ordinary day at Number Ten. The shiny black door opened and closed hundreds of times, admitting trades people, florists, dictators, an oil sheik, a pensioners' group, civil servants, a manicurist, spin doctors, Poppy's nanny... (...) The pair were now in the private sitting room of Number Ten. A GCSE geography coursebook folder lay on the coffee table. (Townsend, 2003, p. 12)

On the contrary, Buckingham Palace is not described as a home “in Townsend's terms”. In some passages of *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla*, the Queen features as the head of the country and the Commonwealth but she sleeps with her dog not with her husband which diminishes the traditional sense of family as the active element of home-making. In *Queen Camilla* the Royal Family are having afternoon tea together at Windsor Castle (as a substitute of Buckingham Palace) while chatting. However, the scene takes place in the Throne Room which is quite distant from a cosy sitting-room, even the one at 10, Downing Street: “The Royal Family were having afternoon tea in the ornately decorated and furnished Throne teapot into exquisitely patterned china cups. King Charles and Queen Camilla, sitting side by side on ornate thrones declined the tea” (Townsend, 2006, p. 443).

²⁹My emphasis

With a final turn of the screw, Townsend traces the real quality of the Royals and the spaces they inhabit just with a few strokes of her pen. The Royals are not the normal family they had been while living in the council estate but members of an endangered species to be preserved like in a zoo. They do not inhabit the tiny bungalows in Hells Close nor the traditional royal palace with its symbolic charge which could barely be considered a home, but a stage where they perform their roles, to be exhibited and watched by the public who hardly recognised the values that both Royal Family and Palace had played for centuries:

When the first notes of a fanfare sounded, the Royal Family braced themselves and the public were let in. A bossy uniformed woman from Royal Heritage Ltd. shouted 'Please, do not feed or touch the exhibits, or attempt to engage them in conversation. And please keep to the public side of the rope. (Townsend, 2006, p. 443)

The relationship between private and public has evolved throughout history and despite the apparent simplicity of both concepts, the general conclusion is that there is no such clear-cut distinction between them. Not disregarding the contributions by Goffman (1971) and Habermas (1989) In this respect, Wolfe acknowledges the ambiguity involved in the dichotomy but, at the same time, the necessity of some public/private distinction both “to understand and to improve society”, (1997, p.182). However, following Hannah Arendt,³⁰ Wolfe proposes a trichotomy which includes the private, the public and the social, the last one being an intermediate realm that can have similarities with the previous ones in special circumstances but cannot be fully assimilated to neither of them.

Weintraub cited by Madanipour (2003) refers to the efforts to confront the “ambiguity between public and private by identifying four broad fields in which the debate between private and public take place” (Madanipour, 2003, p. 97). One of them is of special importance for this research as it concerns the “public life perspective; which focuses on the fluid and polymorphous sphere of sociability, as distinct from the household” (Madanipour, 2003, p. 98). And sociability is precisely the element which occupies the intermediate stance between private and public, corresponding broadly to the above mentioned category of the “social” as the third leg of the alluded triad. It participates of both the private and the public spheres, in this last case through the quality of “sociability” as one of the distinctive elements to describe the use of public spaces. Conversely, as Dines and Catell pose “public spaces represent in their nature sites of sociability and face-to-face interaction” (2006, p. 1).

³⁰To this respect, see Arendt, 1958.

Different public spaces of sociability, either open or close, appear in Townsend's works (office, bookshop, poll station, Co-op magazine, etc.). From the variety of possibilities to analyse, I have chosen three indoor spaces, two of them related to leisure: the youth club and the pub, and a third one as a "compulsory" space of forced sociability: the school, together with an open space defined within geographic and emotional limits; the neighbourhood. They all provide Townsend with the settings for all sorts of micro-narratives which are worth to examine in detail.

4.2.5.2 The youth club

The youth club as a space of sociability features heavily in British life and plays a key role in the social construction of young people's identities as these are negotiated at a spatial level as well.³¹

Rev. Arthur Sweatman is considered the pioneer of the boys' clubs in Britain with the foundation of the Islington Youths' Institute in 1860 (Smith, 2001). From that moment on, the formula progressed and youth clubs turned into key meeting points for youngsters in British neighbourhoods. They have offered a wide range of sporting and cultural activities and some of them are intended to keep young people off the streets and provide them with some extra-curricular qualifications to obtain a job. Others have a religious character and offer counselling and religious support.

In the 1980s all children's activities were guided and supervised by an adult:

As a kid, I was lucky because my mother worked in the Youth and Community sector and I was always a member of a youth club or other such out-of-school activity. (...) At the beginning of the session we would all sit in a circle and discuss what we were going to do that night (...) We had theme nights where we dressed up as Indians and, at break time, we would descend the spooky stairs of West Park and congregate in a room where we were serviced with juice and biscuits. (Russell, 2011, p. 44)

Teenagers had wider possibilities of engagement in a more varied set of activities as described by Angela Russell (2011). The youth club she attended (and where she later worked) offered Radio workshops, a play scheme in August for two weeks, trips, music contests, Christmas activities, talent show and dances (Russell, 2011,

³¹For an interesting revision of youth spaces, see Feixa & Streker in Wynn & Cahill, Eds., 2004.

p. 47). Very similar to the activities organised by the club attended by Adrian Mole and his friends: “Nigel has asked me to go to a disco at the youth club tomorrow night; it is being held to raise funds for a new packet of ping-pong balls” (Townsend, 1991, p. 23), “Went to the youth club with Nigel. It was dead good. We played ping-pong till the balls cracked” (Townsend, 1991, p. 63).

Most of these clubs were spatially integrated in community centres which offered venues for different activities appealing to all ages:

In December 1982 the Community Centre was established in the West Wing of the building providing facilities including Mothers and Toddlers, Keep fit, Junior and Senior Youth clubs, carpet bowls, karate, Senior Citizens' Club, 5-a-side football, Boy's brigade and a club for disabled youngsters. (Russell, 2011, p. 48)

For teenagers, youth clubs represent an opportunity to experience both the idea of community without adult supervision and peer-sociability outside the restrictive school realm which implied that the rules of engagement apparently changed. However, there also existed hierarchical systems of relationship to be obeyed by the members of the club (Farrugia, 2015, p. 618). In the case of the “Off The Streets” club attended by Adrian Mole, the leadership of the charismatic Rick Lemon is never contested: “A gang of punks passed unkind comments about my flared trousers but Rick Lemon, the youth leader, stepped in and led a discussion on personal taste” (Townsend, 1991, p. 63).

These hierarchies may have social and class implications as well, for these spaces of sociability, adequate for certain practices of young people, reflect social clashes at a wider scale. In the case of Adrian Mole, it implies a clash between the children of suburbia (even those of working class extraction) and the children of council estates who seem not to adapt to these controlled environments where lawful standards are to be respected:

Barry Kent tried to get in the fire-doors to avoid paying his five-pence subs. But Rick Lemon pushed him back outside into the rain (...) I am pleased to report that Barry Kent and his gang have been banned from the 'Off The Streets' youth club. (Townsend, 1991, p. 63).³²

³²Not to be missed the recreation of this scene by Townsend in *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts*, this time with a young Margaret Thatcher as the observer:

Methodist Youth club was spoiled by a fighting involving the Prior gang and Cecil Parkhurst's friends. The tea urn was knocked over and the sugar bowl was broken. I think it's time the Prior gang was banned. They have caused nothing but trouble since they became members. (Townsend, 1989, p. 141)

Therefore, the space of sociability offered by the youth club, defined as a space of recreation, contributes to the social construction of Adrian, Pandora, Barry and the rest of the teenagers of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* by reproducing, at a reduced scale, the structures of power present in the wider context of society.

4.2.5.3 The pub

A second closed space of sociability, this time for adults, is regarded by foreigners as one of the most typical elements of British life: the pub. In this case, it lacks the associative character of the youth club and there are no quotas or specific requirements imposed upon customers and therefore, it has been traditionally associated with informal sociability (Hall, 2002, p. 29). Edensor defines pubs (among other places) as “points of intersection where individual paths congregate” (2002, p.54). That is, iconic places where the sense of communality is reinforced. But possibly this strengthening of the communal ties is more present in places other than big cities as in these, the number of leisure possibilities to choose from has increased together with a change in the recreational habits of the different age groups (Törrönen, 2005, p. 125). Therefore the social value of pubs increases in suburban areas and small towns and villages for they contribute to people's attachment to the locality (Dines & Cattell, 2006, p. 9).

This is the case of the local pub that features in *Adrian Mole. The Prostrate Years*: The Bear Inn, which is a traditional pub located in Mangold Parva, as we know, a fictitious suburb in the outskirts of Leicester:

Tom Urquhart, the landlord, strolled over. For some reason, he has never liked our family. I haven't had a proper conversation with him since the day I asked him if he would install a disabled toilet for my father. His pathetic excuse was 'a disabled toilet would spoil the character of the pub -The Bear has been 'ere since the monasteries were dissolved' (Townsend, 2009, p. 25)

Adrian Mole, his second wife and daughter and his parents are living in the middle of the countryside in two converted pigsties and the Bear Inn provides the area with the necessary leisure space for the entertainment of the inhabitants of the suburb and their families, with drinks and meals from a carvery available: “Walked under dripping trees into Mangold Parva to the Bear Inn for lunch” (Townsend, 2009, p. 22).

Townsend's paragraphs are quite significant in relation to the meaning of pubs in local environments. On the one hand, she highlights the fact that pubs have

evolved, especially since World War II, so as to be turned into sociability spaces for families, thus reflecting the change in the gendered character of the pub, traditionally considered as a male (mostly working class) realm, together with important changes, especially from the War, with external makeover and changes in the clientèle.

I was surprised to hear a cheer as we entered the pub. Surprised, because the Mole family is not particularly popular around here (...) However, the cheer was for the news that Tony Blair has finally resigned as leader of the Labour Party (Townsend, 2009, p. 23)

Adrian Mole's family attend the local pub as a way to "escape" from household and family requirements, especially as far as women are concerned:

Lunch at the Carvery was adequate, but I still miss my grandmother's Sunday dinners (...) As we were hacking at our meat, (...) my father said 'It's just cost us as good as six pounds each for this bloody muck (...) How much is a decent joint of beef? He looked at my mother and Daisy, they stared back at him blankly. (Townsend, 2009, p. 24)

And the pub is used by different groups and individuals so as to reflect the relational character of that local public domain: "A group of hefty women in tracksuits bulged into the pub and crowded round a small table where they all lit cigarettes" (Townsend, 2009, p. 30).

An important change in the life of pubs took place in July 2007 when the smoking ban in public places came in force after the passing of the *Health Act* in 2006. Considered by some as the last straw applied by the Labour government to accelerate the destruction of the traditional British pub, it is regarded by others like Adrian Mole as a blessing:

After breakfast (...) I went to next door to invite them to Sunday lunch at The Bear, I said, 'I want to experience for the first time what it's like to enjoy a meal with you without both of you blowing smoke on my face'. (...) Gracie and I sat on our own most of our meal at The Bear. Daisy and my mother and father were outside, smoking in the rain, together with most of the regulars. Tom Urquhart, the landlord, said, 'This no-smoking malarkey is going to finish The Bear' (Townsend, 2009, p. 34)

But the sector had not been alien to changes and important alterations from 1989. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission, a government body created

to report on activities related to trading monopolies and company mergers and takeovers, introduced the Beer Orders trying to break the monopolistic brewery ownership of pubs (Everitt & Bowler, 1996, p.101) However, an important part of pub ownership was transferred from breweries to pub companies (created by the same breweries) with the subsequent changes in management and closure of the less profitable local and rural pubs:

The Bear has closed! Yes, Diary, our ancient pub, whose name and situation commemorate the time when Mangold Parva was the very epicentre of bear-baiting, has been closed down by the property company who own it. The Urquharts have already left and gone to Kirkby New Town to be relief managers at a pub that was featured in the TV series Britain's Toughest Pubs. (Townsend, 2009, p. 378)

The impact of this closure on the regular customers of The Bear, reflects the general feeling of discontent:

When we got to The Bear, we found a small disconsolate group sanding at the locked front door (...) I was quite touched that they were holding hands. Bernard said, 'Poor old England is under attack again. The distinction being that this time the enemy is not the Luftwafe, it's our own government.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 379)

But this is yet another step in a process previously initiated of closure of different multifaceted local and neighbourhood spaces like post offices which provided the community with a variety of services such as stamps sales, bills payment, car tax renewal, etc.

The Mangold Parva post office is like an illustration out of one of Gracie's books (...) Every inch of the interior is lined with shelving and stuff for sale (...) There are tins of beans next to a box of Jiffy bags. Pots of pens and pencils share a shelf with tins of cat and dog food. Greeting cards are jumbled together in shoe boxes. (Townsend, 2009, p. 43)

A situation that it is also denounced by Townsend: "Also, she has got a parcel to send, but her post office at the estate has been closed down because the old people have had their pension books took off them" (Townsend, 2004, p. 231).

The closure of pubs or post offices has a negative impact on local communities as they are places that not only cater for certain leisure or practical needs of their inhabitants but they also represent the spatial dimension of social life in those

communities that have been severely damaged because of both the reduction of essential services and the destruction of spheres of sociability at a local level which are difficult to be replaced:

By 9 a.m. I was in the post office. Tony and Wendy Wellbeck were behind the counter drinking tea and eating toast. (...) When I asked for a do-it-yourself will form, Wendy Wellbeck said, 'Yes, I heard about your trouble down below' (...) Tony Wellbeck said, 'Your mother came in yesterday. She was very upset. Wendy had to go round the counter and give her a cuddle.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 170)

4.2.5.4 The school

In Townsend's work, school is a world on its own where not only does interaction among all the members of the school community take place but also it is subjected to "external" influences in the shape of government policies or social trends, which turns it into a privileged microcosms to study the evolution of British society and education. It features heavily especially in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* where, together with Adrian's home, it constitutes the main setting of the book. It is also dealt with in other books of *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series, in *The Queen and I*, and in *Number Ten* albeit with far less importance. Therefore, this particular setting deserves a deeper analysis which will include the diversity of the characters populating it and the socio historical references that eventually shaped the development of this particular environment.

Adrian Mole attends Neil Armstrong Comprehensive School whose sole name offers the reader two main references to be taken into account when studying the world of British schools of the time. The first one is the name itself, Neil Armstrong set foot on the Moon in 1969 and, therefore, his name was known worldwide in the 1970s. Even if Adrian Mole's school had already been built, the name could have been changed in the early 1970s, a time of deeper transformations in the British school system, namely the ones brought about by the term "comprehensive". Since World War II, British eleven-year-old children had been divided between those whose academic performance was good, who were recommended to attend grammar schools, and those who were not so academically successful, who were directed to secondary modern schools. But in the 1960s, local authorities established comprehensive schools, that is, schools that had no selection procedures and were all-inclusive. This was a matter of controversy, and

found a range of attitudes in the Conservative party benches from indifference to mild or strong opposition:

First, there were those who had no real interest in state education in any case because they themselves and their children went to private schools. (...) Second there were those who, themselves or their children had failed to get into grammar school and had been disappointed with the education received at a secondary modern. Third, there were those Conservatives who, (...) had absorbed a large dose of the fashionable egalitarian doctrines of the day. Finally, there were people like me who had been to good grammar schools, were strongly opposed to their destruction and felt no inhibition at all about arguing for the 11-plus. (Thatcher, 1995, p. 157)

The background to this rejection of comprehensive schools lies in Thatcher's Methodist upbringing and the insistence on individual capacities:

One of the reasons that we value individuals is not because they're all the same, but because they're all different. I believe you have a saying in the Middle West: "Don't cut down the tall poppies. Let them rather grow tall.' I would say, let our children grow tall and some taller than others if they have the ability in them to do so. Because we must build a society in which each citizen can develop his full potential, both for his own benefit and for the community". (Thatcher, 1975)

However, according to Vinen despite the strong criticism of the comprehensive school system, "in practice, the Conservative government did almost nothing to reverse the move towards comprehensive schools that had occurred during the 1960s and the 1970s" (2010, p. 280).

Margaret Thatcher left an undeniable mark in the world of schools through her different positions: as a member of the Shadow Cabinet in 1967 appointed to deal with education matters, later as a Secretary of State for Education after the Conservative victory of 1970 and as a Prime Minister from 1979. While a member of the Shadow Cabinet, she was opposed, as we know, to the introduction of comprehensive schools. But she was in the limelight, as we saw, when as a Secretary of State for Education she reduced the education budget by cutting the expenditure on school meals and, especially, on school milk, which gave her the sobriquet (one of many) of "Thatcher, the milk snatcher":

I'm 31 one years old, old enough to vote, go to work, drink beer and have children. But I'm young to remember with fondness my

childhood (...) This story is not really a story at all but a collection of vivid memories and observations from my childhood, the days when the chant “Margaret Thatcher, the school milk snatcher” did the rounds in the school yards. (Russell, 2011, p. 1)

This sole fact, which Thatcher tries to justify in her memoirs as the lesser of two evils, the other being, the need to reduce the budget for libraries and entry fees for museums and galleries as a symbol of the drastic reduction in the budget for education as a whole, made her widely known and provided her enemies with a solid base upon which to demonise her:

There seemed no reason why families who could afford to do so should not make a larger contribution to the cost of school meals (...) When I was at Huntingtower Road Primary School, my parents paid 2 1/2d a week for my school milk; and there were no complaints. By 1970 very few children were so deprived that school milk was essential for their nourishment. (Thatcher, 1995, p. 179)

As the whole affair is too juicy not to be alluded in her books, Townsend does not miss the opportunity to mock the “milk snatch” as we saw in the previous section. But Thatcher's education policy was, by far, more restrictive than that when she became Prime Minister. The cuts in the education budget affected different sections of schools as Adrian Mole, “innocently” poses:

Our school dinner ladies have got the sack! The dinners now come in hot boxes from a central kitchen. I would have staged a protest but I have got a Geography test tomorrow. (Townsend, 1991, p.166)

The school are making me read *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. I am sharing a book with three dumbos who take half an hour to read one page, so it is turning out to be a frustrating experience. (Townsend, 1991, p. 282)

This last remark is particularly interesting as it shows both the lack of provisions of the school library and the failure of the literacy system. Something that was criticized by Conservative and Labour alike but that neither of them was able to tackle.

Thatcher's adamant position and criticism of comprehensive schools, the cuts in the education budget, and the rest of the items of her education policy had a sole objective: to destroy the influence of local authorities that she identified as left-wing hives of activity: “We had increased parents' rights in the education system;

but the ethos in classrooms and teachers' training colleges remained *stubbornly* left wing" (Thatcher, 1993, p. 306).³³

Thatcher's policies and the contradictory reactions she provoked have an important presence in the world of education. Townsend's depiction of them and their influence on the school's hierarchy according to their political ascription is not to be missed:

This morning the whole school was ordered to go to the assembly hall. Mr. Scruton got up on the stage and acted like the films of Hitler (...) Scruton said that somebody had entered his office and drawn a moustache on Margaret Thatcher and written 'three million unemployed' in her cleavage. He said that defiling the greatest leader this country has ever known was a crime against humanity. It was tantamount to treason and that when the culprit was found they would be immediately expelled. (Townsend, 1991, p. 165)

Adrian Mole attends a suburban comprehensive school where the range of economic situations of the students' families is quite varied; from working class Adrian, to upper-working class Nigel, middle class Pandora and lower-working class Barry, who lives in a council estate. Despite Thatcher's educational policies and the cuts decreed for school budgets, Neil Armstrong Comprehensive has its facilities in a good state and it even has a swimming-pool. This is not the situation of some schools in council estates which have been long neglected as Townsend denounces in *The Queen and I*:

'Oh dear, it's started to rain,' said Mrs. Strickland.
Charles looked up and saw water splashing down from the cracks in the ceiling. A bell rung urgently throughout the school.
'Is that the fire alarm?' asked Charles.
'No, it's the rain alarm,' said Mrs. Strickland. 'The bucket monitors will be along soon, excuse me.'
And sure enough, as Charles and Harry watched, children came from all directions and lined up outside Mrs. Strickland's office. Mrs. Strickland appeared at the door with a heap of plastic buckets which she doled out to the children, who took them and placed them strategically underneath the drips in the corridor. Other buckets were borne away into the classrooms. Charles was impressed with the calm efficiency of the operation. He remarked it to Mrs. Strickland.
'Oh, they are well practised,' she said, rebuffing the compliment. 'We've been waiting for our new roof for five years'. (Townsend, 1992, p. 160)

³³My emphasis.

The school is a highly hierarchical entourage with its members distributed in recognisable separate spheres whose interaction is based on strict sets of rules: headmasters and teachers, students, and the rest of the staff and the school community, including the parents. These spheres, in turn, possess an internal organisation which is rarely subverted. Students are arranged naturally in groups, generally according to forms, with the most popular ones leading them, although some students' leadership trespasses the form barriers and projects into the rest of the school:

I am going to make friends with Craig Thomas. He is one of the biggest third-years. I bought him a Mars bar in break today (...) He said 'Ta Moley'. That is the first time he has spoken to me. If I play my cards right I could be in his gang. (Townsend, 1991, p. 35)

Power structures among students are also based on physical strength and this enables students with low academic performance to place themselves in a dominant position, as in the case of Barry Kent, the school bully:

Barry Kent said he would 'do me over' unless I gave him twenty-five pence every day. I told him he was wasting his time demanding money with menaces from me. I never have any spare money (...) but Barry Kent hit me in the goolies and walked off. (Townsend, 1991, p. 34)

In *A Journey*, Tony Blair recalls an similar episode involving the school bully:

He wasn't even a very big bully. Certainly not a very frightening one. I even remember his name: He had been on at me for weeks. I hated it, and dreaded going into the class where he was, and avoided going wherever he would be. Then, for some reason or no reason, out there by the school gates when he came upon me unexpectedly and started up, I turned on him and told him I would hit him if he didn't stop. He could tell I meant it, because I did and my eyes would have shown it - so he stopped. Silly, isn't it, to recall that tiny moment of character development after all these years. (Blair, 2010, p. 31)

But Adrian's solution to the bullying problem did not come from a firm purpose of confronting and fighting the bully. On the contrary, it was quite unexpected:

My grandma found out about the menacing (...) She listened to it all then she put her hat on, thinned her lips and went out (...) It is all round the school that an old lady of seventy-six frightened Barry Kent and his dad into returning my menaces money. Kent daren't

show his face. His gang are electing a new leader. (Townsend, 1991, p. 76)

On some occasions, those separate worlds within the school collide and rebellion sparks. One of the most famous episodes of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is the “red socks protest” which emphasises the students’ narrow margin for contestation and the position of the headmaster as the authoritarian warden of morality at school:

I went to school, I was feeling rebellious so I wore red socks. It is strictly forbidden but I don't care any more (...) Miss Sproxton spotted my red socks in assembly! The old bag reported me to pop-eye Scruton. He had me in his office and gave a lecture on the dangers of being a nonconformist.(...) Pandora is organizing a sock protests! (...) Met Pandora and rest of the committee at corner of our road; all of us were wearing red socks. (...) We sang 'We shall not be moved' all the way to school. (...) Pop-eye Scruton must have been tipped off because he was waiting in the fourth- year cloakroom. (...) The letter was to our parents, it said (...) “It is my duty to inform you that your son/daughter has deliberately flaunted one of the rules of this school. (...) Young people today often lack sufficient moral guidance in the home, therefore I feel that is my duty to take a firm stand in my school”. (Townsend, 1991, p. 80-82)

Rebellion is crushed by Scrutton but contestation resists, in a most uncomfortable way though:

The Red Sock Committee has voted to give way to Scrutton for the time being. We wear red socks underneath our black socks. This makes our shoes tight but we don't mind because a principle is involved (Townsend, 1991, p. 80)

On other occasions, the students’ rebellion and the subsequent reaction may imply a political stance in both sides involved, with those in power, that is teachers, representing the government’s official positions, either under Margaret Thatcher:

Got fifteen out of twenty for Geography. I lost points for saying that the Falkland Islands belonged to Argentina. (Townsend, 1991, p. 166)

Mr. Lambert told me off for staring out of the window when I should have been writing about the future of the British Steel Industry. He said, ‘Adrian, you’ve only got ten minutes to finish your essay’. So, I wrote: ‘In my opinion there is no future for the British Steel Industry while the present government is in power. I know I’ll get into trouble, but I gave it in anyway. (Townsend, 1991, p. 285)

Or under Tony Blair:

Glenn [Adrian's eldest son] has been excluded from school, for calling Tony Blair a twat. He brought home a note from Roger Patience, the headmaster, which said:

Dear. Mr. Mole,

In this time of national crisis, it is incumbent on us all to support our government. During a senior pupils' debate (...) your soon Glenn succeeded in undermining the morale of teachers and pupils alike by his passionate denunciation of the bombing of Afghanistan. He also called our great leader, Mr. Blair, 'a leading twat'. I have therefore excluded him from the school premises for the duration of the war. (Townsend, 2008, p. 273)

Townsend repeatedly acknowledges the extreme importance of good teachers: "Good teachers should be venerated by society. We should pay them more and stop being jealous of their long holidays" (2001, p. 187) and despises those teachers who not only are not driven by vocation but who also provoke nightmares in children due to their inability to treat and teach them properly, something she experienced first-hand: "I used to dread being asked to read by my teacher in my infant school (who was so unkind and sadistic that my brain turned into porridge whenever I saw her)" (2001, p. 186).

Some teachers feature in Townsend's books with interesting roles as they are politically positioned against the school headmaster. However, they never confront the authority figure openly but through the students, which defines them as powerless with respect to their headmasters and education authorities (Lynch & Lodge, 2002, p. 157): "Miss Elf said that school-leavers are despairing all over the country. She said that Mr. Scruton should be ashamed to have a portrait of Mrs. Thatcher over his desk" (Townsend, 1991, p. 164).

The usual portrayal of teachers in children's and young adults' literature has been studied, among others, by Niemi, Smith & Brown (2014) and their conclusions show that teaching, particularly at primary level, is clearly gender biased as most teachers appearing in books are women for they are supposed to be both more apt at taking care of children and more prone to display affection with respect to the pupils. Thus, the role of a female teacher is a substitute of the mothering role. In Townsend's works, female teachers are sometimes depicted as compassionate:

Miss Sproxton told me off because my English essay was covered in drops of candle-wax. I explained that I had caught my overcoat sleeve

on the candle whilst doing my homework. Her eyes filled with tears and she said I was 'a dear brave lad', and she gave me a merit mark (Townsend, 1991, p. 74)

On the contrary, some male teachers are mocked when trying to trespass the limits which seem very clear to their female co-workers by be-friending their students:

I have a new form teacher. his name is Mr. Lambert. He is the kind of teacher who likes being friendly. He said, 'Consider me a friend, any problems to do with school or home, I want to hear them.' (...) Mr. Lambert is going about school biting his nails and looking worried. He has stopped taking people to the café. (Townsend, 1991, p. 260)

Then Roger Patience took over as headmaster. I expect he's sorry now that he asked the pupils to call him Roger, and told them to throw away their school uniform. (Townsend, 1999, p. 95)

For Townsend, headmasters, positioned at the top of the school hierarchy, are the ones retained responsible for the line their schools follow, either in politics, the students' academic performance or even their biased personal opinion of the children's parents:

He burned with shame when they entered the school and were greeted by the headmaster. 'Mrs. Sprat, is it? You've got a good lad here, we've got great hopes for Jack.' Jack could see the amused look in the headmaster's eyes as the pompous git took in his mother's appearance. (Townsend, 2003, p. 33)

Grice gestured towards the window that looked over the Flowers Exclusion Zone. 'It's the catchment area,' he said. 'Our students are taken from the shallow end of the gene pool (...) 'You don't appear to have a head teacher, Mr Grice,' Grice frowned. (...) We 'ave trouble 'anging on to an 'ead teacher' he confided. 'So I've took it on myself to fill in, like'. 'But you have no teaching qualifications, Mr. Grice,' said Ms. Pike. 'I teach basic and advanced scaffolding Tuesdays and Thursdays,' he said. (Townsend, 2006, p. 158)

The headmaster's position seems to be imbued with special characteristics which lead any person (either male or female) occupying it to behave in an authoritarian manner. In the following extract, Townsend depicts an atmosphere inappropriate for a seven-year-old children class, slightly reminiscent of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and places the responsibility of this sort of aberration, directly on the headmistress as abiding by the absurd regulations of the government policies:

On looking through the glass panel in the door I saw that the children were sitting in rows being taught exam techniques by an 'exam trainer'. (...) There were various exhortations around the room (...) 'Exams are good, play is bad'. The children dipped their pens in their inkwells and copied this slogan down.(...) I fear that, once again Mrs. Parvez, the headmistress, has misinterpreted education-department guidelines. She won't be content until the children are wearing wooden clogs. (Townsend, 2008, p. 57)

Nothing to be compared with Margaret Thatcher's headmistress at Grantham Girls' School, a practical woman educating future wives and mothers although different times required different mottoes:

The headmistress was Miss Williams, a petite, upright, grey-haired lady, who had started the school as headmistress in 1910 (...) The advice to us was never to buy a low-quality silk when the same amount of money would purchase a very good-quality cotton. 'Never aspire to a cheap fur coat when a well-tailored wool coat would be a better buy'. (Thatcher, 1995, p. 18)

But Townsend's personal hobbyhorse, as seen in the previous section, was the unresolved levels of illiteracy. The same concern was shared by Margaret Thatcher:

I knew from parents, employers and pupils themselves that too many people left school without a basic knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic. But it would be no easy matter too change for the better what happened in schools. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 590)

And Tony Blair:

Nearly half of 11 year-olds in England and Wales fail to reach expected standards in English and Maths. Britain has a smaller share of 17 and 18 year-olds in full-time education than any major industrial nation. Nearly two thirds of the British workforce lack vocational qualifications. (Labour Party, 1997)

However, Blair's motto "education, education and education" did not resolve the contradictions and failures of the British school system. On the one hand, trying to adopt a compromise far from the old system of pupil's division according to their performance and the old Labour comprehensive system, New Labour designed a sort of intermediate position favouring the idea of the comprehensive but giving extraordinary importance to the (Thatcher's favourite appeal) individual:

In education, we reject both the idea of a return to the 11-plus and the monolithic comprehensive schools that take no account of children's differing abilities. Instead we favour all-in schooling which identifies the distinct abilities of individual pupils and organises them in classes to maximise their progress in individual subjects. In this way we modernise the comprehensive principle, learning from the experience of its 30 years of application. (Labour Party, 1997)

On the other hand, the different New Labour schemes to improve the quality of education such as the *New Schools White Paper* (2005) did not provide the adequate results. The insistence on a "different" model of comprehensive schools did not change people's ideas about them. In Townsend's *Number Ten*, only an enthusiastic Prime Minister, Edward Clare considers Jack Sprat's high cultural level as an excellent outcome of the comprehensive system:

'Jack is a product of Britain's comprehensive school system,' said the Prime Minister. Daphne Bostock wrinkled her nose as if the word 'comprehensive' was a bad smell and was in the room. Jack said, 'Edwina, if you think they're so great why don't you send your own children to a comprehensive?' 'We scrimped and saved to send our children, Mark and Gillian, to a good private school. (Townsend, 2002, p.191)

Tony Blair himself did not seem to be very confident in his education policy:

But we both knew the real challenge lay in secondary schools. There were only thirty London secondary schools that got over 70 per cent of their pupils to five good GCSEs. In my heart of hearts I knew I wouldn't send my own children to most inner-city secondary schools. Discipline was variable, sometimes awful. Teachers were often, unsurprisingly, demoralised. There was often no organised school sport in the inner city, and sometimes little out of it. (Blair, 2010, p. 203)

The education standards did not improve as New Labour governments wished and the fact was also reported by Townsend: "I was shocked to see that my old school, Neil Armstrong comprehensive has been deemed one of the 297 failing schools. A hit squad is due to stage a coup within days" (Townsend, 1999, p. 95).

The *20th Report of British Social Attitudes*, in its section devoted to the analysis of British education under Thatcher and Blair, refers explicitly to the limited changes produced regarding educational issues in England:

The existing grammar and secondary schools survived (...) The national curriculum and the national tests (...) were left intact (...) The shift from local to central control continued (...) and the trend for more and more pupils to go to university accelerated, until the participation rate had almost trebled. (Wragg & Jarvis in Park et al. Eds., 2003, p. 109)

In addition, the public perception of education, as a priority for extra government spending had shifted from the 50% in 1983 to an important 70% in 1997, coinciding with the New Labour slogan insistence on education, to a 63% in 2002. In all three cases, the public gave more importance to health spending. (Wragg & Jarvis in Park et al. Eds., 2003, p. 111).

Therefore, it seems that, neither Conservative nor New Labour governments could raise the education standards of the country as their policies were very similar and unable to attack the real evils of the education system which was accompanied by the public perception of education as secondary to health. White Papers were written, Acts passed, schemes designed, but the real performance of students did not improve. A reality sadly acknowledged by Townsend:

I've only just realized that Glenn can't read properly. Inside the shed was a bag that clearly said 'John Innes Potting Compost'. When William asked Glenn what was inside the bag, Glenn was at a loss. 'I can't read words like that,' he said. (Townsend, 1999, p. 311)

4.2.5.5 Neighbourhood

Neighbourhoods are spaces primarily defined according to geographical coordinates, as specific areas within bigger units such as cities, towns or villages. However, neighbourhoods could also be understood in terms of their residents' social interaction. In this sense, the so-called "dynamics of neighbourhood", that is, the ways in which the residents of an area relate to each other out of their homes, are, in turn, both connected to wider notions of community (Buonfino & Hilder, 2010, p. 8) and reflect what Madanipour defines as "intermediary levels of organizing space [by] reducing the space of a dichotomous divide between the public and private spheres" (Madanipour, 2003, p. 141).

Williams's concept of structure of feeling or more precisely, local structure of feeling (Taylor, Evans & Fraser, 2003, p. 32), seems to apply quite adequately to the idea of neighbourhood for it relates to social practices and the patterns they follow, in the case of neighbourhood within specific time and place coordinates.

All these elements interact in Townsend's depiction of neighbourhoods and the neighbourhood practices she describes. The longer descriptions of neighbourhood life, according to the parameters in consideration in this section, the ones referred to sociability, are to be found in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *Number Ten*.

In *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* several scenes take place in the streets of the suburb that Adrian inhabits, some of them are of a private character, that is, private affairs which are being aired in the street, a public place where the restrictions of privacy do not apply and everybody is entitled to comment on what is happening once the private character of the facts in question has been erased. Therefore, what it is stressed here is that in-between position of the neighbourhood where streets represent an intermediate location between the public and private realms:

A terrible thing happened last night. My father and Mr. Lucas had a fight in the front garden, the whole street came outside to watch! (...) Mr. O'Leary tried to help my father, he kept shouting 'Give the smarmy bugger one for me, George'. Mrs O'Leary was shouting horrible things at my mother. By the sounds of things, she had been watching my mother's movements since Christmas. (Townsend, 1991, p. 52)

Life in Adrian's cul-de-sac could be altered by these "special performances" that, according to Capp possess a certain "flavour of street theatre and were deliberately staged to inflict public and dramatic humiliation" (2003, p.197):

There was a removal lorry outside Mr. Lucas's house this morning. Mrs. Lucas and some other women were carrying furniture from the house and stacking it on the pavement. Mr. Lucas was looking out from his bedroom window. He looked a bit frightened. Mrs. Lucas was laughing and pointing up to Mr. Lucas and all the other women started laughing and singing 'Why was he born so beautiful'? (Townsend, 1991, p. 30)

Adrian's Cul-de-sac, despite being a mixed working-class area, lacks the recognisable character or council estates as far as neighbourhood life is concerned, where the limits between private and public are not occasionally trespassed but definitely blurred and its dwellers' relationships do not abide by the usual rules of privacy. This implies that both the social construction of neighbourhood and the notion of neighbourliness are different. (Buonfino & Hilder, 2010):

At 4,30 Tony Threadgold was sawing through a sofa that had once belonged to Napoleon, on the doorstep of Number Nine. Nobody in Hell Close complained about the noise. Noise was normal and was created with great vigour, both day and night. It was only when there was a lack of noise that the inhabitants of Hell close came to their doors and windows, wondering what was wrong. (Townsend, 1993, p. 47)

But there are other times in which the alteration of neighbourhood life is celebratory and a good excuse for conviviality. There is a change in both the community pattern of life and its neighbours relationships that is widely accepted and supported:

Mrs. O'Leary is trying to organize a street party for the Royal Wedding. (...) I have been on the go all day with preparations for the Royal Wedding Street party. (...) Mr and Mrs. Singh have hung a huge Union Jack out of their front bedroom window (...) Our house is letting the street down. all my father has done is pin a Charles and Diana tea towel to the front door. (...) Mrs. O'Leary and Mrs. Singh swept the street clean. Then we all helped to put the tables and chairs out in the middle of the road. (...) I put my Abba LP and turned the volume up high and soon even the old people of forty and over were dancing!. When the street lamp came on Sean O'Leary climbed up and put red, white and blue crepe paper over the bulbs to help the atmosphere and I fetched our remaining candles and put them on the tables. Our street looked quite Bohemian. (Townsend, 1991, p. 100)

Not only can alterations in neighbourhood life be caused by extraordinary circumstances but traditions may help cause them as well. Some festivities, like Guy Fawkes, take place outside home, in the streets:

The Marriage Guidance Council bonfire was massive. It was a good community effort. Mr. Cherry donated hundreds of copies of a magazine called *Now!* He said they had been cluttering up the back of his shop for over a year. Pandora burnt her collection of Jackie comics (...) Mrs. Singh and all the little Singhs brought along Indian firecrackers. (...) Nobody was seriously burnt, but it was a mistake to hand out fireworks at the same time the food was being served. (Townsend, 1991, p. 133)

Guy Fawkes night represents one possibility of community celebration as Angela Russell describes in her childhood memories:

It was the 5th of November of 1988 and the families of our little area had been busy. On the road, at the junction of the Graham Street and Hyde Street back lanes, a pile of combustible material had been lovingly constructed. (...) Most of the families of the surrounding area turned up and we spent the evening chatting, playing with other kids, poking our 'chetties' with sticks to see if they were cooked, or simply watching the flames. It was one of those rare moments when community spirit prevailed and railed against Thatcher's statement of 'there is no such thing as society'. (Russell, 2011, p. 50)³⁴

However, times change and the strong links of solidarity which once governed neighbourhood life, are seldom visible in the 1980s, as one of Adrian's neighbours remarks while decorating the street for the royal wedding party (the lines were deleted in the final version of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*): "the deaf woman started to cry and said it was "just like the war with folk speaking to each other" (Townsend, 1981).³⁵

And this is, precisely, the perception of neighbourhood life that, with the passing of time, Townsend conveys in her works, especially as far as the most popular neighbourhoods in her books are concerned (Adrian's cul-de-sac or council estates) which she describes with less structured and more spontaneous community life than those of high class areas:

The house opposite where he had once been sent to borrow a saucepan, had been boarded up and a smashed-up caravan had come to rest in its front garden. School children walked by shouting affectionate obscenities to each other, (...) Once the children had turned the corner the street was deserted. A few cars passed but to Jack's mind it seemed unnaturally quiet. Years ago, in the same street on the day that he had left home to go to Hendon Police College, he had stood on the doorstep for ten minutes waiting for a taxi to take him to the railway station and had been surprised by how many people had passed by and wished him well. Small children had been playing in their front gardens and cars were being mended at the kerbside. In those

³⁴The author refers to the famous Thatcher's statement in an interview for *Woman's Own* in September 23, 1987:

They are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business. (Thatcher, 1987)

For an interesting vision of Thatcher's times referring to this famous sentence, see McSmith, 2011.

³⁵DWL-ST/1/1/1/2/8-8ii

days, Jack remembered, old women wrapped themselves in overalls and leaned on their gates to give and receive news. (Townsend, 2003, p. 38)

Thatcher's insistence on the individual, discrediting the community and its support, was criticized by Tony Blair when referring to the terrible murder of James Bulger, a two-year-old boy, by two ten-year-old children in Merseyside. For Blair, the tragedy was clearly representative of social breakdown and described it as a symbol of "a Tory Britain in which, for all the efficiency that Thatcherism had achieved, the bonds of social and community well-being had been loosed dangerously" (Blair, 2010, p. 38). However, the provisions of New Labour to improve neighbourhood life were not as fruitful as desired:

There were still large gaps between them (the poor areas) and other places in terms of housing, crime and environments. Substantial gaps in individual outcomes (health, education and employment) and in neighbourhood satisfaction remained. Tony Blair's vision of a country where no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live had still to be realised -and this is, perhaps, not surprising given continuing underlying inequalities in income and wealth. (Lupton, 2013, p. 8)

As we have seen, Townsend's vision of neighbourhood life, is both nostalgic for better times and critical of the difficulties the loss of community life implies. Although expressed in terms of class, generally speaking, she seems to favour the neighbourhood community ways still prevailing at the beginning of the 1980s, as a continuation of traditional trends, to the deterioration experienced by community life at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

When his mother came into the room, Jack asked her where everybody was. 'Nobody goes out these days,' she said, coming to stand next to him at the window. 'I don't even nip next door now (...) One of those bad lads come over the fence last week and stole that garden chair you brought me.' Jack said, 'I'll build you a higher fence and get you another chair.' 'No, don't bother with the chair,' Norma said irritably. 'They'd only pinch it again and anyway, the sun never shines in England nowadays.' (Townsend, 2003, p. 39)

4.2.6 On the move

Apart from the travel narratives that we have described so far, Townsend describes others which correspond to her characters' will (or need) to leave their homes for several reasons. Their displacements are compulsory or voluntary, by

train, car or plane, and in all cases, the account of their trips is closely related to the socioeconomic reality of their time which allows the reader to obtain an interesting picture of the evolution of both British transports and the leisure and working activities that its citizens have displayed closely linked to them.

4.2.6.1 Commuting and Other Compulsory Displacements

Headicar's data referring to the number of trips according to average trip time and trip purpose from 1995/97 to 2006 reflect that "overall a quarter of all travel is spent travelling for commuting or business purposes" (Headicar, 2009, p. 38), with an average trip time of 29 minutes.³⁶

Adrian Mole's teenage years are spent in Ashby-de-la-Zouch and he seldom leaves his suburb, therefore there is no need to commute to Leicester for work reasons. His functional displacements are quite constrained and marked by some focal elements: school, home, friends' homes (including Pandora's and Bert Baxter's), library, youth club. This is a very limited range of options which are solely widened with occasional school or tourist excursions to close locations, or his runaway adventure. However, the most usual way of commuting between Ashby and Leicester seems to be by bus. But Adrian's life as an adult is sometimes so miserable that he is forced to commute to his work in a Leicester bookshop by bike while living in Mangold Parva as his car has broken down, which provokes all types of comic situations and an underlying criticism to the alleged "natural life" the family are living in the wildest area of the suburb.³⁷

As I was cycling into a headwind it took longer than usual to ride to the bookshop, and when I reached the environs of Leicester I was further delayed. It seemed that every major road had been dug up so that new sewage pipes could be laid. As a reluctant cesspit owner this prompted me to be almost consumed with jealous rage. Is it any wonder my wife is yearning for the metropolis? (Townsend, 2009, p. 7)

As Adrian's wife does not work outside home at the beginning of *Adrian Mole, The Prostrate Years*, and therefore she does not have to commute to the city, she

³⁶Note the average trip time has increased by 12% which has interesting implications as far as everyday life is concerned. It may reflect, for example, an increase in the figures of private transport, an increase in the population living in suburban or dormitory areas, and the subsequent modifications in living habits.

³⁷As we know, Adrian, his wife and daughter are living with his parents in two converted pigsties. The address is significant enough to have an idea of the area: 1 The Old Pigsty/ The Piggeries/ Bottom field/ Lower Lane/ Mangold Parva/Leicestershire. (Townsend, 2009, p. 9)

experiences a mixture of suburban anxiety, longing for the city, and contempt for her husband's preference for the countryside:

I defended myself, saying 'I never tire of the view, the trees in the distance, the light fading from the sky' Daisy said, 'It's not fucking Cornwall. The view from the front window is of a boggy field and a row of leylandii your father planted to protect his privacy. Not that anybody comes near the place.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 8)

Adrian commutes by bike due to his usual jinx. Normally, the commuting distances are covered by train, bus and, especially, by car. Middleton studies the evolution of British tourism and in a chapter devoted to the fifty years after World War II he describes the growth of car ownership in the 1950s as "indication of the power of the pent-up demand for personal mobility that would be released later as personal incomes rose" (Middleton & Lickorish, 2003, p. 21).

This affluence resulted in an increase in the number of cars which, in turn, provoked the improvement of roads with the new motorways as the stars of a road-building programme. The M1, connecting the country from London to Leeds, was opened in 1956 and it was soon followed by the M6. According to Moran, the motorways were seen as "opening up a new era of mobility and opportunity (...) and they were often characterized as glamorous, thrilling spaces, particularly among the young" (2005, p. 96). This implied that the car was increasingly achieving more importance at all levels, something clearly recognised by Thatcher's governments and exemplified by the strong support she gave to the building of the orbital M25 (which Moran links to her strong association between road building and entrepreneurialism (2005, p. 96). Under New Labour, not only did the number of cars increase but also cars of a particular model which epitomized the renewal process which Tony Blair had implemented in his party.³⁸

The car turns into an essential commodity for Adrian as while living and working in London, he usually travels north by the M1 in order to visit his son William, who stays with Adrian's parents in Leicester. Therefore, for him, this is another type of compulsory displacement, the periodical trips to visit the family who live far from his work place. Thus, for him, the M1 is transformed into both a path connecting him with his closest, affective realm and a border which, despite its upright design, creates a barrier between Adrian's two worlds resulting in him not being comfortable enough in either of them (Lynch, 1960), with highly touching emotional consequences when he must leave his son and take the M1 once again

³⁸Let us remember the "Mondeo Man" story.

back to London: “Dean Street, Soho, London, to Wisteria Walk, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, in three hours. Not bad considering I kept under the speed limit all the way” (Townsend, 1999, p. 8).

William had to be prised from my legs before I could get into the Montego. Eventually he was persuaded to let me go by the promise that he could watch a video of Jeremy Clarkson test-driving a Lamborghini. The kid waved until I turned the corner of the avenue. (Townsend, 1999, p.67)

Number Ten's character, Jack Sprat, travels to Leicester as well in order to visit his mother who lives alone in a council estate house. Jack's is a sort of compulsory displacement, although its periodicity is not explicitly stated but it seems to coincide with holidays and leaves, in order to fulfil his duties as a son. But for Jack, turning back to the home he left to make a living in the police force is always a sad occasion, a reminder of the hard times he spent in his childhood, deprived of essential necessities, especially if he ends up spending the night in the bedroom he used to share with his brother:

There was no food in the house that Jack could bring himself to eat. And unpaid bills had been stuffed behind the tea caddy on the end of the draining board. The whole house needed cleaning, airing and restocking with necessities (...) Jack had been hoping to return to London that evening to enjoy his second day of leave (...) but he realised that he would have to stay another night and sort his mother out. (Townsend, 2003, p. 40)

A very special travel narrative develops related to the M1 in *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. Adrian runs away, leaving a home where nobody takes any notice of him or his needs, with his parents immersed in their own love-life chaos which results in Adrian becoming a member of the gang controlled by the school bully, Barry Kent. He even reaches a certain status in the gang and has his intellectual qualities acknowledged with the nickname of “brains”. The situation at home is so painful for him that he takes a road to nowhere in an attempt to catch his parents' attention:

I have decided to leave home. Nobody will care. In fact my parents probably won't notice that I've gone. (...) I am making preparations to leave. I have already written my goodbye letters. (...)

Dear Mum and Dad, By the time you read this I will be far away. I know I am breaking the law in running away before my 16th birthday,

but, quite honestly, a life as a fugitive is preferable to my present miserable existence. (Townsend, 1991, p.340)

Adrian's adventure is an urban one. He takes to the M1, travelling from Leicester to Sheffield, and from here to Leeds and finally to Manchester. His movement is well defined and covers a well-known area marked by the presence of big cities. However, Adrian's travel narrative does not turn him into a British Holden Caulfield, despite the insistence of the American critics when publicizing the book in the United States:³⁹

Got a lift in a *pig delivery lorry*. This is just my luck! I had a very long conversation with the driver, which is a miracle really, because I couldn't hear a word he was saying over the noise of the engine.(...) Got here by *fish lorry*. Pretended to be asleep in order to avoid driver's conversation. (Townsend, 1991, pp. 345-350)⁴⁰

The lust for freedom does not take him to "Huckleberrian" open spaces down a wide river:

Still in Manchester (St. Ignatius's church porch) 1. a.m. It is traditional for the homeless to sleep in church porches so why don't vicars make sure that their porches are more comfortable? It wouldn't kill them to provide a mattress, would it? (Townsend, 1991, p. 350)

Neither is his travel a modern *grand tour* that takes him to fashionable places of ancient European cities where the highest members of society interact and interesting acquaintances are established, for his Midlands tour does not abide by the rules of the literary *Bildungsroman*.⁴¹

9.30 p.m. Leeds (...) A man has just come up and asked me if I want to sell the dog. I was tempted but said no. (...) 1. a.m. The man who asked about the dog has just approached me and asked if I want to sell *myself*. I said 'No,' and told him that my father was the Chief Constable of Wales. (Townsend, 1991, p. 345)⁴²

Adrian is a working class runaway whose travel narrative lacks the literary glamour that other fictive characters' (of a similar age) displays. His is frustrating for it results into a more acute sense of loneliness and abandonment:

³⁹DWL-ST/1/2/8. Cfr. Chapter 2

⁴⁰My emphasis.

⁴¹It is interesting to see this last element in connection with Psychogeography. To this respect, see, for instance Moretti, 1998.

⁴²Emphasis of the author.

3 p.m. Nobody has said 'Happy Birthday' to me. (...) 5 p.m. Bought myself a birthday card. Inside I wrote: To our darling first-born child on his sixteenth birthday. With all the love it is possible to give, From your admiring and loving parents. P.S. come home son. Without you the house is devoid of life and laughter. (Townsend, 1991, p. 349)⁴³

Eventually, Adrian's parents are notified of their son's whereabouts by the vicar of Saint Ignatius's wife and despite their, according to Adrian, detachment on the days immediately after his runaway:

Rang home but the phone wasn't snatched up immediately like it is in the films about runaway children. Another sign of their indifference. (Townsend, 1991, p. 345)

They travel to pick their son up and take him back home in Ashby-de la-Zouch. When Adrian is home again, feeling unwell, the doctor is called and his diagnosis makes his parents feel guilty:

Doctor Grey has just left my bedside. He has diagnosed that I am suffering from a depressive illness brought on by worry. The treatment is bed rest, and no quarrelling in the family. My parents are bowed down by guilt. (Townsend, 1991, p. 352)

Bad feelings on both parts implied are the results of Adrian's disastrous adventure around the Midlands.

4.2.6.2 Train stories

Despite being one of the most usual means of commuting, undoubtedly, trains do have a remarkable literary flavour and they also feature in Townsend's works as a way to facilitate juicy encounters which would be turned into different episodes or as the means by which some characters try to come to terms with a dysfunctional element of their lives. In none of these cases, trains are used for pleasure but for working or practical reasons.

In a disclosed report of the Conservative Party dated in July 1976 about transport policy, it is expressly stated when referring to railways that "the central aim of policy must be to reduce British Rail's operating deficit":

⁴³Despite having been shot some years later, please note the similarities with one of the most celebrated episodes of *Mr. Bean* TV series. It seems that the culturally accepted tragedy of celebrating one's birthday alone has, nevertheless, a very comic side.

Wherever possible passenger operations should cover their costs. The option to close down some 'green field' lines should be retained but the decision should await the full information required above. If it is necessary to close lines then the public must be assured that replacement services will continue as long as needed. In any plan for labour reductions it is important to be even-handed and to reduce the administrative staff. (Conservative Research Department, 1976, p. 1)

As we see, the Conservative policies were leading to a full-blown process of the privatisations of essential services. However, British Railways were not privatised under Thatcher's governments. The railways had been nationalised after World War II under a mixed scheme in which the state was the owner and the regions functioned as the effective managers of specific lines. Only in 1980, did the management become fully national and not regional (Jenkins, 2006, p. 166).

British Railways were eventually privatized under John Major's government in 1994 after a long and complicated process which could not be termed as a "proper" privatization and produced chaotic results with hybrid forms of management (Jenkins, 2006, p. 169). As a result, British citizens perceived the railway system as inefficient. According to the *20th Report of British Attitudes* survey, in 2002 just 3% of respondents used trains for their obligatory displacements. However, there was a slight recovery in the number of those who report not to have ever used the train as the figure diminishes by some 13% from 1993 to 2002 (Exley & Christie in Park et al. Eds., 2003, p. 59). Nevertheless, despite the economic difficulties of the sector and the controversy around its privatization, trains continue to be both used and loathed by British public and their fictional counterparts alike.

Travelling by train for working purposes gives Townsend the opportunity to live through some experiences which she used later in her works, namely in *The Public Confessions of a Middle Aged Woman* and *Mr. Bevan's Dream*. In both cases, well-established principles, such as those about good parenting, law abiding and not cheating the Social Security are contradicted as if proving that nothing is either black or white but that there are many shades of grey:

All I'm doing is claiming the allowances that other old people should be claiming. (...) I expect I'll be caught one day but they won't send me to prison, will they? (...) I like to think about him and the old ladies spending his ill-gotten gains on sensual pleasures. Perhaps his extra income keeps him and his friends out of expensive geriatric institutions -who knows? It may be that he is saving the state money. (Townsend, 1989, p. 60)

Townsend's characters use the train in an instrumental way, just to take them to their destinations where they are to face personal problems which consume all their attention. Their train narratives do not follow the usual cinematographic clichés whatsoever:

I stood in the train with my head out of the window and my father stood on the platform. He kept looking at his watch. I couldn't think of anything to say and neither could he. In the end I said, 'Don't forget to feed the dog, will you?' My father gave a nasty laugh, then the train started to move so I waved and went to look for a non-smoking seat. (Townsend, 1991, p. 65)

However, the trips by train give the author the possibility to analyse and criticise not only British attitudes to the railway but also the failures of its management as representatives of the general flaws of a privatized system which does not think of "persons" but of "profit" (or the absence of it) with chaotic consequences:

The concourse at King's Cross station resembled a crowd scene of an early Russian film about the October Revolution; there was a similar sense of confusion and despair. A derailment just outside Peterborough station, combined with a computer failure at Swanwick Air Traffic control had resulted in a crush of people all wanting to travel to Edinburgh. (...) Jack looked up at the destination boards and saw that the Edinburgh train they had intended to catch had been delayed until further notice. (Townsend, 2003, p. 81)

The reactions of average citizens may sometimes reach dangerous quotes of rage:

An old woman who was sitting on her suitcase said to the prime Minister, 'I paid £130 for my ticket and I'm still sitting here after five hours, with no announcement, no assistance from the staff. In fact, no staff. At least Mussolini got the trains to run on time. What we need in this country is a dictatorship.' (Townsend, 2003, p. 82)

British, always-on-time trains are given an almost a Third World quality, with passengers practically overflowing from the carriages as depicted in *Number Ten*:

The floor of the carriage had accrued a layer of packaging materials, polystyrene cups rolled up and down the aisles like tumbleweed passing through a Wild West town. There was a smell of fast food and rancid humanity in the air. Jack would like to have strolled along the train to stretch his legs, but when he turned his head to look along the carriages he could see that he would have to step over the bodies of sleeping passengers and their baggage. (Townsend, 2003, p. 88)

Luckily for both protagonists once they change trains at Newcastle to arrive in Edinburgh, things go smoothly but still Townsend profits from the occasion to criticise New Labour policies about pensions:

The Prime Minister could not remain silent. 'Sorry, Mr Baker, but can I correct you on one or two facts? First, the Stakeholder Pension Scheme launched by the government in the last parliament is an extremely tax-efficient vehicle and available to all no matter what their income. And secondly, and perhaps more importantly, in addition, this government has done more than any other to encourage savings for the retirement with mini and maxi ISAs as well as stakeholder pensions, not to mention the rigorous overhaul of the rules governing occupational schemes.' (Townsend, 2003, p. 94)

The rest of Edward and Jack's trip has the road as the protagonist after a vain intent to taking a plane from Edinburgh:

There was an angry crowd outside the terminal at Edinburgh. the air-traffic controllers at Swanwick had walked out because as their leader had said, 'We can no longer guarantee the safety of planes flying over UK air-space. (Townsend, 2003, p. 111)

They hitchhike from the outskirts of the airport, are picked up by a ludicrous lorry driver who is transporting a "cargo" of illegal immigrants and left in the middle of nowhere on the road to Leeds after resisting the driver's sexual proposals. Eventually after walking through a derelict council estate, they manage to get a taxi whose driver will turn into a faithful companion who takes them to Leicester and finally to London, this time escorted by a car of the secret service. Of course, nothing in this tour is innocent and Townsend displays all her skills to milk the situations to the last drop in order to give us a full account of how average British citizens and especially those of the underprivileged classes live.

4.2.6.3 Travelling for pleasure

After World War II, the demand for domestic holidays experienced a recovery, especially in the form of annual, seaside, family holidays (Middleton & Lickorish, 2005) and continued to grow during the 1950s although by the mid-sixties there was a slight decline (p. 23).

However, during the 1980s, there were still some very popular holiday locations, and this popularity did not sway. Skegness, on the North sea is one of these places and, not by chance, it features in Townsend's works. Located in the district of

Lincolnshire, it has received tourists since the 1930s, and soon turning into a celebrated and visited seasonal site, particularly for a specific type of tourism.

Townsend stresses the working class character of the place and the holiday experience to be had there, either indirectly:

Only eight days to go before my holiday in Skegness begins. (...) I asked Pandora if she would like to come to Skegness. She said 'Darling, I would follow you into Hell, but I draw the line at Skegness'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 239)

or straightforwardly:

Ivan Braithwaite continues to be fascinated by what he calls 'working-class culture'. He has suggested that our family go to Skegness on what he calls a 'bucket and spade holiday'. He drivelled on about candy floss, donkeys and 'the glorious vulgarity of the amusement arcade'. (Townsend, 2008, p. 108)

But Adrian Mole is not the only famous chronicler of "the Skegness experience". Margaret Thatcher used to spend her holidays there as well:

There was, of course, no question of closing down the shop for long family holidays. We used to go to the local seaside resort, Skegness. But my father and mother had to take their holidays at different times, with my father taking a week off every year to play his favourite game, competing in the bowls tournament at Skegness. (Thatcher, 1995, p. 5)

Not all the "Skegness experiences" were as nice as Thatcher's. Adrian Mole and his family visit the town twice in the book series., Adrian travels as a teenager and later as a father of a teenager himself so as to show that, as far as family functioning and feelings are concerned, things do not really change with the passing time.

The family experiences all sorts of problems while travelling, some of them involuntarily: "The car broke down at Grantham so we didn't arrive at the Rio Grande [hotel] until 12.30" (Townsend, 1991, p. 243).⁴⁴

Working class tourists for working class lodgings. In both occasions in Skegness, the boarding houses described by Townsend distil a certain Dickensian scent:

⁴⁴The reader cannot fail but wonder whether the choice of the place for the car to break down is as innocent as it seems. Margaret Thatcher was born and raised in Grantham.

I am writing this in my basement room. It overlooks the dustbins (...) I was woken up by Mr Porke shouting, 'Only one piece of bacon per plate, Beryl. Are you trying to ruin me?'. I got dressed quickly and ran up six flights of stairs to my parents' attic room (Townsend, 1991, p. 244)

A boarding house has been booked: The Utopia. (...) Talk about a major infringement of the Trades Description Act! The Dystopia would be a more accurate title for this Draylon hell-hole. I share a draughty attic room with William and Glenn. There is no space in which to swing a dead vole, let alone a cat (Townsend, 2003, p. 108)

Teenagers are not supposed to be bored in Skegness. And some of them are not indeed: "When my mother, sister and I went on holiday together, usually to Skegness, there was always the same emphasis on being active, rather than sitting around day-dreaming" (Thatcher, 1995, p.15). Whereas others, despite the whole array of activities to be enjoyed, languish in boredom: "Eleven days to go and I have already spent all my money on the slot machines" (Townsend, 1991, p. 245), "Glenn is sulking in the attic. He has already spent all his pocket money on the slot machines in the arcade" (Townsend, 2003, p. 109).

It seems that Methodist faith aids by revelling delight even in the minimum display of activity, probably not to fall into idleness:

We would stay in a self-catering guesthouse, much better value than a hotel, and first thing in the morning I went out with the other children for PT exercises arranged in the public gardens. There was plenty to keep us occupied and, of course, there were buckets and spades and the beach. In the evening we would go to the variety shows and reviews, very innocent entertainments by today's standards, with comedians, jugglers, acrobats, "old tyme" singers (...) My parents considered that such shows were perfectly acceptable. (Thatcher, 1995, p. 15)

On the contrary, Townsend "indulges" her characters with boring activities and neglecting parents:

We bought day tickets and went to a holiday camp today. The sight of all the barbed wire and the pale listless people walking aimlessly around inside gave me a weird feeling.(...) My parents went straight to a bar, so I went on all the pathetic free rides, watched a knobby knees competition, then a tug of war, then I stood outside the bar waiting for my parents. (Townsend, 1991, p. 246)

The holiday family pattern seems not to have changed through the years. Accommodation, activities, attitudes, everything is much the same. Skegness is considered a popular location and therefore, the performance of the place must be “popular”, or more exactly working class, abiding by the rules of the alleged leisure preferences of this social stratum which, thanks to the evolution of the market economy, is entitled to spend some time out on a holiday location. However, the more things change, the more they stay the same:

The sun came out today! (...) My father has gone back to his proletarian roots. He bought a 'Kiss me Quick, Squeeze me Slowly' hat and walked along the promenade swigging out of a can of lager. (Townsend, 1991, p. 245)

The sun came out today. Ivan bought a kiss-me-quick and shag-me-slow sun hat. I saw my mother wince when he put it on, but she kept her mouth shut and feigned interest in a stick of rock shaped like a penis. (Townsend, 2003, p. 110)

During the 1960s, the pattern of British holidays changed. According to Middleton & Lickorish:

Day trips were largely domestic -the longer holiday trips increasingly turned to the attractions and modern facilities -especially the more favourable weather and new accommodation- to be found in foreign destinations, especially on the Spanish Costas and Islands. (2005, p. 23)

Due to this increasing tendency, the authorities started to give attention to tourism with fluctuating policies according to the Conservative or Labour governments in power as British citizens spent more on leisure and travelling. Middleton states that British visits abroad increased from 8.5 million in 1970 to over 30 million in 1989. With a reduction in 1991, and the figures mounted up to 41 million trips abroad in 1995 (2005, p. 30), a tendency that increased with New Labour governments and its motto of “access for all” (Middleton & Lickorish, 2005, p. xv).

Townsend's characters also embark on leisure travel abroad, particularly to Mediterranean locations such as Majorca, Greece or Cyprus. Told in first person are several episodes of *The Public Confessions of a Middle Aged Woman* and *The True Confessions of Susan Lilian Townsend* where the author recalls her “adventures” in Greece, Tobago, Barcelona, etc.

Sunny locations in Spain are a typical British tourist destination and in this sense, British mass tourism to Spanish beaches had already been hinted at in *Number Ten* with a specific reference to the exact reproduction of the British way of life in the Spanish coasts for the sake of the business:

A middle-aged woman in front of him said angrily to nobody in particular, 'I've lost a half and a million-pound export contract because of this Swanwick business!' The Prime Minister, ever mindful of the balance of payments, asked the nature of the woman's business, 'I air-freight haggis burgers to hotels in the Costa del Sol' She said. 'At least, I try to,' she added bitterly. (Townsend, 2003, p. 111)

Of special interest for Spanish readers may be the family trip to Tenerife, eventually deleted from the final version of *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*:

We turned off the coast road and began the descent into Puerto de la Cruz. A large mountain appeared from behind a skyscraper. Kelly [the guide] crackled into life. If you look to your right, you can see El Teide, the highest peak in Spain. 'Why is it white?' asked William. Kelly looked down the aisle of the bus at William and I knew that she had vowed never to have children of her own. 'That's sugar on the top, little boy,' she said in a sickly voice. 'But I bet it's not as sweet as you,' William put his fingers down his throat and made retchy noises as he has been taught to do by his mother whenever some poor shmuck makes what she calls 'a Disney moment'. (Townsend, 1999)⁴⁵

Not only in Mediterranean locations do Townsend's characters spend their holidays when abroad. Both being big fans of Dostoevsky, Adrian and Townsend's life paths lead them to Russia on several occasions. Townsend describes her experience as part of a group of visiting British writers in *The True Confessions of Susan Lilian Townsend*. Adrian travels to Russia twice: one with Pandora's father for he had been offered a trip for two to study milk distribution in Moscow, something which apparently was going to be useful for his job as an accountant at the Co-op diary (his wife did not wish to go with him). The second time Adrian goes on an organised trip which sees him to camping and canoeing down a river, to finish in Moscow, as the distracted spectator of Boris Yeltsin's rise to power. I intend to focus mainly in Adrian's first visit, included in the joint edition *Adrian Mole. From Minor to Major* under the title of *A Mole in Moscow* (1991). Townsend gives full account of these experiences unaware, of course,

⁴⁵DWL-ST/1/10/13

of some “strange” similarities between these narratives and Margaret Thatcher's first official visit to Russia.

These three travel narratives, Thatcher's, Townsend's and Adrian's, start with the description of the flight from London to Moscow:

I left Heathrow for Moscow just after midday on Saturday 28 March. I always used a special VC 10 for these flights. (...) The VC10 was not a modern aircraft and was rather noisy. But it was pleasant and had two advantages. One was that there was plenty of space for me and my staff (...) The other advantage was the RAF staff who provided us with delicious food, drink and friendly service. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 478)

Unfortunately, the trips taken by Sue Townsend and Adrian seemed to not be so comfortable nor safe as Thatcher's:

As we got onto the plane Timothy Mo remarked in a loud voice, ‘Oh, this is the plane that bits keep falling off of,’ Ungrammatical, but devastating in its effect on Alan Bennett, who is not fond of hurtling through the air in a potential metal coffin. There was a long delay; eventually Dave Platt, the pilot spoke to us. (...) Dave told us of the problems in getting the plane from the hangar; we were now stacking and would soon be off. (Townsend, 1989, p. 120)

And Adrian is not presented with what could be termed as “delicious food”:

Mr Braithwaite went pale when I told him that the pilot was a woman. Then he remembered that he was an avowed feminist and said ‘Jolly good.’ (...) The passengers concentrated on hiding or eating the garlic sausage and cream crackers they were served for lunch; but they warmed up a bit when the vodka came round. (Townsend, 1991, p. 403)

Thatcher's welcoming ceremony is marked by quite a symbolic present that she uses to display the alleged female concerns regarding her appearance: “When I landed there was an official welcoming ceremony which began at Moscow Airport where I was presented with a large bouquet of red roses which proved remarkably photogenic against my plain black coat and fox-fur hat (Thatcher, 1993, p. 478). But she was not the only one to be offered flowers: “The cars enabled us to get around easily. We visited the private market where Anne and I were each presented with a single red carnation by a handsome Georgian market trader” (Townsend, 1989, p. 125).

The image of the red carnation is used by Townsend though as a good-bye symbol in *A Mole to Moscow*: “Lara was at the airport. She gave Mr Braithwaite a single carnation. There was a lot of palm licking and sighing and talk about “their souls”” (Townsend, 1991, p. 406).

As we see Townsend transforms actual elements into literary ones which are sometimes present in various excerpts of different works:

Our hotel was one of seven *monolithic buildings* that Stalin ordered to be constructed to represent the seven points of the communist star. Our particular point of the star was called “The Ukraine”. *Massive and stolid*, it towers over the river Moskva looking like a cartoon from Gotham City. (Townsend, 1989, p. 122)

The hotel we stopped in was *monolithic* and *swarming with every nationality on earth*. (...) Having checked the room for hidden microphones, I got into bed in my underwear because my grandma had warned me that secret television cameras were behind every mirror. (Townsend, 1991, p. 404)

I am staying at the 'Ukraina' near the Moskva river. It looks like a hypodermic syringe from outside. Inside it is *full of bewildered guests of all nationalities*. (Townsend, 1994, p. 152)⁴⁶

Despite the negative image conveyed by these lines, there is something unmistakable whenever visiting Moscow; an impressive cultural life from which our protagonists also enjoy although with different results:

That evening I attended the performance of Swan Lake at the Bolshoi theatre with the Gorbachevs. We shared a box. Like all the good Russians, they were both clearly enthusiastic for the ballet. I too enjoy the ballet almost as much as the opera, so we found this in common. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 480)

We went to the Bolshoi and saw the most exquisite dying swan, performed by Ms. Larissa, the toast of Moscow; who was reputed to be rushing towards sixty years of age. Her arms vibrated like piano wires, they shimmered, then as the violin soared and swooned she sank into the floor in the final gesture -it was perfect and lovely and I shall always remember it. (Townsend, 1989, p. 128)

In the evening we were coached off to the Opera where I and most of the Russians in the audience fell asleep, and the American girl sold her Sony headset (Townsend, 1991, p. 406)

⁴⁶My emphasis.

Tony Blair also enjoyed an opera performance in Moscow, chosen with a clear second intention by President Putin. Note the familiarity used by Blair (Vladimir) in contrast with Thatcher's rigidity (the Gorbachevs) and the clash established between the use of the terms "their" and "ours":

We met at the Mariinsky Theatre to see an opera conducted by Valery Gergiev. Putin had chosen the opera carefully: *War and Peace* by Prokofiev, written as a morale booster for Russian nationalism and caricaturing Napoleon as Hitler. (...) Vladimir and I walked through the beautiful corridors of the magnificent nineteenth-century building. In a similar situation in the UK, I would have been greeting people, shaking hands, engaging and being engaged; with Vladimir I noticed people fell back as he approached, not in fear or anything; but a little in awe and with reverence. It was a tsar-like moment and I thought: Hmm, their politics really isn't like ours at all. (Blair, 2010, p. 147)

This way, Russian's cultural wealth is one of its most valuable assets and so it is "sold" to the foreign visitor but it is mainly based on a classical tradition developed mostly during the 19th century, that is, pre-revolutionary times.

Before the definitive fall of the Communism, an encounter (either brief or prolonged) with political dissidents seemed to be a "must" for every Western representative. So it was for Thatcher:

Monday began for me with a meeting of what it would be perhaps impolite but only accurate to describe as impeccably distinguished Soviet stooges. This group of tame artists, academics and scientists took up again the themes which had been prominent in the Deputy Patriarch's speech. *They knew, presumably that I was to have lunch with Dr. Sakharov and other dissidents* and wanted to extol the merits of communism first. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 480)

And so it was, indeed, for Townsend:

Our first meeting at the Soviet Writers' Union headquarters gradually took a surreal turn (...) Sakharov, the great Soviet playwright appeared, he seemed to be in a bad mood. He opened his newspaper and started to read. This was slightly disconcerting and had the effect of drawing every eye to him. I was particularly fascinated by the colour of his skin. I had seen that tint before, surely it was Max Factor panstick; natural beige? (Townsend, 1989 , p.123)

As if abiding by the rules of the stereotypical image of the Soviet Union, references to alcohol are made by Thatcher and Townsend alike:

We drank some excellent Georgian wine. I was encouraged to have another glass when Mr. Gorbachev assured me that it helped some Georgians to live to be a hundred. He was very conscious of the unpopularity of the action he had taken against alcoholism. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 480)

My first impression of the Soviet Union was that this was a place that teetered on the edge of chaos and was only held together with vodka. When Mr. Gorbachev made changes to the law governing the sale and manufacture of vodka, his government fell and Yeltsin, a notorious drunk, took over. (Townsend, 2002, p. 338)

One way or another, Townsend's and Thatcher's accounts of these trips do fit to the image that the term "Soviet Union" conveys, formed of different elements that immediately come to our minds when we read or listen to that name: massive official buildings, classical cultural dominance based on soviet discipline, dissidence and alcohol. In this sense, and despite the warm feelings she displays towards Gorbachev ("a man to do business with", Thatcher, 1993, p. 450.) the perception of the Soviet Union is quite negative on the part of Thatcher:

That afternoon it had been arranged, at my suggestion, that I should do a 'walkabout' of the sort which comes so easily to Western politicians (...) As I walked around a large housing estate in a bleak suburb in Moscow in the slushy snow and bitter wind, more and more people gathered to meet me. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 479)

Townsend's perception is not so biased by political feelings and appears to be closer to the average citizen, either Russian or British. Ideology is swept away by the urgency to cover the everyday needs at whatever cost as we see in these extracts from *The Queen and I* and *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years*:

She fumbled in her purse for a fifty-pence coin. Should she have the fire on now, in the afternoon or tonight, while she watched television?. It was a decision she made everyday except in summer (...) She dressed slowly in many layers. (...) fortified against the cold, went into the kitchen to make her breakfast. She counted the slices of bread: five, and the remaining eggs: three. A bit of marge, but only enough to anoint a baby's head. She shook the bowl of cornflakes. Half a bowl and two days to go to pension day. (Townsend, 1992, p. 78)

When I returned to my room, I found a hefty young Russian woman sitting on a hair outside the door. She was wearing a low-cut brown lamé minidress. She said, 'Ah Mr. Mole, I am Lara. I come to

your room to sleep, of course.’ I said, ‘Is this part of the In tourist programme?’ Lara said, ‘No, I am, of course, in love with you.’ She followed me into my room and went to the bunch of bananas on the bedside table. She looked down at them with lust in her eyes and I understood. It wasn’t me what she wanted: it was the bananas. I gave her two. She went away. (Townsend, 1993, p. 154)

Finally, Townsend places his characters right in the whirlwind of historical facts so as to let them give a full account of what is happening although, on some occasions, reading through Adrian Mole’s shortsighted eyes, we must guess what lies behind the lines of his diary. The demise of the Soviet Union is no exception:

When we got to the [Red] Square, it became obvious that something was happening, a protest march or a demonstration of some kind was taking place. (...) The crowd parted and the rumbling grew nearer and the tracks of a Russian army tank clanked past and inch away from my right shoe. The tank stopped, a young man clambered aboard and began to wave a flag. It was the hammer and sickle flag I’d been used to seeing everywhere. The crowd roared its approval. What was happening? Had Moscow Dynamo won at football? No, something more important was taking place. A young woman who wore too much blue eyeshadow said to me, “Englishman, today you have witnessed the end of communism.”

“I nearly got run over by a tank,” I said.

“A proud death,” she said. (Townsend, 1994, p. 154)

4.3 Identity

In the previous section, I have tried to analyse the ways in which Sue Townsend’s characters perform the spaces they inhabit and how these settings impose upon them. In addition, there are further analytical categories susceptible of being applied here, categories such as class, gender, age or race which are both individually constituted and socially constructed. I have attempted a study on how Townsend depicts these categories focusing only on the main aspects to be found in the works under consideration in this research, for instance, her perception of class, clearly working-class centered, her treatment of age, highly generational, etc., and, the other way round, how these categories influence the characters’ everyday in the historical period they are depicted.

4.3.1 Class

Traditionally, analytical models of social reality have tried to describe the large social groups into which the members of -mainly- Western societies were divided. From feudal times and the tripartite social division (see, for instance Duby, 1981) to the Industrial Revolution, and the Marxist theories on class struggle, and, nowadays, the current social surveys to refine and redefine the concept of class, social schemes have proved an interesting tool in order to determine the conceptual vision of a society that its members have.

After Cannadine (2000), Kirk (2007) refers to the obsession of Britain with class and the diversity of trajectories this obsession has taken along history: “From Marx to Margaret Thatcher, the subject of class -usually in the shape of working class- has rested like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (Kirk, 2007, p. 1). Scholars are part of those “living”, for whom class has turned into a major issue and this way, several models of social class analysis have been designed.

The model used up to the 1980s established a six-class scheme, later turned into a seven-class one which defined class according to an individual’s employment position (Savage et al., 2013).⁴⁷ In 2011, scholars from British, French and Norwegian Universities, and members of the London School of Economics designed a new social class scheme which included the three Bordieuan categories of capital; economic, cultural and social:

We analyse the largest survey of social class ever conducted in the UK, the BBC’s Great British Class Survey (GBCS), a web survey with the unusually high number of 161,400 respondents, complemented by a parallel national representative survey. Using these two surveys in tandem allows us to provide unusual detail on the link between class and specific occupational, educational and geographical profiles which offer unparalleled insights into the organisation of class inequality in 2011–12. (Savage et al., 2013 , p. 3)

The researchers conclude that, despite the traditional class division, mainly represented by the presence of working class as such, still exists, other class limits have been blurred resulting in a clear fragmentation of the British social reality.⁴⁸

In Britain, the so-called “Age of Affluence” after World War II brought about the perception that, along with the development of the welfare state, class struggle

⁴⁷Further studies such as Wright’s (1997, explained in Oesch, 2006, p.14-15) designed a 12-fold class scheme. However, it seems that the 7-fold class one was widely accepted.

⁴⁸The classes defined in *The Great Britain Class Survey* scheme were elite, established middle class, technical middle class, new affluent workers, traditional working class, emergent service workers and precariat. (Savage et al., 2013)

was a thing of the past and that a sort of class levelling was taking place, specifically from the bottom of the social ladder upwards. The consumerist society was causing the “workers to be moving inexorably towards the status of their middle-class counterparts and in the process inevitably erasing class divisions all together” (Kirk, 2007, p. 1).

Got *The Condition of the Working Class in England* by Frederick Engels out of the library (...) Started reading Fred Engels’ book tonight. My father saw me reading it and said, ‘I don’t want that Commie rubbish in my house.’ I said, ‘It’s about the class you came from yourself.’ My father said, ‘I have worked and slaved and fought to join the middle classes, Adrian and now I’m here I don’t want my son admiring proles and revolutionaries.’ He is deluding himself if he thinks he has joined the middle classes. He still puts HP sauce on his toast. (Townsend, 1991, p. 209)

Townsend links this class divisions and the aspirations to overcome them to material symbols of the most prosaic character, in a sort of “Bourdieuian” turn: “Tania got up to pour boiling water into the cafetière. I saw my father watching in admiration as she pushed down the plunger. He has always wanted to join the middle classes” (Townsend, 1999, p. 181).

However, this process of class merging was decelerated during Margaret Thatcher’s tenures, when the economic base of the country experienced important changes moving from industrial and manufacturing production to services, with the subsequent losses of jobs in those traditional industries (steel, coal, textile):

Arthur Marwick has shown how conventional images of class have persisted in surveys of public opinion. Referring to data from 1945 through to 1984, he demonstrates that the distinction between the ‘middle’ and ‘working’ classes remained constant in the popular imagination, with the term ‘upper class’ remaining in view, but with a dwindling relevance. (Head, 2002, p. 49)

This, in turn, made the discourses on class struggle and the destruction of the working class reinvigorate: “You will look back at this struggle – you will look back with pride in your eyes at what you have done” (Scargill, n.d.).⁴⁹

Yet these are the very dangers which we face in Britain today. At one end of the spectrum are the terrorist gangs within our borders, and the terrorist states which finance and arm them. At the other are the

⁴⁹Arthur Scargill, NUM leader at the time of the miners strike.

hard Left operating inside our system,⁵⁰ conspiring to use union power and the apparatus of local government to break, defy and subvert the laws. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 371)

In relation to these words and the opposite discourses they represent, it seems interesting to study the social narratives in which they are inserted. In this sense, Steinmetz (1992) explores the role of social narratives, precisely, as constitutive elements in the formation of the working class. Social narratives coordinate the individual with the collective, providing a selection of events which are included or deleted from the social narrative according to their relevance to class:⁵¹ Successful class formation entails a whole array of such narrative discourses, operating at various levels and accounting for the different sorts of events that may be encountered; it also requires specific interrelationships or super-and subordination among these narratives. (Steinmetz, 1992, p. 505)⁵²

As we are referring to social narratives, it seems necessary to consider the relationship between these operating in the construction of working class and literature as the narrative field par excellence. What is the contribution of literature to these working class narratives? Some examples come to my mind as I am typing these words; from Zola's *Fecundity* and *Germinal*, to Osborne's *Looking Back in Anger*. However, there are other literary works that have done their bit in the construction, maintenance or contestation of the working class narrative although they may have not been conceived for that purpose. It is the case of Sue Townsend's works:

I use the term [working class] easily and unselfconsciously, although I am aware that in 1989, the very words 'working class' are buried in

⁵⁰The famous "enemy within". Cfr. Jenkinson, Metcalf & Harvey, 2014 p. 136

⁵¹See, for instance, the symbolism of the battle of Orgreave and the figures of the Tolpuddle martyrs in British working class history. (Jenkinson, Metcalf & Harvey, 2014)

⁵²All this is related with narratology issues which, although conceived around narrative texts per se, can easily be applied to social narratives: Ideally, the characteristics of narrative text should be as follows:

1 Two types of 'speakers' are to be found in a narrative text; one does not play a role in the fabula whereas the other does. This difference exists even when the narrator and the actor are one and the same person as, for example, in a narrative related in the first person. The narrator is the same person, but at another moment and in another situation than when s/he originally experienced the events.

2 It is possible to distinguish three layers in a narrative text: the text, the story, and the fabula. Each of these layers is describable.

3. That with which the narrative text is concerned, the 'contents' it conveys to its readers, is a series of connected events caused or experienced by actors presented in a specific manner. (Bal, 2009, p. 9)

a mine-field over which we all have to tiptoe so very carefully. (...) the more I travel and read about history and the roots of what we call civilisation, the prouder I become of this huge international class. (Townsend, 1989, p. 4)

As Steinmetz poses “real experiences or events (...) are narratively promiscuous” (1992, p. 505) and Sue Townsend acknowledges without reservations her belonging to the working class: “my own background is working class” (Townsend, 1989, p. 4) which provides her stories with a series of actual episodes that she transforms into literary matter and, logically, mediate her vision of class. This vision mainly relays on the traditional and more positive working class values.

The members of the working class (she uses the plural -working classes- as well) are the ones responsible for the creation of wealth for others:

I know that they were the builders of the cathedrals, the carvers of the furniture, the seamstress of the gorgeous clothes in the family portraits. They grew the hothouse flowers, they wove the carpets, bound the books in the libraries and gilded the ceilings. They also built the roads, the railways, the bridges and the viaducts. (Townsend, 1989, p. 4)

But ultimately, they were also the ones perpetuating of the social division between them and a privileged minority: “There has never been a class-based revolution in England of any lasting significance. When the nearest thing to social revolution came it was in the guise of a series of recommendations” (Townsend, 1989, p. 4).

Townsend’s depiction of working class conditions is full of Dickensian images ranging from the 19th century to pre-war times, with special recurrence of the topic of “us” versus “them”:

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century they [the members of the working classes] lived lives of unrelenting daily grind. They lived in dark insanitary houses. Their food was tainted, their general health was appalling and the premature death of children and adults was commonplace. Yet these men and women continued to produce vast amounts of wealth for others and enabled this privileged minority to the live lives of secure luxury. (Townsend, 1989, p. 4)

In addition, she reflects in her works the most traditional working class values tinged with some strokes of Victorian morality:

- Conventional family structure: In *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, Adrian exhibits the traditional mentality of the working class conception of the familiar sphere; father as breadwinner, mother as wife and child bearer, taking care of the house, and children:

My mother has got an interview for a job. She is practising her typing and not doing any cooking. so what will it be like if she gets the job? My father should put his foot down before we are a broken home. (Townsend, 1991, p. 23)

- Dignifying power of work:

The Queen said, 'Was it horribly hard work?' 'Yes, horribly,' said William. He held out his hands to show the Queen. They were now cut and calloused, but the Queen could see that he was proud of having completed a week of manual work. She said nothing to him, but she was proud of the boy. (Townsend, 2006, p. 10)

- Community values and mutual support:

Together, she [the Queen] and Violet washed and undressed Marilyn, put her in one of the Queen's own nightgowns covered the sofa in white linen and prepared for he baby's arrival (...) 'We'll 'ave to clean this shit 'ole up when Marilyn's bin took to the 'ospital. Poor cow shoulda said. We'd'a' 'elped'er out. Done her washin' got stuff in for the baby, cleaned up.' (Townsend, 1992, p. 121)

However, Townsend devotes most of her references on working class issues to the main constitutive element of this social group's life, that is, work, and especially to the lack of it; unemployment. She deals with unemployment as the most important consequence of Thatcher's politics with decisive implications at both individual and collective levels, what discredits the alleged benefits of the changes decreed by Thatcher's governments:

In the price-theorists' ideal world, these changes would reduce market rigidities, increase mobility, and rise incentives. In the price-theorists' ideal world, they would create the micro- institutional base for a more effective market economy with higher productivity, lower unemployment, improved living standards, and possibly a higher permanent rate of economic growth as well. (Blanchflower & Freeman, 1993, p. 1)

Unemployment is one of the issues that collides with the traditional family scheme and contributes to the dissolution of the classical gendered divisions of family roles, for wives must abandon their usual function of home-makers to work outside home as men are unemployed: “My mother is looking for a job! Now I could end up a delinquent roaming the streets and all that” (Townsend, 1991, p. 21).

However, there is no role shifting in those cases as women may find a job but men do not usually fulfill the chores with the same dedication as their wives:

[After Adrian’s mother eloped with Mr. Lucas with Adrian’s father redundant, the situation at home is not ideal] My grandma has just made a surprise visit. She caught us huddled round our new Camping-gaz stove eating cold beans out of a tin. (...) She has forced us to go to her house so I am there now sleeping in my dead grandad’s bed. (Townsend, 1991 , p.74)

Things can be particularly hard if both parents are unemployed: “My parents are victims of Thatcherism so neither of them is working, which means they are able to hang about and linger over their breakfasts” (Townsend, 1991, p. 412).⁵³

However, Townsend deals mainly with the negative consequences, at all levels, of being unemployed. Not only in terms of macro economy or global figures:

Wrote a political poem. I am going to send it to *The New Statesman*
 (...)
 Mrs. Thatcher by A. Mole
 Do you weep, Mrs. Thacher, do you weep?
 Do you wake, Mrs. Thacher, in your sleep (...)
 Do you wake with 'Three million' on your brain?
 Are you sorry that they'll never work again? (Townsend, 1991, p. 284)

But especially at an individual and family level. According to McKee-Ryan et al. (2005), people use a repertoire of aids when a stressful situation, such as being unemployed, appears, namely a series of mechanisms that operate at different

⁵³Please, do not fail to note the deeply conservative, “Thatcher-like” remark by Adrian when suggesting both his parents live on welfare and, therefore, there is no need to hurry when looking for a job:

And yet the collectivist ethos has made individuals excessively prone to rely on the State to provide for the well-being of their neighbours and indeed of themselves. There cannot be a welfare system in any satisfactory sense which tends, in this way, to break down personal responsibility and the sense of responsibility to family, neighbourhood and community. (Thatcher, 1979b)

levels. Townsend explicitly describes her characters' inability to develop them at both personal and financial level:

These personal mechanisms are related to "individuals' self perception of worth" (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005, p. 57). In this sense, unemployment provokes low doses of self-esteem and a self-perception of one's own worthlessness:

Mrs. Kent was very pleased with our haul: she said, 'It's a crying shame what folks chuck away!' Mr. Kent lost his job two months ago, when the diary closed down. He looked a bit ashamed when we brought the new furniture in. I heard him say to his wife, 'For better or worse, eh, Ida.' (Townsend, 1991, p. 333)

Particularly in the case of unemployed men, self-esteem is connected with manhood and the traditional figure of the man as the breadwinner. When there is no possibility of doing so, self-esteem collapses and so does manhood and its performance through sex:⁵⁴

'Where is he, (Adrian's father) by the way?' I asked.
'Upstairs in bed. He's got clinical depression,' my mother said, unsympathetically.
'What brought it on?' I asked, as we climbed the stairs (...) She lowered her voice on the landing. 'One, he knows the won't work again, not in a proper full-time job. (...) Three, he's been impotent for three months.' (...) I looked around the room and realized that my mother's mad clutter (...) was missing. (...) They were obviously sleeping apart. (Townsend, 1999, p. 19)

In these situations, the emotional stability of the unemployed person is in danger:

She ordered Pandora and Pandora's father out of the car, then she said that it was about time my father pulled himself together. She said she knew my father felt humiliated, alienated and bitter because he was unemployed, but that he was setting a bad example to an impressionable adolescent. (Townsend, 1991, p. 124)

Particularly when the official discourse turns around the theme of fighting idleness:

⁵⁴See the connection with the sexual problems of the character played by Mark Addy in the excellent film *Full Monty* (1998).

Happiness is not doing nothing! Happiness is doing something and happiness in an adult consists of having a very full day, being absolutely exhausted at the end of it, but knowing that you have had a very full day. (Thatcher, 1987)⁵⁵

On the other hand, “financial resources refer to the extent to which an individual has access to adequate household income, cash reserves or savings”. (McKee-Ryan, 2005, p. 57). For the majority of the working class, particularly after the full development of the welfare state, the availability of these resources and the possibility of living with dignity when unemployed is directly linked with the government subsidies:

My father got a letter that made his face go white: he has been made redundant from his job!. He will be on the dole! How can we live on the pittance that the government will give us? (...) I am now a single-parent child whose father is on the dole!. Social Security will be buying my shoes!. (Townsend, 1991, p.79)

Little by little, the unemployed individual, who should allegedly support his family, slides into a steep economic downhill when pretending to continue carrying a “normal life”:

My father has had his credit cards taken off him! Barclays, Nat West and American Express have got fed up with his reckless spending. He has only got a few quids’ redundancy money left in his sock drawer. (Townsend, 1991, p. 161)

Thus becoming a member of a new underclass within the very same working class: “Had egg and chips and peas for Sunday dinner! No pudding! Not even a proper serviette. My mother says we are *the nouveau poor*” (Townsend, 1991, p.167):

Brainbox Henderson has started a youth club poetry magazine. I have submitted some of my Juvenilia plus a more recent mature poem called:

Ode to Engels or Hymn to the Modern Poor

Engels, you catalogued the misfortunes of the poor in days of yore,
Little thinking that the poor would still be with us in nearly 1984.
(Townsend, 1991, p. 235)

⁵⁵Please, note the underlying Methodist philosophy of Thatcher’s remark.

All this led to situations difficult to cope, not only by the so-called “traditional working class”⁵⁶ but also by those who, previously, had already been on the verge of becoming part of the precariat:

Mr Kent had been out into the community and found a large branch, painted it with white gloss paint and stuck it into the empty paint tin. This branch effectively took the place of a Christmas tree in my opinion, but Mrs. Kent said, sadly, ‘But it’s not the same really, not if the only reason you’ve got it is because you can’t afford to have a real plastic one.’ (...) I didn’t like to ask any more questions and politely declined the mince pies they offered....from where I was sitting I could see into their empty pantry. (Townsend, 1991, p. 380)

Trying to escape from desperate situations, individuals searched to abide by the official policies which urged the jobless to depend on their own means:

During the post-war period, citizenship implied civil and social rights independent of income; citizens of the state, however poor, could expect equal treatment from it. Neoliberalism proclaimed that these rights no longer existed. The poor would have to fend for themselves in a ‘free’ labour market rather than rely on the state. They should not rely on the state as a provider since the state could not solve their problems but was actually a cause of poverty. (Gough, Eisenschitz & McCulloch, 2006, p. 24)

For doing so, they were given explicit examples:

Norman Tebbit, Secretary of State for Employment between 1981 and 1983, had tried to do this in a speech in which he at once refuted the causal connection between unemployment and rioting and implied that if the unemployed had more determination, they might find other work. In a speech to the Conservative’s annual conference on 15 October 1981, Tebbit said that when his father had lost his job in the 1930s ‘he didn’t riot. He got on his bike and looked for work. And he kept looking till he found it.’ (Hayes in Davis, M. T., 2005, p. 258)

These words were considered as a sort of mockery of the working class by some Labour members and the unions, and Townsend does not miss the opportunity to ridicule the famous speech herself:

Walking to school I was almost knocked down by a horrid working-class man on a bicycle. I castigated him severely. He feebly explained

⁵⁶See Savage et al., 2013.

that he had momentarily lost concentration due to tiredness after cycling 60 miles looking for work. I pointed out that he had absolutely no excuse for not keeping to the straight and narrow path and took his name. He claimed it was Tebbit, but I have my doubts. (Townsend, 1989, p. 148).

Those examples were admired even by the highest Labour representatives:

But none of that defined the principal impact on my political development. What Dad taught me above all else, and did so utterly unconsciously, was why people like him became Tories. He had been poor. He was working class. He aspired to be middle class. He worked hard, made it on his merits, and wanted his children to do even better than him. (Blair, 2010, p. 10)

However, not all the former workers were able to get their bikes and look for a job as they were not skilled enough for new professions in the process of shifting economy the country was experiencing. Miners were not required any more and those with a trajectory in the service sector, trading, etc. were preferred:

My father is going to start his own business making spice-racks. He has spent the last of his redundancy money on buying pine and glue. Our spare bedroom has been turned into a workshop. Sawdust is all over the house. (...) I am very proud of my father. He is now a company director and I am now a company director's son!. (Townsend, 1991, p. 162)

In addition, these new entrepreneurs had to face further difficulties when trying to cope with the economic obligations derived from their activities: "Today Courtney [the postman] brought a letter from the Customs and Excise Department. It asked my father (in very curt terms) why he hadn't registered his spice rack business for V.A.T" (Townsend, 1991, p. 220).⁵⁷

It is undeniable that the the figures of unemployment were decreasing from 1987, (Jackson & Saunders, 2012) due to a readjustment of British society to new economic modes which gave prevalence to the fact of *being employed* over the quality of the employment per se with the subsequent benefit for employers:

Mrs. Bellingham has offered me a job selling security devices. It is evening work. I have to call on nervous householders after dark and

⁵⁷The letter is arriving one year after the spice-rack business was set up. However, the results were negative and the number of spice-racks built by George Mole amounted to two. Note the stress on the inconsistency of the Government claim.

put the fear of God into them until they sing up for a burglar alarm or security lights. I said I would think about it. Mrs. Bellingham said in her careful voice, ‘There are three million unemployed. Why do you need to think about it?’ I said I hoped that beggars could still be choosers. She is offering me £3,14 an hour. (Townsend, 1994, p. 183)

Therefore, the perception on the part of the public of the alleged recovery was not such:

At last! The economic recovery is on its way! The Confederation of British Industry has reported that they expect outputs and exports to increase in the years ahead. According to the C.B.I. manufacturers are expecting huge new orders. I broke this good news to my mother. She said, ‘Yes, and the dog is getting married on Saturday and I’m it Matron of Honour.’ (Townsend, 1994, p. 184).

Thus, unemployment continued being one of the main points of the New Labour programme for the 1997 elections, especially as far as the welfare benefits for unemployed was concerned. New Labour’s Manifesto insisted on the necessity to reduce figures, the dependence on welfare and, especially, the social consequences of unemployment; the expansion of the “nouveau poor” and their separation from the rest of the society, contributing thus to widen the gap between social groups:

We will get the unemployed from welfare to work Stop the growth of the ‘underclass’ in Britain. (...) There is a wider gap between rich and poor than for generations (...) we are determined not to continue down the road of a permanent have-not class unemployed and disaffected from society. (Labour Party, 1997)

But the recovery of employment did not follow exactly the lines traced by Labour’s Manifesto by “helping people into jobs- real jobs” as the quality of these jobs did not improve and the new stakeholder economy did not result in a perceived recovery:

‘My brother shouldn’t be marrying this woman (...) She is only marrying him for his money, he is a subcontractor.’
‘What in?,’ asked the Prime Minister.
‘In anything at all,’ laughed Mike ‘He doesn’t have to do any work because he subcontracts the work out to another subcontractor, and he subcontracts the work out to another subcontractor- do you get it? (Townsend, 2003, p. 84)

Nevertheless, Labour governments tried to tackle with unemployment by devising a series of measures gathered in the so-called *New Deal*,⁵⁸ designed by Gordon Brown while in charge of the Exchequers. However, the initiative (which was developed through specific programmes) did not obtain the desired benefits:

There were also a series of New Deal programmes for specific groups, covering young people, the long-term unemployed aged twenty-five plus, and disabled people (compulsory for the first two groups, voluntary for the latter); these appear to have had positive though limited impacts. (Stewart in Seldon Ed., 2007, p. 422)

And so it was felt:

Job Centre New Deal appointment, 10.15. Catherine Root is my personal job adviser. She is personable enough, though somebody should tell her that it is possible to cure a squint these days.⁵⁹(...) ‘Do you have a degree?’ She enquired, almost looking me in the eye. ‘No,’ I admitted, ‘but I did once share a flat in Oxford (...) I am now employed as a turkey plucker’. (Townsend, 2008, p. 11)

British working classes, who had suffered the steady rising of unemployment, who had lived the re-enactment of class conflict by fighting their own government, who were seeing their new hopes arisen by new blood arriving at 10, Downing Street deluded, were also fashioning their lives according to the 21st. century new assumptions based on part-time jobs and low wages. Townsend’s disillusion is noticeable, a general scenario not so cool for *cool Britannia*.

4.3.2 Gender

With the advent of Postmodernism, gender and sexual identity have been the object of much scholarly research in order to describe how they operate in the process of identity formation. Studies on gender carried out by a variety of practitioners have become an essential component of literary critique which would be impossible to conceive nowadays without the contribution of these authors, most of them women, followers of the different trends and waves of feminism.

⁵⁸Note the connotations of the term which conveys the terrible images of the American Great Depression and the resolute measures taken by Franklyn D. Roosevelt.

⁵⁹One may wonder whether Townsend is leading the reader to consider the lack of global vision of Blair’s government via this funny remark.

Gender studies, or more precisely Women's studies,⁶⁰ have benefited from a growing importance since World War II when the convictions around gender were increasingly questioned both in theoretical and literary realms. According to Head, the sixties illustrate how those "feminist impulses that were soon to be consolidated" (2002, p. 92) opened the path for the activism of the second-wave feminism of the 1970s. The subsequent evolution of the feminist movement and its critical and literary production has been the object of much controversy regarding both the designation terminology and the diversity of aims. Post-feminism and the influence of media constructions of feminism, and the so-called third-wave Feminism and the recognition of other female realities, apart from the white, anglosaxon, First World one, represents the new paths into which the feminist movement has drifted.

4.3.2.1 Townsend and Gender

All these modes regarding the considerations of gender and sexuality are to be found in literature and can be identified in Townsend's works, together with those female fiction characters who respond to the different trends of feminism in a multifaceted way to construct their gendered selves, in contraposition to the almost monolithical set of masculinities displayed around them. This way, gender turns into a core issue for Townsend as it is explicitly shown in *Rebuilding Coventry*, *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year* or her plays *Womberang* and *The Great Celestial Cow*. However, as I said in the introductory chapter, this research has deliberately sought not to focus on the topic of gender in her whole production but only in the ways in which Townsend deals with it in those works more directly related to the socio-historical development of the time span under consideration.⁶¹

Despite this apparent limitation, Townsend deals with gender and particularly everything referring to women and their evolution in British society from the 1980s in such a rich way that the number of novels studied, although not including specifically those in which gender is the core issue, offer a wide array of possibilities to study it. These are mainly focused on the different female models and women's personal and collective evolution which Townsend articulates around two main narratives dealing with both the different ways of contesting the traditional gender roles and the use of femininity to play the role of contestation.

⁶⁰Studies on masculinities either "through the prism of feminist theory or (in order) to write feminist theory using masculinities as an analytic dimension" (Kegan in Kegan Ed., 2002, p.x) must not be forgotten.

⁶¹Cfr. introductory chapter.

- **Women contesting the traditional gender roles**

Starting from a feminist standpoint herself, as acknowledged by those scholars who studied her theatrical production,⁶² Townsend describes a remarkable contestation to the traditional assumptions about women on the part of Pauline Mole, one of the main characters in the series of *The Adrian Mole Diaries* which despite turning around a male figure, is full of iconic females. Pauline's awakening to feminism takes place in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, to her husband and son's dismay, and it acquires different and very interesting dimensions which, in turn, correspond to the multiple components of the feminist ideas of the time. Let us not forget that this period is Margaret Thatcher's time with the well-known implications of her presence for both the feminist movement and the issues related to gender.

The character of Pauline Mole represents the full assimilation of the postulates of the so-called second-wave Feminism in Britain. The context in which it developed in Britain was different from other countries' as, at first –like the 1960s- it was not identified with “an organisation of professional women, but with the industrial militancy of working-class women (...) The biggest impetus came from women active in radical left-wing politics” (Thornham, 2006, p. 26). This instilled a Marxist socialist ideology in the effective management of the Women's Liberation Movement, the organisation which, in practice, articulated the proposals, feelings and sensibilities of the new realities the feminist movement was facing. The first Women's Liberation Movement conference took place in Ruskin College, Oxford, in February 1970. The attending women's demands were summarised in four key issues: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, and free 24 hr. nurseries. Later, in 1975, those were extended to financial and legal independence, end to all discrimination against lesbians, and a woman's right to define her own sexuality. In 1978 a final demand was added to the previous ones with specific reference to patriarchal domination of women by force, the claim for freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status and an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.⁶³

Several feminist authors have given shape to these demands through the development of a new feminist critique epitomized, among others, by Germaine Greer and

⁶²See, for example, Banham, 2000.

⁶³See the blogs Mackay, 2011 and British Library's web page about *Sisterhood and After Project* web page.

her book *The Female Eunuch*, which Townsend turns into the spark of Pauline Mole's feminist explosion:

My mother is reading *The Female Eunuch*, by Germaine Greer. My mother says it is the sort of book that changes your life. It hasn't changed mine, but I only glanced through it. It is full of dirty words. (Townsend, 1991, p. 28)

This new gender consciousness is performed by Pauline through diverse acts, each of them implying a direct conflict with the traditional condition of women as both sexual objects whose sexuality is, in turn, subjected, and mothers and housewives; the pillars of the family. Pauline reacts to this philosophy and takes a step forward which impulses her towards feminist and political activism and which, eventually, would provoke the negative reaction of "the men of the house":

My mother has gone to a woman's workshop on assertiveness training. Men are not allowed. I asked my father what "assertiveness training" is. He said 'God knows, but whatever it is, it's bad news for me.' (Townsend, 1991, p. 42)

Following the feminist idea of the female body as a locus of patriarchal domination of women, and as a reaction to that, Pauline decides to fashion her image in a radical way, according to Adrian's standards, as this new style does not fit with the traditional image of a mother:

My mother has bought some of those overalls that painters and decorators wear. You can see her knickers through them. I hope she doesn't wear them in the street. She is having her ears pierced tomorrow. (Townsend, 1991, p. 28)

My mother has had all her hair cut off. She looks like one of Auntie Susan's inmates. She doesn't look a bit maternal any more. (Townsend, 1991, p. 173)

In contrast with this new image of his mother, Adrian prefers the usual female image displayed wherever and favoured by media (Thornham, 2007):

Pandora has got hair quite the colour of treacle, and it's long like girl's hair should be. She has got quite a good figure. (Townsend, 1991, p. 19)

It was quite a shock to see Doreen Slater for the first time. Why my father wanted to have carnal knowledge of her I can't imagine. She is as thin as a stick insect. She has got no bust and no bum (...) She would be quite nice if she were a bit fatter. (Townsend, 1991, p. 79)

And so does Adrian's father who directly links the loss of sexual appeal by his wife to the feminist ideology she has embraced:

My mother and father were having a discussion about feminism in the car on the way to Sainsbury's this evening. My father said that since my mother's consciousness had been raised he had noticed that she had lost two inches round her bust. My mother said angrily 'What have my breasts got to do with anything?' There was a silence then she said, 'But don't you think I have grown as a person, George?' My father said, 'On the contrary, Pauline, you are much smaller since you stopped wearing high heels.' (Townsend, 1991, p. 203)

Too overtly for his son's taste, Pauline decides to live her sexuality freely as her husband does not satisfy her any more, fighting the moral that imposes a double standard when regulating heterosexuality, which implies that women's sexuality is much more supervised than men's. Pauline has an affair with her neighbour, Mr. Lucas in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, which will have consequences the reader will discover in *Adrian Mole, the Prostrate Years*, as it seems that Rosie, Adrian's sister is Lucas's daughter:

Mr Lucas from next door has been in to see my mother and father who are still in bed. He brought a 'get well' card and some flowers for my mother. My mother sat up in bed in a nightie that showed a lot of her chest. She talked to Mr Lucas in a yukky voice. My father pretended to be asleep. (Townsend, 1991, p. 16)

Throughout *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series, Pauline has other sexual affairs with Martin Muffet, a young engineering student who has rented Adrian's former bedroom at home and whom she also marries and later divorces:

My father has just telephoned the office to say that he thinks my mother is having an affair with the lodger, Martin Muffet. I asked him what evidence he had for his suspicions? I found your mother in Martin Muffet's bed this morning. (Townsend, 1991, p. 448)

And with Ivan Braithwaite, Pandora's father:

As soon as we got inside the hall, Ivan Braithwaite rushed up to my mother and said, 'Yes Pauline, those shoes are perfect!' What is it with the man? Is he a shoe fetishist? My mother pointed the toe of her vulgar red stiletto and Ivan practically ejaculated on the spot. (Townsend, 1999, p 52)

From the moment she starts to develop her assertiveness, Pauline feels empowered enough to live her love -and sex- life freely: “I said, ‘Has he seen you without make-up yet?’ She shouted, ‘Yes, he has and he worships every wrinkle, bag and line!. He loves me to bits” (Townsend, 1999, p. 186). Eventually, she turns back to George Mole again but she will never abandon her feminist postulates.

Mothers are traditionally considered the nuclear element of families, the ones who possess the ability to create heterosexual family homes, as seen in the previous section, which turns them into the foundations upon which societies are built. Family is one of the core ideas of the ideological construction of Thatcherism which turned it into the driving force of society (Nunn, 2002). This insistence on the nuclear family and the stereotyped roles women play in it is clearly symbolised in Townsend’s works by Adrian Mole’s vision of what a mother should be:

The spot on my chin is getting bigger. It’s my mothers fault for not knowing about vitamins (...) My father has got the flu, I am not surprised with the diet we get. (...) It’s a miracle we don’t get scurvy. (Townsend, 1991, p. 14)

I showed it to my mother [a poem he had written], but she laughed. She isn’t very bright. She s till hasn’t washed my PE shorts, and it’s school tomorrow. She is not like the mothers on television. (Townsend, 1991, p. 18)

O’Reilly (2010) analyses the characteristics of “intensive mothering” as one of the poles of the gender dichotomy feminine/nurturer and masculine/producer, and establishes the prevalence of some interconnected themes, among them, the idea that women are natural mothers. This idea is socially assimilated to such an extent that the facts of denying it, even after a traditional marriage, and considering something else more important than it is almost sacrilege:

Pandora and I had a frank talk about our relationship tonight. She doesn’t want to marry me in two year’s time! Naturally I am devastated by this blow. I told her I wouldn’t mind her having a little job in a cake shop or something after our wedding, but she said she intended to go to university and that the only time she would enter a cake shop would be to buy a large crusty. (Townsend, 1991, p. 134)

In addition, things get worse, as we have seen, when Pauline, somehow forced by the circumstances of George’s redundancy, starts looking for a job, which is going to have a key influence on her role as a mother and housewife:

It's lousy having a working mother. She rushes in with big bags of shopping, cooks the tea then rushes around tarting herself up. But she is still not doing any tidying up (...) There has been a slice of bacon between the cooker and The fridge for three days to my knowledge. (Townsend, 1991, p. 29)

Due to changes in the labour market together with important social and cultural transformations the female labour force had been increasing steadily since the 1950s, according to *The 20th Report on British Social Attitudes*, this was:

Changes in women's employment patterns are the outcome of a complex set of factors including technological advances (such as efficient contraception), changes in legislation (such as the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts, from 1976 onwards), and (...) rising levels of education and qualifications amongst women. These 'material' factors are closely intertwined with normative changes – both in women's aspirations and in the attitudes to gender roles and gender relations which *have been associated with second-wave feminism*.⁶⁴ In parallel with these social and cultural transformations, the changes in labour markets and the structure of employment – the relative decline of manufacturing jobs, the growth of service employment – have led to a substantial increase in the numbers and proportion of jobs conventionally carried out by women. (Crompton in Park et al. Eds., 2003, p. 161)

These changes should have been accompanied by a parallel one in the social consideration of the working woman, but this would not happen until the end of the 1980s (Crompton in Park et al. Eds., 2003, p. 167) probably due to the pervasiveness of the Thatcherite insistence on the traditional models despite the social and economic conditions that favoured the development of new ones:

He shook his head sadly. 'Where did we go wrong, Adrian? We let them go to work, we let them be bloody vicars, they drive cars, here's one who's a captain in the navy, we bought them machines to make it easier to do their housework, but they still hate us, and they'd rather have sex with a kitchen tool than with a man' (Townsend, 2004, p. 73)

A final issue regarding the manifold definition of women as mothers and spouses concerns the idea of housewifery. As Morley, states, "there is a collapsing of the image of the wife/mother in the image of the home itself (...) the woman and

⁶⁴My emphasis.

the home seem to become each other's attributes" (Morley, 2000 p. 65). In this regard, Pink (2004) describes the interesting meaning of the management of dirt as analysed by Douglas, Morley and others, like one of the defining elements of femininity. The way in which women deal with the dirt in their homes is basic in order to construct their identity as preservers of the integrity of the home (which includes its maintenance and therefore, its cleaning). Once again, Pauline fails spectacularly in her alleged task of creating a spotless and disinfected environment for her family, a reproachable behaviour in her mother-in-law's eyes. Pauline Mole would not be chosen "housewife of the year":

My grandma came and was disgusted with the state of the house. I showed her my room which is always neat and tidy and she gave me fifty pence. I showed her all the empty bottles in the dustbin and she was disgusted. (Townsend, 1991, p. 16)

Nevertheless, in Townsend's works, Pauline is not the only female character whose attitude to dirt management defies the image of traditional domesticity linked to women. However, this common trait portrays different situations.

In the case of Jack Sprat's mother, Norma, in *Number Ten*, the dirty house and her inability to cope with the most usual chores coincide with the general sense of decay, both of the neighbourhood (let us remember she lives in a council estate) and of a person who finds it hard to recover from an attack suffered some days before Jack's visit:

There was no food in the house that Jack could bring himself to eat. And unpaid bills had been stuffed behind the caddy on the end of the draining board. The whole house needed cleaning, airing and restocking with necessities, even Pete's food bowl was devoid of seed and an empty packet of Trill had been put back into the cupboard next to the jars of mouldy jars and pickles. (Townsend, 2003, p. 40)

As a contrast, Jack's personality, seems to fight with all his strength against the terrible dereliction surrounding his mother's life by developing a compulsive obsession with order and cleanliness:

He cared too much about the minutiae of daily life. It caused pain if a towel was not hanging in the exact middle of the heated towel rail in the bathroom and anguish if a pickle jar was not lined up in order of height next to its fellows (...) Every object in the four small rooms of the flat had an exact permanent space, and Jack was at his happiest when every spoon was back in the drawer and every CD was back on

the rack in its appropriate alphabetical order. (Townsend, 2003, p. 79)

Sharon Botts, mother of Adrian's elder son, is another example of mismanagement of dirt. Her case is similar to Norma's but she represents those young mothers of several children from different fathers whose promiscuity Thatcherite and Blairite governments alike despised so much. Dirt and mess are the visible and natural consequences of an unsuccessful attempt to face male power and control, and are visible in Sharon's neglected personal appearance: "Sharon opened the door before I could knock. She looked like Moby Dick with a perm. I could barely discern the Sharon I once knew from the flesh mountain she had become" (Townsend, 1999, p. 257)

Sharon seems to have thrown in the towel long ago and accepted the gloom of her own life. The general picture is the sadly usual one of male domination by force-female submission-loss of female identity-general neglect:

Sharon indicated that I was to sit in one of the two matching arm-chairs. The carpet felt sticky beneath my feet. (...) The television prompted me to ask Sharon if we could talk in the kitchen, though once we've arrived there, I wished we'd stayed where we were. 'I've not'ad time to wash up yet,' she said, looking around at the spectacular chaos. (Townsend, 1999, p. 258)

What can easily be deduced is that not all women described by Townsend as not fulfilling the traditional gendered role division are to be defined in the same terms. In the case of Pauline, coming into contact with feminism is the key element for her to disregard the usual tasks performed by mothers and housewives. In the other cases, class is the distinctive ingredient of their performance. Townsend depicts low working class and precariat women as inserted within an eternal circle of poverty, faced with the impossibility of taking proper care of their families and neglect of their homes and themselves, in accordance with the environment in which they are located. No feminism is possible for them as, on many occasions, patriarchy imposes itself in the most brutal way:

Went round to Sharon's after ascertaining that Ryan would be out.
(...)
I asked her if Ryan slapped her about.
She said, avoiding my eyes, 'E's a bit heavy-handed with me sometimes, but 'e never touches the kids. (Townsend, 2004, p. 388)

- **Post-feminist women and the role-play of resistance**

Post-feminism implies the assumption of new complexities as far as gender identities are concerned. Fighting patriarchy apparently had become outdated by the end of the 20th century and, together with the political changes that took place in Britain, it called for a new basis upon which to build the feminist demands. (Head, 2002). This re-evaluation of gender experiences and relations gave way to the rejection of former feminist ideology regarding both female body and female sexuality. From the 1990s -although its origins could be traced back to the mid-1980s (Gamble, 2006)-, Post-feminists not only do not reject the impositions on the ways their bodies should be fashioned at all levels, but, in addition, they embrace them playing, at the same time, the part of the so-called “empowered women”⁶⁵ as depicted by the media, and representing an authentic backlash for second-wave Feminism:

The definition of feminism has become ideologically overloaded. Instead of offering a mighty Yes to all women’s individual wishes to forge their own definition, it has been disastrously redefined in the popular imagination as a massive No to everything outside a narrow set of endorsements. (Wolf in Thornham, 2006, p. 40)

In Britain, the post-feminist development took place coinciding with the years immediately after Tony Blair’s tenure and later during his terms of office, although the so-called Third Way Feminism was developing more or less at the same time but “found its way into public notice by a rather different route” (Gamble, 2006, p. 43) since it was not favoured by the media. Specifically, the context of Tony Blair’s access to power is the framework chosen by Townsend to turn one of her recurrent female characters into the most important representative of Post-feminism in all her works: Pandora Braithwaite.

In *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, we see a teenage Pandora working on her assertiveness at the same time as the other women in her orbit, Adrian’s mother and her own mother, although the results are quite different in each of the three cases. Whereas Pauline reacts and takes a clearly second-wave feminist position, Tania Braithwaite, despite being politically active –a supporter of Labour, the SPD later and eventually Labour again-, and a lecturer in Women’s Studies, continues with her own ordered life based on ecology and oriental philosophy.

⁶⁵To this respect, see the numerous literature on the Post-feminist stance of the TV series *Sex and the City*.

Her feminism is not brought to the fore by Townsend. On the contrary, young Pandora's reaction against Adrian's male impositions is just the starting point of her evolution into one of the Post-feminist icons of the Blairite government: "Pandora and Pandora's mother have joined my mother's woman's group. No men or boys are allowed in our front room. My father had to be in charge of the crèche in our dining room" (Townsend, 1991, p. 169).

A brilliant, multilingual Pandora toys with the men around her and very soon she learns how to impose upon them by using her body and charm. She is determined to do whatever is necessary to become Prime Minister. Coming from a middle class Labour milieu, the best option for her is to enrol in the Labour party and run for the Ashby-de la-Zouch constituency in the 1997 elections.

In order to win the elections, she adapts her discourse to that of the Labour party and its leader. The Labour manifesto of 1997 proclaimed that "We will uphold family life as the most secure means of bringing up our children. Families are the core of our society" (New Labour, 1997) and so did Dr. Pandora Braithwaite in an open contradiction with the way she was conducting her personal life:

I heard the Labour Party candidate for Ashby, Dr. Pandora Braithwaite, talking about the importance of family values on Talk Radio. I was so outraged I almost choked on an Opal Fruit (...) Talk about hypocrisy!

Pandora has shown open contempt for family life. Her first husband, Julian was openly, in fact, boastfully gay. And her live-in lover, Jack Cavendish, has been married three times and has ten acknowledged children (...) How Pandora ever got past a Labour Party election committee is a mystery to me. (Townsend, 1999, p. 8)

Pandora uses her image to obtain exactly what she has in mind:

Immediately after I have turned off the motorway I was confronted by Pandora's lovely face staring down at me from an election poster (...) It was a glamour shot, reminiscent of 1940s Hollywood. Pandora's highlighted dark blonde hair fell to her shoulders in rippling waves. Her glossy lips were open, showing Harpic-white teeth. Her eyes said bedroom! She was wearing a dark jacket thing; there was a hint of white lace underneath, and beneath that more than a hint of voluptuous cleavage. I knew every man in Ashby-de-laZouch would walk on his knees to vote for her. (Townsend, 1999, p. 11)

This way, Pandora embodies the Post-feminist philosophy which implies a Neo-conservative reaction against second wave Feminism and its outdated and "un-feminine" ways, and represents the empowered woman who uses her weapons,

especially the ones given by nature. In Pandora's case, these weapons prove to be very useful for her to get what she wants.⁶⁶ In a world dominated by consumer culture and the pervasiveness of the media, Pandora moves comfortably mastering the two main claims of Post-feminism; independence and individual power with strong confidence in her own femininity and sexuality, which she overtly displays:

Pandora was sitting with her back to me (...) talking in a husky voice into the smallest mobile phone I'd ever seen (...) 'Boris, darling, if I'm elected tonight, I promise we'll have a celebratory dinner very, very soon, and if I lose we'll have a dinner even sooner. Bye you horrible Tory, you.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 32)

What seems to be clear is that Pandora represents a powerful and beautiful alternative to the rest of the women who also run for Labour constituencies:

He said there was a lot of national press interest in Pandora because she was exceptionally beautiful and had long hair. Most of the other women Labour candidates had short hair and couldn't fill in a thirty-six AA-cup bra. Also, despite grooming lessons, they applied their make up as though they were toddlers who had run amok at Boot's N^o7 make-up counter. (Townsend, 1999, p. 45)

This extract, quoting the words of Pandora's father, seems to epitomise the apparent collision between both feminist tendencies we have identified in Townsend's words: the second-wave feminism, represented by those Labour candidates who give their bodies just the minimum attention in order not to betray their feminist beliefs and the post-feminism represented by those powerful women who "use" their bodies to reach the same professional goals just like the first ones. In this case, to be elected MPs.

This lack of attention to the external aspects of femininity on the part of second-wave feminists is accounted for by Hollows (2007) as something basic in order to reach the real essence of the female being:

It was not only men and systematic male domination which were constituted as a problem in second-wave Feminism but also women's

⁶⁶These last words undoubtedly trigger the reference to the Spice Girls iconic image in regard to the concept of "empowered woman". See Genz and Brabon (2009) for a full treatment of the topic. Curiously, when Adrian comes home to Ashby-de-la-Zouch to vote in the 1997 election he sees that: "There was a Labour Party poster in the living room of my parents' house on Wisteria Walk, and a Spice Girls poster in my sister Rosie's window" (Townsend, 1999, p. 12)

investments in ‘femininity’ which, it was claimed, blocked the development of a feminist consciousness (...) Some feminist (...) distinguished a ‘false’ culturally produced femininity from females ‘true’ nature which presumably lay in their biology, a ‘deep’ femaleness which was waiting to be released once the ‘surface’ trappings of femininity had been thrown off. (Hollows, 2000, p. 17)

At the same time, Ivan Braithwaite’s words open the way to considerations upon what Sapiro (1998) described as the link between women’s symbolic and descriptive representations. How these MPs perform their gendered selves (Butler, 1990) is a matter of controversy as they tend to be identified and judged according to the external ways in which they represent their alleged femininity. In the case of Pandora, when receiving the news of her victory in the 1997 elections, the performance of self she offers to her supporters and the media is an artful combination of sensuality, modesty and emotion, all of them desirable qualities in a woman:

Pandora licked her lips; whether it was at the prospect of her new enticing career or to add gloss to her television smile I couldn’t say. She stood with her eyes cast down and her hands clasped together as though praying. She is a skilful actress (...) Pandora appeared to ‘recover’ herself and strode up to the microphone. Her voice cracked with ‘emotion’ (...) She pretended to break down and fight back the tears while making a passionate speech about justice and freedom. (Townsend, 1999, p. 58)

Exactly the opposite to Adrian’s description of Harriet Harman, the Secretary of State for Social Security:

Harriet Harman, the Social Security secretary, has been on radio and television trying to explain about the government’s ‘Welfare to Work’ scheme. Several times she called it a ‘crusade’. It has to be said that Mrs. Harman has the look of the zealot about her, as well as a constant air of irritation. She should let her fringe grow out, stop wearing smocks and buy an uplift bra. (Townsend, 1999, p. 142)

Pandora’s brilliant career granted her to be appointed minister in the first Blair government. In this way, she turned into one of the famous “Blair’s babes”:

Pandora and her fellow Blair’s Babes were photographed with Tony outside Parliament. Pandora showed the most teeth, cleavage and leg, and managed to position herself next to Mr. Blair. In one photograph

she has an arm draped casually around his shoulder *as though they were equals*.⁶⁷ (Townsend, 1999, p. 87)

The moniker “Blair’s Babes” was coined by the tabloid press after the landslide victory of Labour in the 1997 election when the number of women MPs doubled from 92 to 182. The entry of such a large group of women in Parliament was celebrated by feminists as a way of bringing new air to the old-fashioned, patriarchal institution:

The entry of women into Westminster would help to change the mainstream policy agenda and the ‘public school/boys’ club’ atmosphere of Commons debate. A popular argument in favour of positive discrimination for women was that the new intake of female members would raise different types of concerns in the Commons as well as in the European Parliament. (Norris in Hay, 2002, p. 39)

The excessive media coverage of the presence of women in the traditional male realm of the Houses of Parliament seemed to obscure, in a way, the fact that women had been elected MPs since some decades ago, although certainly not in such a large number, and that some mere twenty years ago, another woman had been elected as PM of the country. This time, the overwhelming treatment of the issue, most of the times in contemptuous terms, led to minimal impact on the women’s movement. The hopes raised were soon deluded as Blair’s Babes “appeared more quiescent towards the leadership, less willing to rebel, and therefore, unlikely to make a distinctive contribution to the public policy agenda” (Norris and Lovenduski, 2001). No wonder, given the fact that the new MPs, particularly the Labour ones, were submitted to all types of disturbing situations.⁶⁸ In addition, they were in the middle of a deep contradiction, required to be women and therefore dress and behave as such, and when doing it, questioned about their professionalism and validity as politicians:

Asked if she wore erotic underwear in the debating chamber of the House of Commons she said, ‘Yes, I buy my undies from Agent Provocateur in Soho. This in no way affects my ability as a politician. I work tirelessly on behalf of my constituents.’ (Townsend, 1999, p. 174)

⁶⁷My emphasis.

⁶⁸For a revision of what being elected MPs implied for those women who won their seats at the 1997 election, see Cooke, 2007.

In this sense, constantly toying with her extremely standardized femininity, Pandora acknowledges the only way to reach the highest positions in politics is to abide by the rules of gender polarization and play the part of an intelligent, leader-supportive and unusually sexy MP:

Pandora was grilled on the question of beef-on-the-bone by Jeremy Paxman on Newsnight last night. She kept to the party line: ‘Must protect the public, blah, blah, blah’ (...) She did show the woman behind the politician once during her interview. After Mr, Paxman had said, ‘Oh, come off it, Mrs. Braithwaite,’ she said, dropping her voice, ‘Jeremy, you are so very forceful,’ then laughed her husky laugh and appeared to poke her tongue out at him.⁶⁹ (Townsend, 1999, p. 328)

As we have seen, Pandora’s political activity is tinged with the theoretical assumptions of Post-feminism. However, the connections between politics and feminism have existed from the very beginning of the movement, Pandora’s running for the constituency of Ashby-de la- Zouch being the most relevant and visible activity which would eventually lead to her empowerment as a politician though never at the same level as her male fellows:

I asked how she was enjoying the world of Agriculture and Fisheries. She grimaced and said ‘I should be at the Foreign Office. I speak fluent Mandarin and Serbocroat, for Chrissakes!. I could be useful. As it is, I’m wasting my bloody time on whelks!. (Townsend, 1999, p. 296)

This individual action is quite meaningful as a reflection of the Post-feminism spirit, counteracted in a way by previous collective actions carried out by women during the 1980s. To the different actions led by the WLM, a significant one should be added: the Greenham Common women’s peace camp.

Greenham Common was a RAF base in Berkshire, used to place NATO nuclear missiles during 1981. The women’s movement against this nuclear danger was

⁶⁹According to Campbell (1989) women who had been relegated for centuries to the private sphere, when dealing with the public one, crafted their rhetorical style in a more personal tone, relying on personal experiences, anecdotes, etc, with a high degree of empathy towards their audiences. This is what Pandora does, although having the men in the audience as her target:

It was almost the most erotic thing I’ve ever seen or heard since Barbara Windsord lost her bra in *Carry on Campaign*. The newspapers are full of it this morning, Brutus in The Express alleged that Paxman ran straight from the studio into a cold shower and stayed there for twenty minutes. (Townsend, 1999, p. 328)

initiated by Helen John who, having gathered a first group of some forty women under the name of “Women for Life on Earth”, led a march to the military base demanding the dismantling of the nuclear weapons and asking for an open debate with Margaret Thatcher. It was September 1981. The first group chained themselves to the base fence. The women’s protest gathered important media coverage, despite the initial hard questioning of the action as these women were considered to have abandoned their roles of mothers and wives in favour of political feminist action. As Helen John describes:

All they asked about was how our husbands were coping back home, and weren’t we irresponsible exposing our children to all that carbon monoxide. We just could not get them to engage in serious conversation. So some of us decided to try a different approach – to take a leaf out of the suffragettes’ book and engage in civil disobedience. (John in Fairhall, 2006, p. 6)

More and more women joined the camp and on the 1st April 1983, some 70.000 protesters formed a human chain of fourteen miles. These were the initial steps of a decade of women’s protest against nuclear weapons bases:

Hand in hand, the line extends
All around the nine-mile fence,
Thirty-thousand women chant.
Bring the message home. (Seeger, 1983)

Townsend could not resist the temptation to place her characters right in the middle of the turmoil, as they always are one way or another: “My mother has gone out with Mrs. Singh, Mrs. O’Leary and her women’s group to have a picnic on Greenham Common. She has taken Rosie so the house is dead peaceful” (Townsend, 1991, p. 301).

This short entry in Adrian’s diary states two important issues: women’s groups were well organised during the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s (see Pilcher, 1999) and the fact that despite what the press was conveying, those women had not abandoned their children and husbands, on the contrary, many of them had taken their children to the protest for it was mainly carried out with the aim of getting a better world for their offspring: “We are the ones who care for our children/ and we are caring for their lives”.⁷⁰

Adrian is denied a full insight into what is happening at Greenham Common until he watches the facts on TV:

⁷⁰Verses of one of the popular Greenham Common’s songs, sang by the camping women.

I have just seen the Greenham women on the telly!. They were tying babies' booties on the wire surrounding the missile base. Then they held hands with each other. The newscaster said that 30.000 women were there. The dog was sulking because my mother had gone out for the day. It didn't understand that she was miles away safeguarding its future. (Townsend, 1991, p. 301)

Reactions to Greenham Common protests were varied and there was a clear division of opinions men and women regarding the significance of the movement. After taking part in the extraordinary facts of the time, those proud women had proved that summoning their individual strength with a common aim eventually had led them to victory. Their positions were reinforced and they were aware of their own capacities: "They got back safely. The women's group came back to our house. They talked about female solidarity while I served them coffee and tuna sandwiches" (Townsend, 1991, p. 301).

On the other hand, most of their male counterparts did not acknowledged the importance of the Greenham Common protest as one of the essential facts leading to the end of the Cold War. Even Labour politicians, gave no credit to Greenham Common women as responsible for the dismantling of the missile camp:

Denis Healey, member of the House of Lords, Defence Secretary 1964-70, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party 1980-83: 'I do not think the protest at Greenham Common had much effect on British politics, so it had no effect whatever on the Cold War as a whole. (Fairhill, 2006, p. 196)

Just woken up by Mr. Singh and Mr O'Leary banging on our door demanding entrance. I got up and explained to them that there were about twenty women in our living room. Mr. O'Leary said, 'Tell Catlin to hurry up; I can't find my pyjamas,' Mr. Singh said 'Ask Sita to tell me how to work our electric kettle.' I advised them to go home for their own safety. (Townsend, 1991, p. 301)

However, journalists and political observers gave the Greenham Common protest the coverage it deserved and linked its action to both previous feminist milestones, and no doubt, to future ones:

The greatest lasting achievement was probably the assertion of modern feminism, ranking with the campaigns of the suffragettes, whose colours were adopted by many women. 'Carry Greenham home' was the slogan which encouraged women to become activists when they returned to their own areas. (Stead in Fairhall, 2006, p. 201)

Maybe without the women of Greenham Common, Pauline Mole among them, Pandora Braithwaite would have never reached a position in Blair's government. Maybe without those women of the second-wave Feminism, many of the achievements in the advancement of gender equality would have been impossible.

4.3.3 Sexuality

Hand in hand with the studies on gender, there has been a reconsideration of the traditional ways of experiencing human sexuality and the role it plays in the construction of the self. From the feminist theory realm, new claims have been made so as to give visibility to lesbian sexuality and the queer theory has studied the different ways in which homosexuality relates to social systems of organization and beliefs (Hall, 2003).

Sexuality as both naturally developed and culturally manifested is one component of identity which Townsend deals with mainly by focusing on three issues: teenage sexual awakening and the rejection of its literary depiction showed by a section of the establishment representatives, Tory's 19th-century biased policies regarding homosexuality, and the expansion of AIDS with its subsequent social impact. These, in turn, show interesting sociohistorical connections with the time span that this research covers, particularly Margaret Thatcher's terms of office.

4.3.3.1. Teenage sexuality

My mother is reading *The Female Eunuch* (...) I only glanced through it. It is full of dirty words. (...)
I had my first wet dream! So my mother was right about *The Female Eunuch*. It has changed my life. My spot has got smaller. (Townsend, 1991, p. 28)

Adrian Mole's sexual awakening is explained in such a simple way that its importance may be obscured by the family distress caused by Pauline's feminist development. It is displayed directly and lacking the extra fuss that, for instance, a girl's first menstruation attracts. In fact, we do not know anything else-except a casual "felt a bit funny" (Townsend, 1991, p. 29) until some diary entries written around a fortnight later: "I had had my second W.D. I had to put my pyjamas in the washing machine so my mother doesn't find out" (Townsend, 1991, p. 35). This hormonal "infusion" is accompanied by the usual body changes that Adrian eagerly checks:

Had a good look at my face in the bathroom mirror today. I have got five spots as well as the one on my chin. I have got a few hairs on my lip. It looks as if I shall have to start shaving soon” (Townsend, 1991, p. 35)

And of course by the inevitable male practice of examining the dimensions of his sexual organ: “Measured my ‘thing’. It was eleven centimetres” (Townsend, 1991, p. 35). This sole sentence as representative of a topic which was not very dear to adult, Conservative censorship opened a great deal of controversy and provoked an overreaction on the part of officials, for instance, at schools. The journalist Alexis Petridis (2012) recalls in an article for *The Guardian*, the extreme measures taken by the headmaster of his school who, inadvertently, acknowledged the importance and popularity of the book by forbidding it, therefore provoking exactly the opposite reaction; the book became a hit. The popular actor, comedian and writer David Walliams also remembers adult reception (and rejection) of the book and the direct consequences for its popularity:

‘I blame that Adrian Mole,’ said my sea-scout master Roger. ‘Boys weren’t obsessed with the length of their things before reading that awful book.’ Of course Roger was wrong. Boys have always been obsessed with the length of their things. Somehow, a lady called Sue Townsend understood what it was to be an adolescent boy better than any adolescent boy. That parents and teachers and responsible adults all disapproved of the book of course made us kids love it all the more. (Walliams, 2014)

In the specific entries of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* that refer to sexuality, the narrative voice is of special interest as, according to Miles they “immediately place the reader in a potentially emphatic position, with a perception of somehow being invited into the confidence of the teenage narrator” (Miles, 2006, p.12). Exactly what Townsend did so effectively when dealing with male, teenage sexuality in such a natural and casual way. No teenage boy failed to identify with Adrian. In my view, this is exactly what, together with the extreme reactions on the part of educators, boosted the book sales to the point that reading it became a real craze.

It was not the first time that teenage sexuality had appeared in young adults literature. Judy Blume’s *Forever* in 1975 would be followed by Norma Klein’s *Family Secrets* in 1985 or M.E. Kerr’s *Night Kites* in 1986 in the United States. British representatives were Barry Hines’s *The Blunder* (1966), Max Lungren’s *Summer Girl* (1976) or John Crompton’s *Up the Road and Back* (1977). However,

the teenage sexuality to be found in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is realistic as made problematic by the protagonist, but its display is not the main component of the story which, in this case, is formed from a myriad of topics, sex among them. In addition, humour is the basic ingredient of Townsend's successful recipe: "I was racked with sexuality but it wore off when I helped my father put manure on the rose bed" (Townsend, 1991, p. 102).

Adrian's sexual desire for Pandora grows together with his "thing" which he feels uncontrollable: "My thing keeps growing and shrinking, it seems to have a life on its own, I can't control it" (Townsend, 1991, p. 102). This would eventually lead to initial failure when trying to actually have sexual intercourse with Pandora who only allows him to touch her bust slightly a couple of times:

Pandora has allowed me to touch her bust. I promised not to tell anyone, but there was nothing to tell really. I couldn't tell where her bust began through all the layers of underclothes, dress, cardigan and anorak. (Townsend, 1991, p. 94)

I asked Pandora to show me one of her nipples but she refused. I tried to explain that it was in the interest of widening my life experience, but she buttoned her cardigan up to the neck and went home. (Townsend, 1991, p. 205)

Pandora terminates her relationship with Adrian due to his sexual demands which she is not willing to meet, displaying a rather conservative stance. However, she lapses into a contradiction that she does not fail to realise:

There were a lot of visitors at Pandora's house (...) I realized it must be a fancy dress party (...) then the gorilla burst in and started dancing with a belly dancer who was wearing a most disgusting flimsy costume which showed her navel and most of her nipples (...) Pandora said seriously, 'I so enjoyed dressing up as a belly dancer even though it's quite against my feminist principles to exhibit my body'. (...) So Pandora who refused to show me one of her nipples in the privacy of our bedroom is quite prepared to flaunt both nipples at a mixed gathering!!! (Townsend, 1991, p. 207-8)

Pandora is not a New Labour candidate yet but a teenager, daughter of the second-wave Feminism. Eventually this contradiction she remarks upon will be solved for, as we have seen, Post-feminism offers her a comfortable framework to display her sexuality without betraying her principles.

While Pandora was trying to assume her contradictions, Adrian was having his first man-to-man talk with his father about women. If we expected the talk to

be revealing and clarifying for Adrian, we would be disappointed. George Mole uses the opportunity to criticise his wife and end the talk with, in his view, the most useful piece of advice a father can pass on to his son:

He ended our first man-to-man talk by saying, ‘Look, kiddo, don’t even think about getting married until you’ve spent a few months sharing a bedroom with a bird. If she leaves her knickers on the floor for more than three days running, forget it!’ (Townsend, 1991, p. 193)

Directly related to sexuality, Townsend introduces a worrying social issue that will show up in *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series with unsuspected consequences: “Pandora says she is not going to risk being a single parent just for the sake of a few spots. So I will have to fall back on self-indulgence” (Townsend, 1991, p. 166). Sex does not occur, for the moment, between both our protagonists despite the pervasive presence of the issue at school where students are subjected to the contradictions of their time between sexual desire and experimentation, and repression and the dark consequences of uncontrolled intercourse:⁷¹

Pandora and Craig Thomas are creating a scandal by flaunting their sexuality in the playground. Miss Elf had to knock on the staff-room window and ask them to stop kissing. (...) Mr. Scrutton made a speech in assembly this morning. It was about the country’s lack of morals, but really he was talking about Pandora and Craig Thomas. (Townsend, 1991, p. 68)

Teenage pregnancy has been a problem in Britain since the sixties, with the highest rate in Europe. It has also been proved that, during the 1980s, the figures of conception for girls under 16 were three times higher in deprived areas than in affluent ones although these areas showed a lower number of conceptions ending in abortion (Smith, 1993). Despite the continuous decline in the figures of teenage pregnancy, the problem has not been successfully tackled by successive governments which regarded it both as a social issue and a health problem (Arai, 2009).

However, the social perception of teenage pregnancy changed over time. During the sixties and 1970s:

⁷¹In this sense, Miles spots that “a dichotomy exists between the modern cultural perception of sex as spontaneous and consequence-free, and the actual contraception that is necessary to facilitate this ideal” (Miles, 2006, p. 9).

The marital status of a mother-to-be was more important than her age. Marriage offered economic protection to mothers and their children in a time when the burden of unwed motherhood fell solely on local communities, so unmarried parenthood was highly stigmatised. At some point in the late 1960s/early 1970s, in the US (...) and slightly later in the UK (...) public and policy concern shifted from the marital status of mothers-to-be to their age, and the problem of teenage pregnancy came into being. (Arai, 2004, p. 3)

Conservative thinking, supportive of the traditional family, was highly critical of teenage pregnancy and its overwhelmingly social origin. In a speech given in Birmingham in October 1974, Sir Keith Joseph stated:

The balance of our population, our human stock is threatened. A (...) rising proportion of children are being born to mothers least fitted to bring children into the world and bring them up. They are born to mothers who were first pregnant in adolescence in social classes 4 and 5. Many of these girls are unmarried, many are deserted or divorced or soon will be. Some are of low intelligence, most of low educational attainment. (...)They are producing problem children, the future unmarried mothers, delinquents, denizens of our borstals, sub-normal educational establishments, prisons, hostels for drifters. Yet these mothers, the under-twenties in many cases, single parents, from classes 4 and 5, are now producing a third of all births. (Joseph, 1974)⁷²

However, according to Arai more than the teenage mothers, Conservatives criminalised the single mothers, considered as “the enemies” for they were blatantly exploiting the resources of the welfare state and failed to exhibit the clichéd topic of “responsibility” thus eroding the traditional family values upon which society should relay:

Single mothers, especially where they were young, epitomised social and moral deviance and were considered to belong to almost the same category of citizen as criminals and drug addicts, although the crime of the single mother was to be conniving, and guilty of exploiting the largesse of the welfare state. (Arai, 2004, p. 118)

New Labour policies regarding teenage pregnancy implied, as in most areas - including the very name of the Labour Party- a recasting of an old idea, turned

⁷²It seems that this speech and its background eugenics paid off and was one of Keith Joseph's negative assets when running for the Tory leadership (Harris, 2013) .

into a new linguistic concept which transformed “deviant pregnancy” into “dependent teenage parents”. New Labour’s Manifesto of 1997 describes single mothers as “trapped on benefits” (New Labour, 1997). They were not demonised but redirected into the mainstream so they could participate in the project of modernity designed by New Labour. (Arai, 2004).⁷³ Once knowledge on contraception spread, teenagers were called to exercise their responsibility and become productive members of a society which supported middle class values. Of course, not all single mothers agreed with that or could, due to their socioeconomic situation, aspire to belong to this idyllic middle-class:

She’d done everything to make her money last the week. She’d put it in different jugs and boxes, and kept pound coins in an egg-cup, but did they know the price of disposable nappies? (...) She never went out, and she was only nineteen. Tushingas’s Dad had only seen him the one time, at the hospital the second day after he’d been born. He’d turned up with his mates and brought a giant teddy that his mam had won in a raffle, so it didn’t count as a present. (Townsend, 2003, p.148)

In such circumstances, single mothers were termed as a “demographic residuum” (Arai, 2004, p. 120), the waste of the *Cool Britannia*. Ultimately, single parenthood in general was regarded with the same negative tinge as it had been in Thatcher’s times:

I asked her [Rosie, Adrian Mole’s teenage sister] tonight if she wants a baby. She said ‘I might’ this surprised me. (...) I felt my duty to warn her that New Labour strongly disapproved of single parents, and that should she choose to tramp that particular road in life, she would find it ‘stony and full of potholes.’ I said, ‘Tony Blair will make you go out to work, Rosie (...) I asked her if her school provided parenting classes. She said, ‘Yeah, like, they teach us how to, like, fill a single-parent benefit form.’ I retired for the night. How can Rosie have a baby? She is a baby herself. (Townsend, 1999, p. 216)

4.3.3.1 Homosexuality

Townsend introduces homosexual characters, both male and female, from the initial pages of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* thus enriching the protagonist’s entourage with a wide variety of personalities and vital circumstances, and providing the reader with the opportunity to analyse the way in which she linked the

⁷³For an interesting analysis of unmarried motherhood based on Foucaultian genealogy, see Carabine in Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001.

life and vicissitudes of her homosexual characters to the development of historical facts that would affect them at a legal level.

Lesbianism is hinted early in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* by presenting Mrs. Lucas, the wife of Mr. Lucas, the neighbour Pauline Mole elopes with. The contrast between Mr. and Mrs. Lucas is so flagrant that only Adrian is blind enough not to see the evidence:

Mrs. Lucas was next door cleaning the outside windows. (Townsend, 1991, p. 18)

Mrs. Lucas was planting trees in the dark. (Townsend, 1991, p. 19)

Mrs. Lucas is concreting the front of their house and the concrete lorry had to keep its engine running while she shovelled the concrete round before it set. Mr. Lucas made her a cup of tea. He really is kind. (Townsend, 1991, p. 20)

When the confrontation between Mr. and Mrs. Lucas reaches a point of no return, the inevitable separation takes place, creating a major scandal in the neighbourhood:⁷⁴

There was a removal Lorry outside Mr. Lucas's house this morning. Mrs. Lucas and some other women were carrying furniture from the house and stacking it on the pavement. Mr. Lucas was looking out from his bedroom window. He looked a bit frightened. Mrs. Lucas was laughing and pointing up to Mr Lucas and all the other women started laughing and singing 'Why was he born so beautiful?'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 30)⁷⁵

These short scenes display some of the most evident topics regarding the image of lesbians as perceived by heterosexuals; lesbians typically perform male activities, have male looks and exhibit male attitudes. To this respect, Hammidi and Kaiser refer to the lesbian image:

The image of looking 'butch' has loomed as the primary marker of lesbian visibility within both gay and straight stereotypical images. (...) yet the dominant aesthetic codes of 'looking butch' are ones against which lesbians are most strongly evaluated as being either queer or not (Hammidi & Kaiser, 2012, p. 59).

⁷⁴See section 4.2.

⁷⁵*Why was he born so beautiful?* is a typical rugby song whose lyrics stress the alleged usefulness of the opposite team and mock its components' manhood. See Green, 1967.

While insisting on this lesbian stereotype of the “butch”, Townsend immediately places it side-by-side with the socially accepted lesbian image, so widely portrayed as a product of male fantasy. Both images are so shocking to Adrian’s eyes that he cannot fail to describe them in his diary:

I was glad when Auntie Susan and her friend Gloria turned up at 11 o’clock. Their talk is very metropolitan and daring; and Gloria is dead glamorous and sexy. She wears frilly dresses, and lacy tights, and high heels. And she’s got an itsy-bitsy voice that makes my stomach go soft. Why she’s friends with Auntie Susan, who is a prison warder, smokes Panama cigars and has got hairy fingers, I’ll never know. (Townsend, 1991, p.308)

Hammidi and Kaiser study the strict codes of queerness applying to lesbian looks by the lesbian community: “While the dominant lesbian beauty discourse promotes masculine style, it also clearly devalues cultural styles that cannot be read as chic or urban” (2012, p. 59). Gloria is “metropolitan” and sexy, thus, not abiding by the strict rules of the “butch” or the urban-chic model.

Eventually, Adrian realises her aunt’s sexual tendency and, interestingly enough, what was a simple statement with no mark of second intention, turns into quotation marks written by an adult Adrian: “Auntie Susan’s new ‘wife’, Amanda, stood next to me at the bar sipping a pint of Guinness” (Townsend, 1999, p.64).

Previously, Mr. Lucas had yielded to the evidence of his ex-wife’s lesbianism and when asked, with clear second intentions, by some acquaintances he happened to meet while out with Pauline and Adrian he simply acknowledged the truth:

Bumped into Mr. and Mrs. Swallow who live in the next street to me. Everyone kept saying, ‘It’s a small world, isn’t it?’ Mrs. Swallow asked creep Lucas how his wife was. Lucas told her that his wife had left him for another woman. Then everyone blushed and said ‘what a small world it was’ and parted company. (Townsend, 1991, p.106)

Looking and behaving like men, the lesbians portrayed in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* support each other against these very same men who, as a whole, impose patriarchal society codes upon them by a double standard of rejecting what they consider “deviation” from the traditional female look and role, and including lesbian sex among their dearest sexual fantasies.

The topic of lesbian and gay support groups is of a greater importance, especially in times of Margaret Thatcher and her restrictive policies against the promotion

of homosexuality. These support groups were started by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) founded in 1970, following the wake of its American counterpart. In the 1980s the organisation changed its denomination to Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) and in the 1990s, to the current LGBT, including transsexual persons, thus giving voice and visibility to a multiplicity of sexual realities. Other support groups followed the line and added different components such as race or medical situation to the basic founding conception.

Gay sex, practised in private, was decriminalised in 1967 but the age of consent was still set at twenty-one whereas heterosexual and lesbian consent had been set at sixteen. As usually, public opinion had reached that point prior to the official passing of the law for, in May 1965, polls showed that some 60% of respondents agreed that “homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence” (Grey, 1989, p.38). Some years later the decriminalisation extended to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

It seems things were favourable towards homosexual literature and specifically for teenage and young adult stories including homosexual characters or dealing with the problem in an open way with an evident informative scope.⁷⁶ Townsend was no exception although, as in the case of teenage sexuality, homosexuality is just one of the variables she uses when depicting the world in which her characters are immersed which, in turn, responds clearly to the zeitgeist of the time. As usual, Adrian hints at the topic in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*:

At five o'clock I was asked by my so-called best friend Nigel to go to his Hallowe'en party. (...) There were no girls at the party, which was a bit strange. Nigel said that girls made him sick. The warlocks and me danced in the pumpkin light to Duran Duran records. It was OK I suppose, but without girls it lacked a certain je ne sais quoi. (Townsend, 1991, p. 281)

As Adrian had not taken the hint, some pages later he is updated via the rumours at school. This provokes a negative reaction which soon will be overcome as, after all, Adrian and Nigel are best friends: “Everyone is saying that Nigel is gay so I made sure that everyone knew that he is no longer my best friend” (Townsend, 1991, p. 306).

When finally both friends have a conversation about Nigel's sexual orientation, the reader finds out that he is, in fact, trying to define himself and his sexuality

⁷⁶In this sense, it is interesting to have a look at the list of the LGBT books for young adults for example those available at <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/ya-lgbt>

but he is unable to fit into any of the immovable categories into which, apparently, sexuality should fall:

Walked up and down the High Street (...) Saw Nigel in his new leather trousers posing at the traffic lights. He suggested we go to his house to 'talk'. I agreed. On the way he told me that he was trying to decide which sort of sexuality to opt for: homo, BI or hetero. I asked him which he felt more comfortable with. He said 'all three Moley'. Nigel could never make up his mind. (Townsend, 1991, p. 310)

Amidst the alleged liberal atmosphere regarding homosexuality, which did not imply total openness but legally restricted it to the private realm, Margaret Thatcher entered 10, Downing Street. In her personal fight to control the power of councils, her Conservative government included the famous Section 28 of the *Local Government Act*.

In October 1987, Margaret Thatcher stated in a speech given at the Conservative Party Conference: "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that they have an inalienable right to be gay" (Thatcher, 1987) The "deviated" educational policies put in practice by councils provided Thatcher with the *casus belli* to attack local policies on education, what Grey terms as the "bogus pretext":

Section 28 is based on a bogus prospectus, but expresses real concerns. The bogus pretext was a handful of trumped-up and largely fictional cases of alleged 'promotion' of homosexuality by a few left-wing councils who had appointed gay rights committees anti-discrimination study groups, and so forth (Grey, 1989, p. 56).

From the moment the official establishment's positions towards gender, race and sexuality had begun to be contested by social segments previously silenced, councils, on their side, started revising how these minorities had been affected by their policies and searched for different ways to counterbalance proceeding inequalities. In addition, these groups were, undoubtedly, a source of votes which explains, for instance, the interest of Greater London Council in the gay community, (Sanders & Spraggs, 1989). In 1983, *The Daily Mail* published an article denouncing that *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, a novel about a girl living with his father and his gay partner, was available at the library of a school in London. Soon Conservatives fuelled the controversy by attacking these attempts of Labour councils to render homosexuality a normal issue. They formed the "Committee for a Free Britain" and their PMs used distorted news published by some local newspapers

to campaign against the alleged promotion of homosexuality at schools. Eventually, Section 28 was inserted after section 2 of the *Local Government Act*:

The following section shall be inserted after section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 (prohibition of political publicity): Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing materials

(1) A local authority shall not-

(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality.

(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. (2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease.⁷⁷

(Local Government Act, 1988)

In this way, Conservatives turned education into a site of conflict with Labour local councils but as Wright and Reinhold state, Section 28 “was the first legislation directed against a sexual identity in Britain” (Wright & Reinhold, 2011, p. 88). It provoked a wave of protest from different sectors and was particularly reprehensible for gay and lesbian citizens.⁷⁸ Years later, the Conservative PM David Cameron, speaking at a gay party event, in July 2009, apologised for the passing of Section 28:

It does give me *great pride* to be standing here to celebrate Gay Pride and all you have achieved. (...) And by the way, it means something whether you’re a man and a woman, a woman and a woman or a man and another man. That’s why we were right to support civil partnerships, and *I’m proud* of that. 35(Cameron in Watt, 2009)⁷⁹

⁷⁷AIDS was already present in laws and recommendations of various kinds. See next section.

⁷⁸This contestation was staged at various levels, including song lyrics such as Boy George’s *No Clause 28* which I consider interesting to reproduce fully due to the multiplicity of sociopolitical issues it deals with: Won’t you be elated / To tamper with our pride / They say to celebrate it / Is social suicide / I’m not your average beat boy / I’m not your rebel guy / You want to make us hated / You want to make us slide / No Clause 28 (bis) / Brother you’re much too late / Don’t need this legislation / You don’t need this score / Don’t need this fascist groove / Just to show pornography the door / Don’t mean to be too precious / I don’t mean to be uptight / But tell me iron lady / Are we moving to the right? / No Clause 28 (bis) / Brother you’re much too late / They talk about AIDS they call it a curse / But brothers we know it’s gonna get worse / You know you won’t cure it with TV campaigns / Or telling those mothers what to put in their veins / I’m telling you suckers start using your heads / By putting the money in hospital beds / You’re clamping our cars the streets are a mess / Look what you’ve done to the NHS / Not Tory, not Labour, not SDP / It’s all the same from a factory / Don’t talk to me about political choice / I don’t like your tone and I don’t like your voice / No Clause 28 (bis) / Brother you’re much too late. (O’Dowd, 1988)

⁷⁹Note the repeated use of the words “pride” and “proud”. My emphasis.

David Cameron's words were still years ahead of Adrian Mole's school days, but the situation that caused them found its way through Townsend's pages, as could not be otherwise: "Nigel has formed a gay club at school. He is the only member so far, but it will be interesting to see who else joins. I noticed Brain Box Henderson hovering around the poster looking worried" (Townsend, 1991, p. 318). Nigel's ideal seems to lack widespread appeal but nevertheless official authorities at school see it as a dangerous activity: "Mr Scruton has ordered the closure of the Gay Club saying that he and the school governors couldn't sanction the use of the school gym for 'immoral purposes'" (Townsend, 1991, p. 318). Townsend's humour dismantles Scruton's authority and mocks the inflexible position of school governors coloured by their extreme conservative views:

Nigel pretended to be innocent. He said, 'But sir, the Gay Club is for pupils who want to be frisky, frolicsome, lively, playful, sportive, vivacious or gamesome during the dinner break. What is immoral about gaiety? Mr. Scruton said, 'Nigel, the word "Gay" has changed its meaning over the past years. It now means something quite different.' Nigel said, 'What does it mean, sir?' Scruton started sweating and messing about with his pipe, and not answering, so Nigel let him off the hook by saying, 'Sorry, sir, I can see that I will have to get an up-to-date dictionary.' (Townsend, 1991, p. 318)

The relationship between Adrian and Nigel, with its ups and downs, will be a long-life one, once Nigel's homosexuality was fully accepted by both friends, which in Adrian's case is not free from funny stereotypes:

'Nigel!' I said. Then, 'What are you doing driving a van? I thought you were gay.'
Nigel snapped, 'Being gay isn't a career, Moley, it's a sexual orientation.'
'But,' I stammered, 'I expected you to be doing something *artistic*.'
(Townsend, 1999, p.17)⁸⁰

This line of humorous remarks toying with the gay condition of one of her characters continues up to the last book of *The Mole Diaries* series where we find a blind Nigel (an image of what Townsend herself was facing though distilled through the conduit of her fantastic humour):⁸¹

Nigel rang me at work to tell me that he's in love 'with a fellow blind man'! How stupid can you get? it would have been better all round if

⁸⁰Emphasis of the author.

⁸¹See Chapter 3.

Nigel had fallen for a man with good eyesight. But as it is, Nigel and his new partner, Lance Lovett, will be blundering around, bumping into furniture, spilling drinks and walking into the traffic together! (Townsend, 2009, p. 47)

Nigel rang. Hysterical.

Graham [Nigel's leader dog] is dead. The vet said he'd probably been dead at least twelve hours.

'And you didn't realize the poor dog had stopped breathing?' I said scathingly. 'I thought blind people were supposed to have superior hearing?'

'You're confusing me with Superman,' said Nigel. (Townsend, 2009, p. 48)

Townsend's approach to the issue of homosexuality, includes certain episodes in which two of the protagonists are senior gay men, which is quite interesting for seldom is this sector taken into account when dealing with homosexuality, as if the fact of being elder erased the other characteristics of a person, also possibly due to the impositions of homosexual stereotypes upon the image of the gay community (Quam in Quam Ed., 1997). In *Adrian Mole, The Prostrate Years*, Townsend introduces the character of Mr. Carlton-Hayes, Adrian's boss at a book shop in Leicester. He is supposed to have a companion, Leslie, but both are very discreet and the fact that they live together is not clarifying enough of the relationship they have. In addition, Leslie is a unisex name so the confusion around both men and their bonding persists:

Mr. Carlton-Hayes is ill. Leslie his friend, rang me at the book shop first thing this morning. For years I have been wondering if Leslie is a man or a woman. I am still none the wiser. Leslie could be a deep-voiced woman, à la Ruth Kelly the cabinet minister, or a high-voiced man like Alan Ball the footballer. (Townsend, 2009, p. 12)

Townsend deals with the figure of Mr. Carlton-Hayes with gentleness and exquisite care. He is a sensitive man who values Adrian and cares for him, the only one who sees in Adrian what Adrian would like the others to see in himself as well: "There was so much I wanted to say to Mr. Carlton-Hayes: how much I loved him, how I would miss him, how much I respected his knowledge of books, how much I admired his unfailing good manners." (Townsend, 2009, p. 275)

Mr. Carlton-Hayes's relationship with Leslie, albeit long-lasting and surely difficult, having to navigate the most virulent times of AIDS, remains hidden from the closest circle of Mr. Carlton-Hayes's friends. Nigel and Lance openness in

showing their relationship is something of more modern times. Being used to a life of self-control, Mr. Carlton-Hayes is still reluctant to introduce Leslie publicly as his partner, this is quite significant of the strict heterosexual, discursive control applied to the public display of the gay condition which, when showing tolerance on the part of the rest of the society, seems to be considered as a folly of youth, apt for handsome, sportive, fashion-victim gay men. Older gay men are either ridiculed publicly and turned into social jesters or obviated as if non-existent. Mr. Carlton-Hayes's case is probably worse as, falling under none of these categories, he has long ago silenced himself:

Mr. Carlton-Hayes lives in a huge Edwardian house in Stoneygate (...) A sprightly elderly man with an abundance of grey hair and wearing a white polo-neck jumper opened the door to us (...) 'I'm Leslie, Mr. Carlton-Hayes's friend' (...) I gathered the plates and glasses and took them into the kitchen where I found Leslie slumped over the sink with his head in his hands. I asked him if he was all right and he turned a tear stained face to me and choked, 'this could be his last Christmas with me and yet he still will not properly introduce me to his friends. Why? Is he ashamed of me? I always kept the house nice for him. He's always had a good meal waiting for him when he comes home. I don't know what will happen to me when he dies. I can't start all over again, not at my age.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 273)

As we see, both components of the couple formed by Mr. Carlton-Hayes and Leslie, are defined according to stereotypical models of heterosexual couples, one of them playing the role of the breadwinner and the other the one of the home carer. That is, their relationship is depicted in terms of gender roles with a heterosexual frame of reference, unlike Nigel and Lance's which turns around a peer relation model. (Peplau & Cochran in McWhirte, Sanders & Reinisch, Eds., 1990, p. 342). Both models seem to fit with an essential component of identity namely, age as Mr. Carlton-Hayes and Leslie are both older men born and raised in times of legal and social restriction of homosexuality. Nigel and Lance have seen the legal constraints of Section 28 being demolished and their sexuality is not questioned any more, unless legally, and it is openly accepted as a matter of fact.

4.3.3.2 AIDS

Freddie Mercury has died of Aids. There was no time for me to mourn, but I put 'Bohemian Rhapsody', which is one of my favourite records, on the record player. (Townsend, 1993, p.192)

Stephen Fry in his documentary *HIV And Me* (Wilson, 2007), reflects on the development, consequences and current presence of AIDS in British society, and states that “one death brought AIDS closer to the general population at the start of the 1990s more than any other”. Freddy Mercury’s death was a social salutary lesson for Britain in a way similar to Rock Hudson’s death had been some years before. Both events contributed to give AIDS a face and raised the number of private donations to fight against the disease.

At the very beginning of the 1980s the first cases of HIV started to be reported in Britain. The figures soon increased and social alarm was created around the fact that the virus seemed to hit only gay men, which contributed to stigmatise the gay collective to a greater extent with a social reaction modelled by the tabloids and their “Gay Plague” headlines:⁸²

Suddenly, AIDS was very big news. Its victims, by inference, were in two categories -the innocent and the guilty. ‘The infection’s origins and means of propagation excites repugnance, moral and physical, at promiscuous male homosexuality, a leader in *The Times* opined. (McSmith, 2011, p. 253)

AIDS erupted during Margaret Thatcher’s term of office in Britain and, unfortunately, it has not been erased so far. Official reactions to it varied from country to country in Europe and the United States. It seems that British extensive experience facing epidemics in the 19th century contributed to display a different approach with regard to the fight against AIDS right from the very beginning:

The British took a broader and more socially reformist approach to public health than did Continental reformers. There, old fashioned, quarantinist attempts to contain the spread of disease were pursued throughout the nineteenth century. (...) The British had their system of VD education and treatment in place by the First World War. Their sanitationist and voluntarist bent continued into the AIDS epidemic. With the exception of a few laws with more tongue than teeth—threatening the isolation of recalcitrants, for example—and some initial restrictions at the borders, the English continued their largely consensual approach. (Baldwin, 2005, p. 228)

The AIDS scare was present in the formulation of Section 28, as we have previously seen, for the prohibition of spreading materials that allegedly contributed

⁸²This terminology was especially used by those media controlled by Rupert Murdoch. To this respect, see Clews, 2013.

to the promotion of homosexuality did not apply to those materials intended to inform against “the spread of disease”. In this sense, public campaigns to prevent the expansion of AIDS were started, the famous slogan *Don't Die of Ignorance* was seen all over and John Hurt's voice echoed in the ears of the whole country.⁸³ Margaret Thatcher does not mention AIDS in her memoirs and, according to Baldwin, “she preferred not to meddle in these matters” (Baldwin, 2005, p. 209). She left the management of everything related to AIDS to the Department of Health without interference. They, in turn, developed the policies to fight the disease without taking into account the experience and opinions of communal organisations, victims or their families.

Sadly, the number of AIDS victims continued to mount during Thatcher's years and were still a health problem to tackle in Tony Blair's terms.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, as shown in his memoirs, Blair seemed to be more committed to George W. Bush's programme on AIDS in Africa than in fighting the disease in Britain, despite the pressures by institutions such as the Church and some Christian development agencies which had joined the Stop AIDS Campaign to press the government to start actual action against AIDS (Stranz, 2010).

Townsend deals briefly with the problem of AIDS in *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years* where we find Adrian living in London with her girlfriend at that time, Bianca. It is she who plants the seed of doubt in both of them; will they have been infected with AIDS by previous partners?:

Wednesday, January 29th [of 1992]

UK heterosexual Aids cases rose by fifty per cent last year. I gave this information to Bianca as we walked to ‘Savages’ early this morning. She went very quiet. (...)When I got back to our room, I found Bianca reading a pamphlet written by the Terence Higgins Trust.

I said flippantly, ‘Who's Terence Higgins when he's at home?’

‘He's dead,’ she said, softly. The pamphlet was about Aids.

Bianca broke down and confessed that i 1990 she had had an affair with a man called Brian Boxer, who in turn confessed to her that in 1979 he'd had an affair with a bisexual woman called Diane Tripp. I shall ring the Terence Higgins Trust Helpline in the morning and ask for help. (Townsend,1993, p. 216)

⁸³I refer to the TV ad *Don't Die of Ignorance* narrated by John Hurt, released in 1986.

⁸⁴See Hajnal, 2007 p. 109-120- to learn about Bono (U2) and Bob Geldof meeting Tony Blair and the rest of the leaders of G8 in 2001 before the G8 summit in order to discuss the necessity of policies to fight poverty as the responsible of the spread of AIDS in poor countries.

In this short paragraph, Townsend is stressing the change in the tendency of AIDS. The once “Gay Plague” had been detected as well in haemophiliac children, drug addicts, and heterosexuals who had lived an average sexual life. However, the connection between gay men and AIDS was still on people’s minds and generalised misconceptions about the disease were still present, despite the efforts made by public figures such as Princess Diana.⁸⁵

Apart from the Government information campaigns and designation of a specific budget to fight AIDS (McSmith, 2011, p. 256) some private organisations devoted (and still do) their efforts to inform and assist the population with regard to the illness. Among them, the Terence Higgins Trust that Adrian and Bianca are forced to contact. Terence Higgins was one of the first patients to die from AIDS in Britain on 4th July, 1982. Immediately after his death, his friends and his partner created the trust to improve information about AIDS and raise funds for research. It was the first charity in the country to be created in response to AIDS and it is still the leader in the fight against the epidemic. By the time Adrian and Bianca read the Terence Higgins Trust pamphlet, it had already been working for ten years and was well-known enough so as to be perceived as a normal presence thanks to its informative resources (let us not forget that Adrian and Bianca live in Soho):

We both woke early this morning, but we didn’t make love as usual. We had a shower and got dressed in silence. (...) Then, at 10.45 a.m. we paid our bill and walked to the clinic in Neal Street (...)
We were counselled separately by a very empathetic woman called Judith. She pointed out that, should our tests prove positive, it wouldn’t necessarily mean that we would develop full-blown Aids. (Townsend, 1993, p. 219)

Townsend is making the most of the projection of her books to display some educational statements regarding the particular characteristics of the HIV, thus contributing to spread publicly the knowledge of the disease. On the one hand, she positions one of the most beloved characters of British literature in a situation that could have been familiar for many readers of that time. Adrian had not ever been a promiscuous young man but he sees himself living through a situation that could happen to anybody. Townsend does not judge her characters. She just presents their dilemma through Adrian’s words in a simple way, what would

⁸⁵Princess Diana was committed to fight AIDS and a famous photograph of her holding the hand of an HIV positive person contributed, in a way, to dismantle the construction of the disease as a plague.

happen if they take the tests and the consequences of not taking it. And this simplicity makes the scene more realistic:

After seeing Judith, we went for a drink in a pub in Carnaby Street to discuss our opinions: a) Have the test and know the worst. b) Not to have the test and suspect the worst. (...) We have both decided to have the test and have pledged to care for each other until the day we die. Whatever the outcome. (Townsend,1993, p. 223)

The results take six days and the happiest news arrived: “Judith told us that our tests are negative! We are not H.I.V. positive. We are not going to die of Aids!” (Townsend,1993, p. 224).

Despite the information so carefully presented by the Terence Higgins staff, the connection between AIDS and death remained in people’s minds. And so it did in literary characters’ minds.

4.3.4 Race

On September 3, 1939, King George VI sent “to every household of my peoples, both at home and overseas” (George V, 1939) a message declaring war against Germany and appealed to “my people at home, and my peoples across the seas, who will make our cause their own,”(George V, 1939) implying an underlying sense of community which involved all his subjects located all over the world. Years later, the skinheads’ motto “Ain’t no black in the Union Jack” represented the most violent tip of the social iceberg, showing how times had changed.

The demise of British Empire brought about a commotion in the allegedly stable pillars of what being British meant:

No longer a world military power, no longer an imperial power, no longer a manufacturing power, no longer an island power, the British have been increasingly driven back on their own resources (of which identity is a part). Membership of the European Union since 1973 has rendered them not even a sovereign power. (Colls, 2002, p. 4)⁸⁶

That “being British” seemed to express a sheer contradiction with what it used to be as now it implied an essential change in the perception of Commonwealth residents, members of what Brah termed as “the crucible of the British Empire”

⁸⁶Cfr. “Things have changed, things have remained the same, over the past ten years. (...) No doubt there’ll be surprises when I start to look around, but I always felt I knew where England was heading”. (Amis, 1991, p.5)

(Brah, 1996, p. 1) and, especially, of their presence in the former metropolis where they had arrived to stay. The *British Nationality Act* of 1948 had granted them not to be subjected to immigration controls. However, gradual restrictions in immigration policies changed their reality and “Commonwealth residents who had previously held common rights of citizenship and movement within a global empire found themselves first they were British subjects and then they were immigrants” (Featherstone, 2009, p. 108).

The presence of immigrants from former British colonies shook the stability of national identity which had been carefully established through time. In what seemed to be just the click of a finger everything was a matter of race. Race turned into a paramount issue and soon the idea of “multicultural or multiracial England was introduced” (Colls, 2002, p. 144). But what were the implications of this major change for British society?

In first place, there was a redefinition of the binomial “British nation”. What was the meaning of “British”? and what was the new reality covered by the term “nation”? Most of the time, British morphed into English:

The move from ‘England’ to ‘Britain’ and back again was frequent and common, suggesting that, by this time, the two were so merged in the minds of English subjects and commentators alike that they did not notice the confusion nor feel the need to explain it. (Kumar, 2004, p. 234)

Likewise, the fact and the act of being English were founded on a series of general assumptions and traditional perceptions both difficult to define in a strict way and easily perceived, particularly from a negative standpoint, that is, considering what was *not* English.

On the other hand the slippery concept of “nation” has been approached under different perspectives. (Wodak et al., 2009). However, despite the popular identification between people and nation at popular -and according to Edensor (2002) theoretical- levels, the construction of national identities implies a process with an essentially narrative component, which led Anderson to define nation as an imagined community based on a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1981, p.7). And as a product of collective imagination, the nation may be narrated and its textual meaning collectively produced (Bahba, 1990). In this sense, different approaches to nation imply different types of narration. Carretero et al. (In Vosniadou, 2013) analysed the characteristics of two different visions of the concept of nation: the Romantic approach and the disciplinary approach.

The Romantic approach considers the nation as a natural, immutable reality whose origins could be traced back to ancient, obscure and mythological times, to which affiliation is natural, stemming from the past, and basically pre-modern. In my view this broadly represents the traditional feeling of “being English”, that is, being a member of a community whose foundations were laid long ago, with specific ways of living, acting and reacting, with common referents of diverse nature which can be appealed to in case of the need for self-protection against aggression by means of a war or silent ways of acculturation. On the other hand, the disciplinary approach sees the nation as a social, ever-changing entity which may adapt to the type of multicultural nation derived from the decolonization processes and the subsequent immigration of former colonial subjects to the metropolis.

Both visions of nation provide different narratives of the same reality as a prism with different faces. And who are the authors of the nation’s narrative? The answer to this question is, at least, problematic for there is a constant shift in the embodiment of the narrator figure of the nation’s chronicle as new elements are assimilated within the culture that produces the narrative and these elements, in turn, contribute to it with their own vicissitudes and narrative voices.

The problem arises when one voice prevails over the other. In the case of the British nation, the traditional view of the British community was based on a series of elements which were easy to spot and identify with (Colls, 2002): “the personal bonding between the Monarchy and its subjects, the garden and landscape metaphor, cultural elements such as language and folklore, even the climate metaphor” (p. 207),⁸⁷ which leads us back to the idea of narrative of the nation.

The arrival of immigrants and the creation of immigrant communities brought about the disruption of the traditional narrative line of the English nation. “Others” had appeared and were claiming their right to write their own account of the same reality they were sharing with their former colonizers. At the same time, they were trying to control the way in which they were perceived, for long-term assumptions about what being black or Asian meant were deeply rooted in British mentality, and influenced the self and external perception and the performance of culture and race (let us not forget Lefebvre):

⁸⁷Colls also identifies Britishness with Englishness when performing the analysis of the traditional components of British nation. As for the garden metaphor, he comments: “Entire weather patterns and political systems were aggregated and then used to explain each other. The (temperate) weather pattern the English enjoyed was used to explain a (liberal) political system. Equally, extreme weather patterns were used to explain extreme political systems”. (2002, p. 207)

This was essentially an exercise in self-learning: at first, black and Asian people had to learn how to be 'black' or 'Asian'. But such was the anthropological-colonial background of race-relations assumptions, and such was the post-war culture of cultural pluralism, that there was always a tendency to see race and culture as interchangeable concepts, representing what one academic saw as 'systematic totalities' Others saw 'whiteness' in the same way -an ethnicity acting in contradistinction to and (for all sorts of historical and contemporary reasons) in competition with another ethnicity, which was 'black' or 'Asian'. When dealing with these people, 'whites' were 'white', but when dealing with 'whites', 'whites' could be any number of complexions. (Colls, 2002, p. 154)

The clash between the varied narratives of nation and their corresponding realities has resulted in constant contradictions (for instance, the fact that immigrants once a minority are now the majority of the population in traditional English cities like Leicester) and painful incidents such as the Notting Hill riots in 1958 or the riots in Brighton, Brixton, Liverpool or Manchester in 1981.⁸⁸ At the same time, these national narratives were articulated in political terms which, in turn, tried to deal with the definition of Britishness and race issues alike inasmuch as new social realities had to be assumed, either to accept or reject them.

Conservative accounts after the Falklands war rejoiced in the fact that Britain had "ceased to be a nation in retreat" (Thatcher, 1982) thus trying to reinstall the nation within its former imperial (though at that time already devalued) ways. However, according to Colls, Margaret Thatcher was fully aware of the changes occurring in her country and its relocation within the global context:

In the 1980s, for all her alleged conservatism, Mrs Thatcher knew that change was the order of the day. Myths of longevity and continuity were replaced by myths of what was 'new' and 'improved'. Everything stood ready to be 'restructured', and by the 1990s the British knew that they weren't what they were any more. National identity was unravelling with astonishing speed. (Colls, 2002, p. 5)

However, in spite of the terminology of newness, Thatcher's conservative stance stresses the contradictions of the social situation regarding immigration and race by describing the consequences of the riots in socio-economic terms, mainly as the product of Labour councils' elaborate plots, thus diluting everything related to race and immigration:

⁸⁸Cfr. McSmith, 2011.

On Monday 13 July I made a similar visit to Liverpool. Driving through Toxteth, the scene of the disturbances, I observed that for all that was said about deprivation, the housing there was by no means the worst in the city. I had been told that some of the young people involved got into trouble through boredom and not having enough to do. But you had only to look at the grounds around those houses with the grass unattended, some of it almost waist high, and the litter, to see that this was a false analysis. They had plenty of constructive things to do if they wanted. Instead, I asked myself how people could live in such circumstances without trying to clear up the mess and improve their surroundings. What was clearly lacking was a sense of pride and personal responsibility -something which the state CAN easily remove but almost never give back. (Thatcher, 1993, p. 145)

New Labour's new vision for a new Britain was fully represented by the motto *Cool Britannia* which epitomised the need for renovation and change of a country which was trying, at the same time, to come to terms with a glorious past which should not be felt as a burden any more. Blair summarizes this idea in his memoirs when commenting on London's candidature to organise the Olympic Games: "We set about presenting London as modern, dynamic, multicultural, multiracial and proud of it. London on its contemporary merits - modernity as much as tradition" (Blair, 2010, p. 324).

This process of remaking British reality was both cheerfully welcomed and highly criticized, even openly mocked. What was undeniable is that not only did the term 'New Britain' encompass a variety of identities, namely Asian, black, etc. but also it implied a global sense of a new Britishness which accepted multiculturalism as the sign of the times (Kumar, 2003). However, the New Labour Manifesto of 1997 is quite mild when facing the practical matters concerned with the origins of this welcomed multiculturalism; the immigration policies made it seem as if the party were stepping on thin ice:

Every country must have firm control over immigration and Britain is no exception. All applications, however, should be dealt with speedily and fairly. There are, rightly, criteria for those who want to enter this country to join husband or wife. We will ensure that these are properly enforced. We will, however, reform the system in current use to remove the arbitrary and unfair results that can follow from the existing 'primary purpose' rule. There will be a streamlined system of appeals for visitors denied a visa. (Labour Party, 1997)

In spite of this, New Labour governments passed several Parliamentary Acts, White Papers, etc. related to immigration, according with the public perception

of the issue, partly modelled by the Conservative media.⁸⁹ However, contemporary attempts to define the British nation which are not ideologically or politically biased were founded in the everyday, in the British citizens' perception of their own society. It seemed that everyday culture had assimilated in the most practical way at least part of the cultural baggage of those former subjects of the Empire, later immigrants and now British citizens. And so it was shown by the "Self-Portrait Project", in the Millenium Dome of 2000 and especially its last part, the "Andscape", designed to 'produce a "non-elitist version of Britishness, a snapshot of the nation at the turn of the Millennium, and a "people's view of the nation rather than an academic or media product" (Edensor, 2002, p. 172). The "Andscape" was performed by conducting a survey all over Britain in which British citizens were asked to name the one thing that, in their opinion, best represented something good about Britain and the reasons for their answer. There was a further selection of the answers and the results included items such as St. James Park, humour, politeness, a mixed race couple, Talvin Singh, kebab, chicken tikka masala, Chinese takeaway, Cheddar cheese, fish and chips, mosques, Hindu temples or Wimbledon.⁹⁰ It seems that, once again, average citizens were well ahead of their politicians:

Ron Davies, the Secretary of State for Wales, had been robbed *by a black male prostitute* on Clapham Common. My mind was fairly boggling, and we asked Ron to come into Number 10. 'It's all very easy to explain,' he began. 'I had been in Wales for the weekend, I drove up to London, and to stretch my legs I decided around midnight to go for a walk on Clapham Common.' Puzzled looks from listeners. 'I bumped into this *Rasta bloke* and we got talking, you know, as you do.' Eyebrows raised further. 'He said: Why not go for a curry? I said: Fair enough, and got in his car.' (Blair, 2010, p. 131)⁹¹

⁸⁹Blair and successive Home Secretaries were convinced that maintaining a high profile for the tough measures they were taking was the way to reassure the public that they were bringing migration under control. Polling evidence shows this was not successful. A window of opportunity in the first three years, when no more than 10% rated immigration and race in the top three issues facing Britain, was lost as it rose to 27% in 2001, and reached 39% as asylum numbers and the media fever pitch reached their peak in 2002. By April 2007, as Blair prepared to announce his resignation, 36% of the public rated immigration and race issues second only to crime. (Spencer in Seldon, 2007, p. 348)

⁹⁰For a full description of the Andscape, see Featherstone, 2002.

⁹¹The emphasis on the words "black" and "Rasta" is mine. They are both perfectly expendable but it seems they are used to stress the negative tinge of the account and its consequences.

4.3.4.1 Townsend's narrative of race issues

Terms such as race, immigration, diaspora, displacement or culture clash would be no more than mere components of a nomenclature but for the fact that they express a reality lived, perceived and acted out at all levels within British society of the period I am dealing with. Stemming from a biological fact, they reflect cultural and sociological diversities that some try to overcome and others insist on stressing.

As a living manifestation of the society in which it is produced, literature has also been concerned with these issues at various levels. British literature has incorporated the Postcolonial reality and assimilated its cultural product, Postcolonial literature which, in turn, "has frequently opened a vital cultural space, often within the same text, where a revolutionary rendering of the colonized nation is both forged and challenged, and where the political and cultural goals of anti-colonial nationalisms are both acknowledged and questioned" (Mc.Leod in Chew & Richards, 2009, p. 98), thanks to the work of Caryl Phillips, Salman Rushdie, V. S. Naipaul, Hanif Kureishi, Zadie Smith, Monica Ali, Gautam Malkani or Benjamin Zephaniah, among others.

On the other hand, writers not labelled as practitioners of Postcolonial literature have also dealt with race issues and the multiculturalism of Britain. This is the case of Sue Townsend who addresses racial matters mainly in *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series and *Number Ten*, although these issues are by no means the core of the novels, and above all in her play *The Great Celestial Cow* where Indian immigration to Britain and the cultural clash it caused is described from a feminist point of view. In works other than these, race and immigration are touched on more tangentially just with a stroke of her pen introducing, nevertheless, interesting nuances in her narrative.

Most of her references to race and immigration are focused on the Indian presence in traditionally white English contexts and the shocking, and racist, reaction this originally provokes:

A brown-skinned family are moving into Mr. Lucas's old house! (...)The street is full of brown-skinned people arriving or departing in cars, vans and mini-buses. They keep trooping in and out of Mr. Lucas's old house. My father says they have probably got three families to each room. Pandora and I are going round to welcome them to our district. We are determined to show that not all white people are racist fanatics. (Townsend, 1991, p. 91)

Considered as outsiders in a typically English context, the Indian family are, nevertheless, the only ones who would probably pass the test of Britishness, expressed in the recognition of the external components that are supposed to bind the nation together, namely, the monarchy, the Union Jack and British patriotic songs:

Mrs. O'Leary is trying to organize a street party for the Royal Wedding. The only people to put their names down so far are the Singh family (...) Mr. and Mrs. Singh have hung a huge Union Jack out of their front bedroom window. (Townsend, 1991, pp. 92, 97)

At the end of the tea, Mr. Singh made a speech about how great it was to be British. Everyone cheered and sang 'Land of Hope and Glory'. But only Mr. Singh knew all the words. (Townsend, 1991, p. 99)

I passed the Co-op where the Union Jack hung upside-down, and the Sikh temple where it was hung correctly. (Townsend, 1991, p. 421)

This acknowledgement of the exceptional British quality of Indian members of the community, contrasts with the bigotry that some Townsend's elder characters show:

Bert and Mr. and Mrs. Singh and all the little Singhs came in asking for sanctuary. Their telly had broken down! My grandma tightened her lips, she is not keen on black, brown, yellow, Irish, Jewish or foreign people. (Townsend, 1991, p. 99)

And clashes with overtly racist attitudes whose irreflexive display Townsend describes as highly connected to class and education issues:

There was a very unpleasant incident tonight. Barry Kent shouted horrible names at two of the Singhs kids. I said, 'Oh lay off em eh Baz, they are all right!'. Barry sneered and said, 'I 'ate anyone who ain't English' I reminded him about his Uncle Pedro and he said, 'Except Spaniels'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 335)

Curiously enough, the external symbols of Englishness that are so well assimilated by the Indian community of Ashby-de-la-Zouch are also mocked by Townsend:

ROYAL WEDDING DAY!!!!
How proud I am to be English! Foreigners must be as sick as pigs!
We truly lead the world when it comes to pageantry! I must admit to having tears in my eyes when I saw all the cockneys who had stood

since dawn, cheering heartily all the rich, well-dressed, famous people going by in carriages and Rolls-Royces. (Townsend, 1991, p. 98)

These matters related to nation, nationalism, Englishness, Britishness and immigration are highly connected to feelings and Townsend's are overtly expressed through her characters' lines. She spares no criticism of the manipulation of the working class who are summoned by its rulers to "defend the nation" by fighting faraway wars which only make the rich richer. To achieve support, the manipulation and abuse of group identity elements is in fashion:

Barry Kent came to school in a Union Jack tee-shirt today. Ms. Fossington-Gore sent him home to change. Barry Kent shouted, 'I'm celebratin' our patron saint's day ain't I? Ms. Fossington-Gore shouted back 'You're wearing a symbol of fascism, you nasty NF lout' (...) Barry Kent's father is on the front of the local paper tonight. He is picture holding Barry Kent's Union Jack tee-shirt. The caption underneath his picture says: 'A Patriot mourns loss of National Pride' (Townsend, 1991, p. 198)

At a more political level, Townsend expresses her rejection of racist policies and immigration restrictions:

A blonde man in a blazer, with a regimental badge stood outside the school gates handing out election leaflets this afternoon. I read mine on the way home. The man is called Duncan McIntosh and his party is called 'The Send 'Em Back Where They Come From Party'. Its policy is the compulsory repatriation of, p. black people, brown people, yellow people, tinged people, Jewish, Irish, Welsh, Scottish. Celtic and all those who have Norman blood. In fact only those who can prove to be pure-bred, flaxen-haired Saxons are to be allowed to live in this country. My mother has worked out that if he came to power the population of Great Britain would be reduced to one. (Townsend, 1991, p. 363)

On trying to workout Townsend's meaning of "being English" we cannot fail but note the high levels of irony her lines distil. It seemed that Adrian Mole, despite his tender age, embodies perfectly well the traditional English values which, in his case, are not concerned with race but with external manifestations and a sense of belonging to a community which extends beyond locality and encompasses attitudes, feelings and external symbols generally recognised and accepted:

Went round to Nigel's and was astounded to hear that his parents are trying to emigrate to Australia! How could any English person want

to live abroad? Foreigners can't help living abroad because they were born there, but for an English person to go is ridiculous. (Townsend, 1991, p. 201)

As usual, humour and mockery cannot be missed when Townsend is around:

An old American bloke called Ian MacGregor has been put in charge of the National Coal Board. It is a disgrace! England has got loads of ruthless, out-of-work executives who would be delighted to be given the chance to close their own country's coalmines down. Mr. Scargill is quite right to protests, he has my full support on this issue. (Townsend, 1991, p. 343)

This, however, may lead to pre-conceived ideas on "the other" which Adrian must be very careful about if he wishes not to be called a racist:

It was my wish that William should enter the world via warm water, candlelight and Bach as described in a leaflet issued by the Society of Radical Midwives. Jo Jo, however, was curiously resistant at first, saying that she would prefer to be unconscious throughout the labour. When I expressed surprise, saying 'I'm sorry to hear you say that Jo Jo. I'd have thought that you, as an African woman, would have had a more natural attitude towards childbirth,' to my utter amazement she became tearful and angry, and raised her voice to me, saying, 'When my waters break, why don't you find me a field that I can work in throughout my labour? And there must be a tree in this field because as an African woman, I will naturally want to give birth under its branches. And as soon as I have done so I will strap the child on to my back and return to my work in the fields.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 46)

Despite sharp replies, and living up to his surname, Adrian insists on committing the same mistake every now and then:

After waiting three weeks, I've finally got to see the new G.P. Dr. Ng. I asked him if he was related to the Dr. Ng in Soho, whom I occasionally consulted. He said no. I said I was surprised, as Ng was an unusual name. For some reason, he took offence at this and snapped, 'There are millions of Ngs in the world'. (Townsend, 2008, p. 7)

Eventually, Townsend explains in a simple, detailed way what being English means to her in the last pages of "The True Confessions of Susan Lilian Townsend" the third part of *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole, Margaret Hilda*

Roberts and Susan Lilian Townsend. Her Englishness stems from an original sense of recognition, of feeling at ease with those constituents of English reality she has always been surrounded by: “I like living in England because everywhere else is foreign and strange” (Townsend, 2003, p. 131). Although she acknowledges certain attractive qualities in what she terms as “abroad” which encompasses all things, places and realities other than those inhabiting her own world:

But I wouldn't like anyone to think I don't like Abroad. Abroad means adventure and the possibility of danger and delicious food, but Abroad is also tiring and confusing and full of foreigners who tell you that the bank is open when it's not. (Townsend, 2003, p. 131)

She provides the reader with a list of typically English elements she loves: churches, countryside, English weather, the reserve of English people, their way of coping with disasters and its cultural products. She uses the term English and never refers to British.

The same mechanisms of stereotyping that we saw concerning the definition of Englishness are also in motion when in contact with other races and realities. Townsend's characters, despite showing antiracist attitudes cannot avoid categorising their reality according to a series of racial clichés, exhibiting a mild form of cultural bias operating at surface level (Wilson, 1961):

Ali drove past shops with Indian and Pakistani names. A cinema was showing a Bollywood film. The Bank of India was flanked by a Rahki's shoe shop and Aman's translation service. Ali said that after he'd dropped Jack and the Prime Minister off at Norma's house he would visit his second cousin who lived next to the flyover in Belgrave. 'I'll expect you'll enjoy eating your own food again' said the Prime Minister looking at the restaurants and take-aways.

Ali looked puzzled, 'I can get my favourite food anywhere', he said, 'it's seafood pizza.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 271)

Clichés that some members of foreign origin communities insist on dismantling by assimilating the dearest traditionally English symbols: “Parvez and his wife, Fatima, had come [to a fancy dress party] as Robin Hood and Maid Marian” (Townsend, 2004, p. 188).

And they do it despite the insistence of Anglo-Saxon whites on stressing the differences between racial communities, mainly to their own benefit:

When I went to the BP garage for a box of Coco Pops, Mohammed was bursting with the news that Pandora had rung him and had invited

herself and a Newsnight crew to dinner last night. She had requested chicken tikka masala. Mohammed said, 'Me missus were a bit put out, cos she usually gets fish and chips on Tuesdays. (Townsend, 2008, p. 225)

Finally, others prefer to avoid further problems by tiptoeing round the fact that many of them are British-born subjects with full rights:

When Jack saw a sign advertising traditional cream teas just outside Bakewell he asked Ali to pull into the small car park. The Prime Minister and Jack got out but Ali remained seated behind the wheel. (...) Jack leaned into the taxi window and said, 'Ali, come inside with us, nobody will nick the car out here'.

Ali said, 'No, I couldn't go in there.' (...).

Jack asked, 'Why not?'

Ali answered, 'It ain't my kind of place, innit. It's for the English'.

'But you're British, Ali.' Said the Prime Minister. 'You're as free to have a cream tea as any other British citizen.'

Ali laughed (...). 'I went in a country pub once with two of my brothers-in-law. It was noisy but when we walked in it went quiet. Before we could order, the landlord said, 'I thought you chaps couldn't drink,' I says, 'We can drink orange juice.' We was only in there for five minutes, innit, and a woman comes in an' said to the landlord, 'Crickey, Eric, they've started coming out of the towns.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 207)

Townsend's allusions to the Indian community are more common in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. To show its integration within traditionally white English contexts, it is also mentioned in other volumes (such as *Number Ten*) to report the changes in British social mosaic:

They drove past rows of large detached houses. In the garden of one a woman in a sari was pruning a shrub; in another a brown-skinned family were admiring a new-looking car. They were very few white people around. The Prime Minister remarked on this and Jack said, sounding like a tour guide, 'Leicester's well on the way to being the first city in Britain to have an ethnic majority.' Ali laughed and said, 'Your women don't want kids, innit.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 270)

However, the more the situation of Muslim countries and of Muslim British subjects during the Gulf Wars deteriorated, the more references to it are to be found in Townsend's narrative mainly to stress the racist attitude of officials:

At 3 a.m. this morning my sleep was disturbed by the sound of a violent altercation (...) I went downstairs in my pyjamas and was just in time to see Tariq, the Iraqi student who lives in the basement, being led away by a gang of criminal-looking men.

Tariq shouted 'Adrian, save me!' I said to one of the men, 'Let him go or I will call the police.'

A man with a broken nose said, 'We are the police, sir. Your friend is being expelled from the country, orders of the Home Office.' (...) 'Mr. Azziz's presence is not conducive to the public good, for reasons of national security. Ain't you heard there is a war on?' he added (...)

Tariq shouted, 'I am a student at Brasenose College and a member of the Young Conservatives. I am not interested in politics!'

There was nothing we could do to help him (Townsend, 1994, p. 12)

According to *The 20th Report on British Social Attitudes* (2003), the general evolution of the trends in racial prejudice on the part of British public shows a gradual downward tendency in racial prejudice from 1983 to 2002, but this is not linear at all and different peaks and troughs in the figures can be spotted, roughly corresponding to the Kuwait and Iraqi war periods (Rothon & Head in Park et al., 2003).

Townsend gives a full account of mounting quotas of racism displayed at all social levels and in a variety of situations and places, from infant schools:

This afternoon, William ran home from the grotty recreation ground in tears, after a big white kid called him a 'mongrel'. I reminded him that he had in his veins the blood of a Nigerian aristocrat, a Norfolk potato farmer, a Scottish engine driver, a Welsh witch and that, by virtue of being born in this country, and, as defined by the OED, he was as English as Prince Philip. (Townsend, 2008, p. 226)

To the British army:

I gave him [the postmaster at the post office] my parcel [for Glenn fighting in Kuwait]. He read the BFPO address and said, 'Kuwait? You must be worried about your son, sir,' I said that I was hoping that the war would be over soon. He told me that his son had joined the army but had left after three days, after he was called a Paki bastard on the parade ground. I said he should have reported it to an officer. He said, 'It was an officer who insulted my son.' (Townsend, 2004, p. 337)

In contrast, other official attitudes struggling to avoid alleged accusations of racism collide with actual, everyday reality:

[After attending the school's Nativity play] I sat next to Mohammed, whose daughter Raki was in the cast, playing a glue-sniffer running away from an arranged marriage (...) As we walked to the car park together, Mohammed said, 'oley, why don't they do a proper Nativity play no more? I said that it was felt in some circles that it was inappropriate in a multicultural school. Mohammed laughed and said, 'What kinda circles? Crop? (Townsend, 2008, p. 172)

A police patrol car pulled up outside the house at three o'clock this afternoon. A policeman came to the door and said, 'Did you know, sir, that there's a black man on your roof?' I said, 'Yes, I do know, I'm paying him £20 an hour to be there.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 349)

Those who firmly believed in the respect of the authorities to the same multicultural society they were supposed to sponsor and protect, display a naive sense of confidence in them which, on many occasions, places them out of reality:

Mohammed, whose brother works for Midland Mainline, gave me two Eurostar vouchers to Paris last week saying, 'You use'em, Aidy. I daren't leave the country. I 'm frit that immigration won't let me back in' I said, 'Mohammed, you were born in the Leicester Royal Infirmary maternity unit, you have a strong Leicester accent, you cried when Martin O' Neill left Leicester City Football Club. Nobody could possibly question your English nationality.' 'Oh yeah,' said Mohammed cynically. 'And who was the only kid to be stopped at Dover when we came back from that school trip to France?' (Townsend, 2008, p. 190)

However, as time passes and the situation in Iraq and the bogus pretext of the Weapons of Mass Destruction leads the country to the war, Townsend progressively portrays more absurd situations in which Muslims are involved, situations that reflect the official insistence on reporting Muslim's separation and withdrawal from interaction with the rest of the British citizens:⁹²

Mohammed has been arrested! (...) he was surrounded by police marksmen, who ordered him to take off his clothes and walk towards them with his hands up. Before he got into the back of the van, Mohammed shouted (...) 'I was only parked on that double yellow for two minutes!' (...) He came to tell me that his brother has been detained on 'suspicion of terrorism'. Apparently, an anonymous caller had informed the security forces that Mohammed had taken a flying lesson at Leicester airport. Imran said, 'It's all my fault: I bought him a flying lesson gift voucher last Christmas.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 282)

⁹²In this sense, cfr. Hopkins and Gale, 2009.

Accordingly, Townsend's Muslims start to radicalise their external, recognisable traits:

Went to Parvez's house. (...) I was surprised to see him wearing traditional Muslim dress. He said that he had started going to the mosque again. (...) I told him that his new goatee beard suited him and made his face look thinner. (Townsend, 2004, p. 61).

I bumped into Mohammed at the halal barbeque, and he told me that his youngest brother, Imran, is talking hot-heatedly of flying to Afghanistan to fight alongside his Islamic brothers. (...) Mohammed said that Imran had tried to persuade his girlfriend, Kyle Dodge, to cover herself up with a burka, and walk 10 paces behind him. But she said that she had a good pair of legs and she weren't going to cover them up for nobody. (Townsend, 2008, p. 279)

However, Townsend advocates for dialogue and understanding between those two allegedly irreconcilable worlds. Efforts are made by both parts to reconcile and find the things that link them discarding those that set them apart. The members of Adrian's book club in *Adrian Mole, The Prostrate Years*, their peculiarities, opinions and attitudes, represent Townsend's compromise with a peaceful, multicultural world which has in its plurality an engine for positive transformation and advancement:

Mr. Carlton-Hayes started by saying, 'I ought to open this meeting by admitting that I am not an advocate of organized religion but, having said that, I was profoundly moved by the Koran. (...) He then invited Mohammed to say what the Koran meant to him. Mohammed said quietly, 'The Koran as I interpret it helps me to live my life. I follow its rules, I take comfort from its teachings and I use it for guidance, when I am uncertain and need to hear God's word'. (...) The rest of us joined him, forming a circle, and Mohammed began to chant. As he read, his body swayed in a slight oval pattern, (...) 'Each Muslim interprets the Koran in their own way,' he said. (...) At the end of the meeting we spontaneously applauded Mohammed, and I think he was quite pleased. (Townsend, 2004, p. 402)

4.3.5 Age

Age is the less stable component of identity and operates at multiple levels. On the one hand, it is definable both individually and collectively, resulting in the formation of the so-called "generations", a term which links the personal evolution process of its members with the global events that shape every historical period.

On the other hand, age acts as a distinctive measurable and objective defining trait of a person and, at the same time, it is culturally constructed in a variety of dimensions, including the self-perception of individual's own age. Therefore, so multidimensional a concept is deeply permeated by history which interacts with individualities and collective experiences alike.

In the following pages I will be dealing with the idea of "age generation" and the social and literary construction of age in Townsend's works paying special attention to *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series and particularly to *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* with occasional references to other novels of the series or further volumes such as *Number Ten* or *The Queen and I*.

Townsend's presentation of age in the aforementioned works is performed through a mediated depiction on the part of some of her main characters. These, impose their own vision upon the reader who, in turn, needs to "remake" the impression obtained from Adrian Mole's or Jack Sprat's subjective perception. For instance, the readers know about Grandma Mole only from her grandson's written words. It is however, the readers' life-experience and individual knowledge which places Adrian's quotes on his grandma within the proper coordinates, so as to capture the full dimension of the character according to her age. When Adrian says: "My grandma came and was disgusted with the state of the house. I showed her my room which is always neat and tidy and she gave me fifty pence" (Townsend, 1991, p. 16), he is portraying Grandma Mole as the traditional type of woman, educated to be clean, neat and tidy as a token of respectfulness which, in addition, separates her from lower classes' dirt (and its connection with Victorian images of dereliction) and high classes' disdain for menial jobs such as cleaning.

Either narratively or discursively, Townsend's portrayal of characters according to their age is based on the broad concept of generation which Vincent proposes as composed of three sociological elements: "a sequence of collectivities, the product of time, and a set of contingent relationships between the groups through time" (Vincent, 2005, p. 582). In the three cases, time and historical experiences interact at a collective level around a specific historical event, giving shape to a collective memory and developing certain sets of relationships among social groups, creating every generation's consciousness as a distinctive component of its idiosyncrasy. From all the age groups that appear in Townsend's work, I have chosen to focus on the three of them who better represent the generational succession; the elders belonging to the so-called "Greatest Generation", the baby-boomers, and their children, the generation X, who were teenagers in times of

Margaret Thatcher and started their adulthood during Tony Blair's terms of office.

4.3.5.1 The Greatest Generation

Grandma Mole, Bret Baxter, Archie Tait, Norma Sprat, Filomena Tussaint or Mr. Bunion are but a few of the elderly populating Townsend's books. They all belong to the so-called British Greatest Generation, that generation of British citizens whose lives were deeply marked by war (Elliott and Humphries, 2015). World War I was the background of their childhood and turned their world upside down. Many of their fathers fought and died in the war and so did some of them (like Adrian Mole's grandfather) who were old enough to be conscripted, while their mothers remained serving the country from the home front or even the rear front replacing soldiers.⁹³ Little did they realize that they were going to be forced to repeat history some years later for, as adults, the historical event that articulated their lives was World War II, a terrible disruption of the weak status quo derived from The Great War.⁹⁴

World War II (as had happened during World War I) altered the traditional scheme of everyday life and social interaction. Once more, women gained access to working positions previously occupied by men, they supported their country by working for the different civil corps, took care of their families while men were fighting and devoted all their efforts to coping with the restrictions of rationing and the loss or absence of the usual family breadwinner. The challenges these women had to face left an indelible trace in their way of conducting their lives once the war was over. Most of them were used to doing their best in the kitchen with the shortage of important supplies, keeping their children fed and their houses clean, and maintaining the country's moral standards despite the disturbing presence of American GIs (Mackay, 2002). The war imposed restrictions, ways of acting and living and modelled a special set of relationships with the environment.

Among all of Townsend's elderly characters, Grandma Mole is the one who best fits this image of the women of the Greatest Generation. Grandma's insistence on cleanliness and tidiness stems from the education the women of her generation

⁹³For a summarized and very clear account of the participation of women in both World Wars, see Brayley and Bujeiro, 2001.

⁹⁴For an excellent audiovisual account of the facts and persons behind the term "Greatest Generation", see the BBC series of the same title (2015), based on the book by Sue Elliot and Steven Humphries.

received, still based on the Victorian conception of hygiene applied both to home and personal appearance.⁹⁵

My grandma told my father off for growing a beard. She said, 'You may think it amusing to look like a communist, George, but I don't'. She said that even in the trenches at Ypres my grandad has shaved every day. sometimes he had to stop rats from eating his shaving soap She said that my grandad was even shaved by the undertaker when lying in his coffin, so if the dead could shave there was no excuse for the living. (Townsend, 1991, p. 59)

Those Victorian values are also reflected in Grandma Mole's righteousness: "My grandma has got eyes like Superman's, they seem to bore right through you. To divert her I told her about the red-sock row but she said rules were made to be kept" (Townsend, 1991, p. 81).⁹⁶

In her religious faith:

My grandma made us get up early and go to church. My father was made to comb his hair and wear one of his dead father's ties. (...) My father kept standing up when we were supposed to sit down and vice versa. I copied what grandma did, she is always right. (Townsend, 1991, p. 75)

And her absolute contempt for any form of idleness:

Grandma came to my room at 8 a.m. this morning and ordered me out of bed!
 She said, 'You've been pampered enough. Now, pull yourself together, and go and shave that bum-fluff off your face!'
 I weakly protested that I needed more time to find myself.
 Grandma said, 'I need to wash those sheets so get out of bed!'
 I said, 'But I am angst-ridden.'
 'Who wouldn't be after lying in a bed like a dying swan for a week!' was her callous reply.
 My Grandma is a good honest woman, but her grasp of the intellectual niceties is minimal. (Townsend, 1991, p. 354)

From the war and its aftermath, Grandma Mole inherited an almost sacred respect for food, as a result of long hours queuing for it:

⁹⁵For a full account of the Victorian conception of hygiene, see Smith, 2007.

⁹⁶Cfr. with Grandma Mole's attitude when dealing with Barry Kent and his bullying practices.

Helped grandma with the weekend shopping. She was dead fierce in the grocer's: she watched the scales like a hawk watching a field-mouse. Then she pounced and accused the shop assistant of giving her underweight bacon. The shop assistant was dead scared of her and put another slice on. (Townsend, 1991, p. 74)

According to Mackay (2002), the British State tried hard to keep feeding the citizens as they tried to supply the army but due to the extenuating circumstances of the times, they were unable to avoid food rationing and queuing for food turned into a time-consuming, everyday activity:

The limited rationing that sufficed in 1940 had by July 1942 given way to a much more thorough system (...) Queuing for food was one of the home front's characteristic activities, if standing still for hours can be so described. It followed not just from the fluctuations in the supply of certain foods but from the fact that retailers, wanting to appear fair, did not allow customers to build. (Mackay, 2002, p. 196)

These long hours waiting to retrieve one's rations and queuing for whatever extra goods were available surely took its toll on these women of the Greatest Generation and led them to develop an almost religious sense of food processing and home cooking: "I cleared off to my grandma's at dinner time. She cooked me a proper Sunday dinner with gravy and individual Yorkshire puddings. She is never too busy to make real custard either" (Townsend, 1991, p. 32). Not only from the nutritious point of view, but also as a way to cure anyone's distress:

I rang my grandma and she came round in a taxi and took me to her house and put me to bed. (...) It's very clean and peaceful (...) I had just had a bowl of barely and beef soup. it's my first proper nourishment for weeks. (Townsend, 1991, p. 44)

A clean house, a groomed appearance, properly cooked food, an active conduct, an inveterate patriotism (mixture of traditional Englishness and ardent monarchism, religious compliance and a matter-of-fact attitude are Grandma Mole's guidelines; the perfect summary of both Victorian values and resilience in war times.

The term Greatest Generation is ample enough to encompass a variety of social situations and collective and individual experiences alike, all of them shaped by the terrible events of World War II which galvanised that multiplicity and, for a while, masked social, economic and political differences. Claims for social

revolution on the part of British left-wing thinkers such as Orwell: “Either we turn this war into a revolutionary war or we lose it” (Orwell in Meyers, 2002 p.192) were obscured by the impositions of wartime and later discarded by the Socialist practicalities of Labour politics after the war.

An example of the aforementioned role played by the traumatic experience of war is also to be found in Townsend’s pages with the presence of one of her most peculiar characters; Bert Baxter, the pensioner Adrian Mole helps after school (to avoid extra Maths lessons) and who is going to become a constant presence in Adrian’s life until his death at 105 after having lived through both World Wars in person. Politically, Bert embodies a communist ideology forged in his youth as a result of certain experiences which clashed with his working class background:

Bert Baxter gave me ten pence and asked me to get him the Morning Star from the newsagent’s. So he is a communist as well as anything else!” (Townsend, 1991, p. 25)

Bert showed me his old horse brushes and photographs of the big house where he worked when he was a boy. He said that he was made into a communist when he was there. (Townsend, 1991, p. 47)

Baxter’s personality could not be more different from Grandma Mole’s:

Bert Baxter was lying in a filthy-looking bed smoking a cigarette, there was a horrible smell in the room, I think it came from Bert Baxter himself. The bed sheets looked as though they were covered in blood, but Bert said that was caused by the beetroot sandwiches he always eats last thing at night. (Townsend, 1991, p. 24)

Both of them shared the bad times during and after the war, a common experience which blurred temporarily the irreconcilable, ideological differences between them:

Grandma and Bert Baxter came to our house to watch the wedding because we have got a twenty-four-inch colour. They got on all right but then Bert remembered he was a communist and started saying anti-royalist things like ‘the idle rich’ and ‘parasites’, so grandma sent him back to the Singh’s colour portable . (Townsend, 1991, p. 98)

Townsend’s depiction of the elderly covers important aspects of their lives; their houses, their relationships with their families, their moral and ideological principles, their connections with the past and, eventually, in some cases, their death.

Most of her elders live in council houses or bungalows which reflect the different personalities and living conditions of their dwellers:

I went into Grandma's home this morning. Everything was the same as ever. My G.C.S.E. certificates were still there, framed on the wall. My dead grandad Albert's photograph was on the mantelpiece. The clock was still ticking. Upstairs, the linen lay folded in the cupboard and in the garden the bulbs pushed through the earth. (Townsend, 1994, p. 239)

My father helped us to move all the furniture out of the ground floor of Bert's house, the woodworms came out to sunbathe. When we lifted the carpets, we discovered that Bert had been walking about on a layer of dirt, old newspapers, hairpins, marbles and decomposed mice for years. (Townsend, 1991, p. 109)

There was no food in the house that Jack could bring himself to eat. And unpaid bills had been stuffed behind the tea caddy on the end of the draining board. The whole house needed cleaning, airing and restocking with necessities. (Townsend, 2003, p. 40)

There is an evolution in the description of the elderly homes over time in Townsend's pages. As the welfare state loses the battle of time and economic change, the presentation of these homes evolves and is painted with a darker brush. From the sad tinge of Bert Baxter's Alderman Cooper Sunshine home, somehow alleviated when he marries Queenie, an old lady also staying at the home in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*:

Pandora and I went to visit Bert, but it was a waste of time really. His room had a strange effect on us, it made us not want to talk about anything. (...) We passed the lounge on our way out. The old people sat around the walls in high chairs. The television was on but nobody was watching it, the old people looked as though they were thinking. Social Services have painted the walls orange to try to cheer the old people up (Townsend, 1991, p. 122)

To the gloomier vision of Frank Bruno House where Prince Philip is admitted when the Queen is unable to take care of him in *Queen Camilla*:

She waited longer than usual outside Frank Bruno House, constantly pressing the buzzer (...) She took out her identity card; the woman glanced at it and allowed the Queen to step inside. The smell hit the Queen like a blow. The air felt heavy with invisible, malodorous substances. (...) Bunion gestured towards the covered dishes stacked on Prince Philip's bedside trolley. 'He's not been eatin',' he said, 'and

I don't think 'e' s' ad anything to drink either. We've been in a right pickle.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 289)

Gender marks a subtle difference as far as family connections are concerned. Townsend's female elders do usually keep in touch with their families, although not living with their children. They become an important presence in their grandchildren's lives, especially when these are young. However, they receive visits, though sometimes perfunctory, from their sons and daughters (mostly sons): "Fitzroy Toussaint was surprised to find that his mother was not at home. He always called on Fridays at 1 p.m. and she was usually on the doorstep, waiting for him" (Townsend, 1993, p.132).

Whereas male elders are definitely alone, in some cases despite having children or other relatives:

I cursed God and socialism for sending this pensioner to me (...) I made him as comfortable as one-legged, one-lunged old man with pneumonia can be and took his phone number. I ascertained from him that he had no relations (of course), and no friends (*naturellement*), he had quarrelled with his neighbours (*mais oui*) and guess what? *Quelle surprise! He is alone in the world.* (Townsend, 2000, p. 42)

As if their gender condition imposed certain ideological position, elder women in Townsend's books tend to be Conservative. They perceive themselves as the depositories of the traditional values which thrived during war time and establish a stark contrast with the female baby-boomers of the following generation. On the other hand, most of their male counterparts in Townsend's narrative are left-wing:

The next person I picked up was another old man called Archie Tait. (...) when I asked him sarcastically if he was alright he said no, he had pneumonia (...)
 'Shouldn't you be in bed, or in hospital?' I said.
 'No,' he said, 'I must vote, I'm a socialist.'
 'Mr. Blair wouldn't want you passing out at the polling station,' I said.
 'Mr. Blair?' he said, disdainfully. 'I've just said I'm a socialist, I'm voting Socialist Labour, for Arthur's party.'
 'Arthur?' I checked.
 'Arthur *Scargill*,' he said as if taking to an idiot. (Townsend, 2000, p. 40)

What all of them have in common is an indissoluble link with their past as the most comforting asset of their lives, left behind and brought back to present through tiny details delicately unveiled by Townsend: “I went into Grandma’s home this morning (...) I found her Yorkshire pudding tin. She had used it for over forty years” (Townsend, 1994, p. 239). “Pandora and me searched Bert’s house looking for his army paybook. Pandora found a pile of brown and cream postcards that were very indecent. They were signed *’avec tout mon amour chéri, Lola’*” (Townsend, 1991, p. 86).

What is left from the Greatest Generation? Despite all the possible differences described by Townsend either referring to a way of living or ideology, she stresses the very difficult situation the sons and daughters of this age group are forced to endure at the end of their lives:

The Prime Minister said, ‘Why are you closing, Mr Rainbow [the Home for the Elderly where Edward Clare’s uncle is living]. Isn’t there a demand for places in residential homes?’ ‘Yes, but me and Mrs Rainbow are in business first and foremost and the profit margins on old people are nor worth the candle, to be honest. I need another fifty quid a week per unit to make it worth me and Mrs. Rainbow’s time. And then there’s all this new legislation coming in. I’ve got to widen all the doors by an inch.’ ‘But where will they all go?’ asked the Prime Minister. (...) ‘I don’t know where they’ll go, but in three months’ time this place will be a private clinic: breast augmentation, Botox, liposuction, that’s where all the money is now.’ (Townsend, 2003, p. 239)

A generation overtaken by the baby-boomers, who, despite the repeated celebration of their sacrifices on Remembrance Day, see their values fading away little by little, who end up in sordid elderly homes or council estate bungalows, most of them all by themselves and in very difficult conditions, some about to cross the line of poverty, neglected by the same country they fought for:

I might as well do the country a favour and top myself. Nobody wants me, nobody would miss me, I’m just a bloody nuisance. It’s a crime to be old in this country and I’m being punished for it. (Townsend, 2006, p. 291)

4.3.5.2 The baby boomers

The term “baby boom” was born in the United States and is used to describe the wave of births which occurred in the aftermath of World War II. For some authors

(Jack, 2011 cited by Bristow, 2015) the American coinage of the word makes it somehow ill-fitted for British reality but the term was popularly accepted and widely used by the media until it became common in Academia as well.

The dismal postwar context did not offer the best circumstances for a generation to be born and, against all odds, there was a steep rise in the number of births between the years 1946 and the mid 1960s, although the population recovery had already started in 1943 (Bonvalent, Clement & Ogg, 2015). This birth-wave did not reach the peak of the one after World War I but in the years immediately after World War II, there were significant differences that caused the longer duration of the population increase for some thirty years: low mortality, a rise in fertility, political issues such as the introduction of welfare provisions and policies (let us remember the Beveridge report as the basis for the subsequent *Family Allowances Act*, various *National Insurance Acts* or the *National Health Service Act*, among others) and psychological factors which are not to be disregarded:

As in 1920, children represented a source of immense hope, a reason to live and a means of healing the wounds of war. Unlike the interwar period, however, far from fading, this belief in the future persisted and even grew as the years went by. One reason for this is that, in contrast to the aftermath of the Great War, both victors and vanquished were helped to restart their economies after 1945. (Bonvalent, Clement & Ogg, 2015, p. 25)

Strictly speaking, two baby boom waves were identified, the first one from 1946 to 1953 and the second one starting in 1960 up to the 1970s. Both took place under very different socioeconomic conditions as the affluent scenario in Britain of the sixties was quite different from the grim situation of the aftermath of the war.

The baby boomers' generation⁹⁷ Townsend is depicting in her works is the one formed by those born in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when the living conditions were still hard:

My father said, 'You' re forgetting one thing, lad, me and your mother are baby boomers. We were born in the 1940s. We grew up without central heating, tissue paper, vitamins, hot wa ter on tap. We walked four miles to school and four miles back in short trousers through the snow. It will take more than a few draughts to kill us off. (Townsend, 2004, p. 59)

⁹⁷Due to its literary connotations, I preferred the term "generation" to the more sociometric "cohort" despite the latter is widely used by the sociology sources consulted.

Most of the World War II baby-boomer generation are to be pitied. My mother has often spoken about the overcrowded classrooms: 'Three of us to a desk, four of us to a book.' She claims that even the pavements were crowded when she was a girl, and that she had to queue to go on the swings in the park. (Townsend, 2000, p. 271)

Despite this difficult childhood, this generation knew how to create a world on their own, absolutely different from the one inherited from their parents. They did not suffer the terrible experience of a war although their lives were not free from austerity or authoritarian family entourages who certainly helped model their evolution and the definition of brand new sets of premises which defied the traditional morality:

Although the baby boomers had to endure postwar austerity and most of them received a rigid and authoritarian upbringing, they were nonetheless sheltered from the harsher realities of life as children, living in a 'timeless', 'asepticised' bubble. Some paint a picture of happy and uncomplicated family life, glossing over the problems caused by housing shortages, while others dwell more on what they perceive to be a severe, inflexible and hierarchical upbringing both in the home and at school - a straitjacket from which they were determined to break out. (Bonvalent, Clement & Ogg, 2015, p. 63)

Thus, baby boomers were responsible for the protest movements of the sixties, the changes in politics and social morality, second-wave Feminism, etc. However, as time went by (and they grew older), they turned into a living, socioeconomic contradiction. Being a long-lasting phenomenon, the two successive waves of baby boomers coincided in time with part of their own generational renovation, their offspring aspiring to and claiming for their own space, a space occupied by the old-fashioned baby boomers. Therefore, these soon became the target of bitter criticism. For instance, they were discredited for their lack of morals:

Dear Ms. Mole, It was most kind of you to have me on your Boxing Day celebration. I enjoyed myself enormously (...) As a young man I campaigned for the principles of free love, and the rejection of bourgeois values. It was good to see these values being practised so assiduously in your family. (...) my mother has taken this short note to be a total vindication of her louche and undisciplined behaviour since she came to sexual maturity. (Townsend, 2000, p. 292)

As they did not fight in a global conflict which might have led to significant loss of life and, at the same time, benefited from the improvement of health

care and social security provisions, the baby-boomers have been considered the culprits of the steep increase of social security spending and the blockage of the labour market.⁹⁸ To this respect, Jennie Bristow studies how baby boomers have been constructed as a social problem in Britain. Her interest stems from the realisation of the number of narratives that contemplated this generation's responsibility for "an extraordinary range of social problems" (Bristow, 2015, p. 4) which included environmental destruction, the bank crisis, growing materialism, sexual immorality, etc., although she also uncovers the contradictions of these claims against baby boomers as the alleged social problem that they represent is not clearly and objectively defined. Nevertheless, literary baby boomers, such as Townsend's, are deemed responsible for long lists of failures, including those of their own children:

This time Leonora [Adrian Mole's psychotherapist] invited me to imagine that the chair was my father. she gave me an African stick and I beat the chair until I lay limp and exhausted (...)
 'He's not a bad bloke, my Dad,' I said, 'I don't know why I went so berserk.' Leonora said, 'don't talk to me, talk to him. talk to the chair. The chair is your father.' I felt stupid addressing the empty chair again (...) I forced myself to look at the upholstery in the eye and said, 'Why didn't you buy me an anglepoise lamp when I was revising for my G.C.S.Es?'(Townsend, 1994, p. 51)

What is most shocking, is that despite the wave of negativity and contempt with which the baby boomers are regarded, it seems that they have turned into a valuable market target for many of them are already retired and others are on their way to doing so, probably in the most favourable conditions in the history of the modern Social Security System. Therefore, property or leisure companies have turned their eyes to the once discredited baby boomers now seen as future, solid customers:

For years, marketers ignored the older consumer unless they were selling a product or service specifically targeted at seniors, such as dentures or nursing homes. Now, seniors have become one of the hottest of all target markets. (...) Businesses may see opportunities in the 50-plus market, but they are not always sure how to approach it. (Hilt & Lipschultz, 2013, p. 83)

Meanwhile, women of the baby boom era had to face their own difficulties. They are to be credited for the second-wave feminism but, eventually, some of them

⁹⁸See, for instance Shute, 2015.

were forced to go back to exemplify the old adage *kinder, küche, kirche* and take care of their grandchildren. Those of Townsend's women in that situation, react angrily to an imposition on the part of their own offspring despite the initial (but reluctant) agreement and must fight again, as in their good feminist times, to recover their own spaces of freedom:

I said to my mother, 'You've got to go home, William's roaming in the house and Dad's asleep or dead!' 'He's your kid, and it's your father,' said my mother, belligerently. 'You go home, I'm staying for the celebration'. (Townsend, 2000, p. 60)

A bombshell! My mother has told me that she is no longer prepared to look after William when I go back to work!. Ivan has asked her to travel the world with him (...) I suggested that they take the lad with them. It would broaden his mind. She said, 'You don't get it, do you selfish sod? I'm through with childcare.' (Townsend, 2000, p. 212)

4.3.5.3 The Generation X

The Generation X is formed by those children born of baby-boom parents between the mid-sixties and the end of the 1970s or the early 1980s. Subjected to a great deal of controversy, the Gen, Xers, also called "the lost generation" or "baby busters" did not endure the hard conditions of part of their parents' childhood but they are thought to be the generation least interested in politics so far, marked by the cases of divorce among their parents, although more open to alternative forms of family, sexual orientation or conceptions on class and race. They are the generation who lived their childhood under Thatcherite policies, suffered their parents' unemployment and sold their souls later to the "loadsamoney" craze of Thatcherism and the feeble social reformulations of Blairite New Labour.

The New Right politics implemented by the successive governments of Margaret Thatcher placed children, whose own entities were being erased by the comprehensive school system, as part of the family unit around which the rhetoric of the party constructed its discourse, mainly based in the traditional concept of family:

Children were not, and should not be, self-determining creatures- they need firm instruction, 'discipline' and 'standards'; these commodities were part of a national culture, independent of party politics and now under threat; this threat came, variously, from Labour politicians peddling the comprehensive ideal, from educational bureaucrats and from teachers who were progressive', 'trendy' or merely 'bad'; the nature of this threat was, chiefly, that it undermined the simple distinction between correct and incorrect. (Pilcher & Wagg, 1996 p.17)

This alleged place of children was to be reinforced by the *Children Act* of 1989, designed as the legal cornerstone to protect children against the abuses of uncaring parents and incompetent social workers. Particularly the latter were the focus of strong attacks by Conservative representatives as the living embodiment of those Labour policies which, as a reflection of the interference of the State in citizens' everyday life, not only had proved to be ineffective but clearly dangerous.

Several scandals involving the role of social workers took place between 1980 and 1987 epitomised by the deaths of the children Jasmine Beckford, Tyra Henry and Kimberley Carlile due to the injuries caused to them by their parents or step-parents while social workers were investigating their maltreatment (Winter & Connolly in Pincher & Wagg, 1996). This led the media to consider that the deaths of the children "occurred because of social workers' failure fully to understand and use their authority (as prescribed in family and child legislation) to appropriately deal with "high risk" situations (p. 33). The effects of the damaging activity of social workers were extensively highlighted and resulted in the creation of an "anti-social workers campaign", particularly focused on the pernicious and disruptive effects on community life that their unfruitful interference in families' lives brought about:

Once again, social workers were criticized for being unaccountable and not listening to the views of the parents or children. Their "abuse" of the children was described in relation to the children being 'dragged from their families at dawn...and bundled off to secret locations' and then 'subjected to relentless pressure little short of brainwashing to make them admit the abuse. (Winter & Connolly in Pincher & Wagg, 1996, p. 35)

These were quotes extracted by Winter and Connolly from *The Daily Mail* of 5 April 1991. Similar lines date back to the same year, which leads the reader to imagine the sort of social panic of the time. It was such an important issue that it seemed almost impossible not to find it in literature. Even in the context of one of the most famous of Townsend's works, *The Queen and I*:

The Queen's eye was taken by a lurid oil painting of two young children which hung over the fireplace. The Queen asked who they were. There was a slight pause, then Tony said, 'It's Vernon and Lisa, our kids (...).' The Queen was surprised; she had assumed that the Threadgolds were childless. She said so. Beverly said, 'No we got kids but they've bin took off us.' The Queen asked, 'By whom?' Tony said, 'Social Services, they've 'ad' em eighteen month.' (...) The Queen said to him across the fence, as she took out her key, 'I am sure

that you and Mrs. Threadgold were excellent parents.’ (Townsend, 1991, p. 116)

Thus, while some of Thatcher’s children were dancing to Abba, Queen and Duran Duran or experimenting with sex, others were trying to cope with the role assigned to them by the Thatcherite governments in their fight with previous Labour policies, and, of course, to suffer the physical and emotional consequences of parental abuse, most of the time in an economically depressed environment.

The Generation X members grew up in times of uncertainty and are surrounded by controversy. Their own definition might include a wide range of terms totally opposed to those prefixed terms used by cultural commentators or the media which, in a way, diminishes the originality of their own character and gives way to antithetical definitions:

Many members of the Generation X (...) fill in the blank with such descriptors as diverse, individualistic, determined, independent and ambitious:

The term ‘Generation X’ worked its way into popular vernacular after the release of Douglas Coupland’s 1991 novel, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, about three twenty-somethings who are underemployed, overeducated and unpredictable. (...) However, most of the other markers have negative overtones such as ‘slackers’, ‘latch-key generation’, ‘MTV generation’ and ‘baby busters’. (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000, p. 221)

Politically speaking, the Generation X did not have to face neither the shocking conflict of a World War as their grandparents had, nor the difficult conditions of the baby boomers’ childhood, but were forced to come to terms with social distress, political disillusionment and economic crisis.

Xers had never experienced political innocence and have lived within a negative climate of politics their entire lives. This climate has caused many to turn their backs on political involvement, in turn, causing a potentially devastating problem in terms of Xers’ future civic and political responsibility. (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000, p. 221)

Townsend, being a baby boomer herself, does not fail to spot the many contradictions of her age cohort. This way, although fictitious, Adrian Mole certainly exemplifies the characteristics of the Generation X: “Like most younger generations, many Xers resent their parental generation -the baby boomers- for leaving

them to repair or endure a society on the brink of collapse” (Pendergast & Pendergast, 2000, p. 222).

As we have seen, the Generation X grew up in the hard times of Thatcherism, with one or both parents unemployed, lived through the different armed conflicts in which Britain was immersed, from the Falklands war to the Iraqi war, put their hopes in Tony Blair and his spirit of Newness and modernization, only to be disappointed, and witnessed (and still do) the process of remodelling the welfare state which their grandparents created and their parents benefited from, knowing that the times of “from the cradle to the grave” were fading away. In addition, they were seduced by the “dark side” of the economic mirage of the Millenium and some of them launched into living beyond their means:⁹⁹

My solicitor, David Barwell, phoned to say that he has received the papers from Mark B’Astart and my mortgage company and warned me that there was an £8,000 short-fall. He asked me how I intended to cover this. (Townsend, 2004, p. 38)

Soon many Xers found themselves incurring debts in pursue of a lifestyle that only a few could afford, fuelled by the banks and their never-ending concessions of credits:

I cannot bear to drag the old cheap pine bed I have been sleeping in since childhood to my new cutting-edge loft apartment. (...) When I explained my predicament to my mother, she looked up from her book, *The Beginners’ Guide to Renovating Property*, and said, ‘Nobody uses money anymore. Money as such doesn’t exist. Everybody I know lives on credit. Get yourself a card’. (Townsend, 2004, p. 71)

I went to Debenhams and confessed to a kindly woman behind the counter in the furniture department that I had no money. She agreed with my mother that a store card would solve my problems (...) within a quarter of an hour and after lying about my salary and showing my passport and Visa card, I was given £10,000 worth of credit. (Townsend, 2004, p. 76)

But things were going to change shortly. The omens of the economic collapse, prophetically forecast by some and merrily ignored by the majority, turned into an actual crisis: “Daisy said, ‘You haven’t seen the news, have you? Northern Rock has gone bust.’ I said, ‘Impossible. That bank is as solid as a, well, rock.’ (Townsend, 2009, p. 111)

⁹⁹I hope the reader will forgive me for this generational, unmistakable reference which, being an Xer myself, I could not fail to use.

While I was in the car Pandora rang me on my mobile to tell me that I must sell any stocks and shares I have. She said, 'The whole financial market is going to crash.' I told her that my mother had predicted the very same thing months ago. (Townsend, 2009, p. 225)

A crisis which swept away the delusions of grandeur of many Xers:

Brett was wearing one of his expensive pinstriped suits but his white shirt had a dirty collar and he was unshaven. He sat down at the kitchen table, burrowed his face in his hands and sobbed (...) Daisy said, 'You can't have lost everything, Brett. Not in such a short time.' Brett (...) said 'The properties were mortgaged, the car was leased, and the hedge fund collapsed. The fucking banks turned me away. I lived on my credit cards for a while but the bastards closed me down.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 284)

Trying to cope with their difficulties in order to come to terms with the clash between dreams and reality, the Xers are a generation "in the middle" of the social scenario, whose memories insist on playing tricks on them, eventually to remind them that time, inevitably, passes:

A teenage boy who came in [Mr. Carlton-Hayes's book shop where Adrian works] (...) said it was the most realistic fire he had ever seen. (...) Mr. Carlton-Hayes joined us and said that it was a shame 'one couldn't buy coal these days'. The youth said, 'coal, what's that?' Mr. Carlton-Hayes patiently explained to the boy (...) The boy listened with something akin to wonder. (...) I told the boy that in my boyhood coal had been superseded by electrical storage heaters, which consisted of a pile of electrically heated bricks inside a metal box. The boy's eyes widened further. 'My father used to sell them,' I added. 'Before he was made redundant, like the miners.' Mr. Carlton-Hayes said, 'The miners were not made redundant, Adrian, their jobs were stolen from them by Mrs. Thatcher.' The youth said, 'We haven't done Thatcher yet. We're still on the First World War'. (Townsend, 2004, p. 127)

And that, as in the case of previous generations, they are gradually getting older:

Two teenage girls wearing miniskirts, crop tops and thin cotton jackets came into the shop this morning and made immediately for the fire. The sight of them filled me with irritation. If they were so cold, why didn't they wear more clothes? (...) Before they left the shop, I

asked the girls why they were wearing skimpy clothes on such a cold day.

They giggled and after the shop door was closed I heard one girl say to the other, 'What an old perv!' (Townsend, 2004, p. 145)

As we have seen, Townsend's use of the category of age, provides the reader with a vivid account of the three main generations that dominated the 20th century. All of them with their own contradictions, personal challenges and disappointments. What merely would look like age cohort figures in tables, apparently accounting for social trends and population changes, is actually a reflection of a reality beyond the papers and the fashionable terminology of baby boomers, X, Y or even Z generations: the passing of time and the renewal of society with the arrival of new members who might have inherited their parents' mistakes but who embody, at the same time, the hopes of a better future:

Bernard shouted to say that Glenn was on the phone from Afghanistan. I hurried up to the house.

Glenn said, 'Dad, something great 'as' appened. Finley-Rose is 'aving a baby. You'll be a grandad.'

Diary, my first thought was that I couldn't possibly be a grandfather, I was only forty years old. My second thought as that I wanted to live long enough to see this child grow up. (Townsend, 2009, p. 404)

Chapter 5

SUE TOWNSEND'S WORKS NARRATIVE KEYS

Having devoted the previous section to what I consider the most important thematic components present in those of Townsend's works under consideration, I would like to analyse in this section the most striking narrative devices she utilizes and how they turn into essential constituents of her trademark. I use the term "narrative device" to describe certain mechanisms used by Townsend which range from the particular ways of organizing her texts, to the presence of some referential elements whose pervasiveness imprints her lines with a certain specific character, or the framing of her narrative within strict genre codes although used in her peculiar way. The following are just but a few of those narrative devices to be found in her lines:

- The discursive and narrative uses of humour.
- The diary writing technique and other narratives of the self.
- The use of metafictional games and alternative story-telling devices.
- The depiction of dystopian scenarios.

None of them are new to literature. Some are actually backed by a long literary tradition, particularly in the British world, but all of them confer Townsend's works with a special quality worthy of a deeper study.

5.1 Townsend's discursive and narrative uses of humour

The presence of humour, in different for the reader and shapes and with a different character throughout Townsend's works is so persistent that it would be impossible to refer to her narrative without acknowledging the importance of this discursive element, and although some of her novels, articles and plays were conceived with no humoristic intention, Townsend cannot avoid her pen slipping into hilarious modes even in those cases in which the situations portrayed would require a higher degree of seriousness. On some occasions (*Number Ten, The Queen and I*), humour is the key component of the whole structure of the narrative. In others, it is artfully distilled and is to be found throughout in her pages.

Prior to any analysis of a philological nature, it seems that humour, apart from what might be termed as "a disposition of the mind" might be considered as an element imbued with a specific national character which allows the reader/listener/audience to identify a series of defining traits, of specific peculiarities of every humorous manifestation and ascribe them to a certain nationality. In this way, the term "English humour" is widely used although clearly difficult to define.¹ However, certain authors credit England and its "grace of nature" as the nation which discovered the immense potentialities of humour:

It would thus seem that, after all, the nation which first grew aware of the distinctive nature of humour was singled out for that discovery by a particularity of genius, and that to study the development of modern humour in England is to trace it on the chosen ground where the character of the race was to lead it the earliest and the richest fecundity. (Cazamian, 1952, p. 7)

Although humour has been present in the English literary tradition since the very beginning (see, for instance Hamilton, 2013 and Dyer, 1993) it seems that it was during the 19th century when it achieved this national trait:

It was also in the 19th century that humour – or sense of humour – acquired the status of a cardinal English virtue, together with others such as common sense, tolerance and compromise, thus becoming an integral part of the English life style. With the political predominance of the British Empire, the positive connotation of the term 'sense of

¹Especially taking into account what we have previously seen about the slippery condition of the terms "English" and "Englishness".

humour' became definitively rooted overseas, still surviving nowadays.
(Ermida, 2008, p. 5)

Thus, a reader familiar with the best-known English literature is able to identify a series of humorous references in a wide range of texts, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Swift, Dickens, Wilde or Wodehouse. And it is precisely within this tradition of irony, comedy and satire where most of Townsend's narrative, broadly speaking, is inserted:

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout. (Swift, 1729 in Abrams & Greenblatt, Eds., 2000, p. 2475)

As I drove back to the committee rooms, I wished that everybody over fifty years of age would commit mass suicide and give the rest of us a break. I understand that certain 'grey' industries would collapse; garden-trellis and thermal-underwear manufacturers spring to mind. But the benefits are obvious: no pensions to pay out, no residential homes for the elderly to maintain, and at least half of the disabled parking spaces outside Marks & Spencer's would be reclaimed by the young and the able-bodied. (Townsend, 1999, p. 43)

The definition and characterization of humour has been addressed from long ago by philosophers, linguists and communication experts alike, giving way to a series of theories and theoretical research in response to the multiple facets of the term. Some of them have been particularly useful in my attempt to study Townsend's use of humour exemplified either by certain extracts of some of her works or by complete narrative structures which are humorous in themselves.

The superiority theory can be traced back to classical authors like Plato and Aristotle. Later redefined by Hobbes in the 17th century, it is based on the acknowledgement of the superiority over instances other than us. The role of humour is to spot the other's mistakes in order to improve our self-consideration when compared. (Hurley, Dennet & Adams, 1977)

This theory has led to the definition of the concept of *Schadenfreude* or the pleasure we derive from reading or listening about other's misfortune, applied to the study of humour which has proved to be particularly interesting in the study of the humour component of *The Adrian Mole Diaries*.

Salvatore Attardo, building on previous research by Victor Raskin on the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour, devised a linguistic analysis of verbal humour, the well-known *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (Attardo, 1991) whose applicability to the analysis of a specific corpus of literary texts has been tested later by authors such as Hamilton (2013) with interesting results. Attardo and Raskin's theory describes a series of humorous techniques which operate at plot level, easily applicable to our analysis of Townsend's use of humour. In addition, their use of the Gricean model to study the humour contained in irony leads to the inevitable allusion to Pragmatics, a discipline in which the contextual framework of utterances is essential for their full understanding. This, in turn, triggers interesting references to the connection between the reader, the characters and actions in the text and the referential background these elements move around which is particularly rich in the case of Townsend's narrative. As Ermida poses:

A key pragmatic distinction to establish when studying the humorous text is the dichotomy text/context. The former encompasses not only the semiotic features of the message, but also its structural principles and the nature of the channel (oral/written) through which it is conveyed, whereas the latter involves the codes and conventions that preside over the circumstances of the utterance. (Ermida, 2008, p. 132)

The *Incongruity Theory* establishes that humour takes place on every occasion that an incongruity occurs but this is resolved later (Hurley et al., 1997). That is, when there is a contrast between the concept and the real object as it is considered to be in relation to the concept. Philosophers such as Kant and Schopenhauer delved into the idea in relation with the feelings of expectation and surprise that a humorous situation may provoke before being solved. In spite of the many contradictions this theory seems to incur (Venour, Ritchie & Mellies in Dynel Ed., 2011) I consider that its use of the concept of the collision of two referential frames offers an interesting perspective when analysing some of Townsend's humoristic lines. In this sense, challenging though it may seem, it was necessary to study the functioning of these theories once transferred from the study of short jokes or pun lines to longer narratives. The works by Hamilton (2013) and Larkin (2002) offer some interpretation keys which are particularly valuable when describing the role played by the reader and the so-called "pact with the reader".

5.1.1 Townsend's *Roman holiday*

Despite the efforts of New Criticism to establish a distance between the reader and the literary artefact, further literary schools and scholars have focused on the emotions fuelled by literature and the reactions and responses of the readers to the text:

The celebration of novel reading as a stimulus to the role-taking imagination and emotional responsiveness of readers—in countless reading group guides and books on the virtues of reading, in character education curricula, and in public defenses of humanities funding—augments the empathy-altruism hypothesis, substituting experiences of narrative empathy for shared feelings with real others. (Keen, 2002, p. vii)

Among these emotions, empathy has played an important role in the literary strategies developed by novelists, particularly where female fiction is concerned (Keen, 2002). This connection between reading and emotion also operates as far as other emotions different from empathy are concerned, and the least addressed by literature scholars is *Schadenfreude*: “Yet since *Schadenfreude* is intrinsically connected to the concept of empathy, it should be possible to study how it features in literary texts and whether readers experience it when reading” (Oostdijk in Van Dijk & Ouwerkerk Eds., 2014, p. 294).

The concept of *Schadenfreude* has been used in different contexts, from literary studies to psychology and social science or even music and cartoons. As hinted before, it has particularly been of interest to those theoreticians of humour when analysing the comic effect caused by watching or reading about others' disgrace. As Portman says, “Why not allow ourselves the holiday *Schadenfreude* proclaims?” (Portman, 2000, p. 25)

There have been interesting literary samples whose humour lies, precisely, in the depiction of situations in which one or more characters experience difficulties or even humiliation. At a more subtle level, authors such as Oostdijk (2014) see *Schadenfreude* in whole sections of literature classics, namely Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Especially dear to British literature are the examples of Jack Worthing who, as a baby, was left in a handbag at Victoria Station in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* or Ebenezer Scrooche's terrible night out in Dickens's *A Christmas Tale*.

Sue Townsend develops some of her characters' personalities in such a way that the reader cannot resist laughing at their repeated misfortunes. In this sense, Adrian Mole is particularly fruitful although, luckily for us, not the only unfortunate personality in her work.

As far as *The Adrian Mole Diaries* is concerned, there exists a clear antecedent of the use of *Schadenfreude* intensified by the coincidence in the adoption of the narrative form of diary, *The Diary of a Nobody*, by George and Weedon Grossmith, published serially in *Punch* between 1888 and 1889 until its release in illustrated book form in 1892. It is an extended report of the life of Charles Pooter and his family and friends. Pooter, who intends to be the new Pepys, and his wife are involved in all sorts of absurd events, most of them during the course of their everyday lives of which he gives a full account.

The existence of an unfortunate, though comic, link with Adrian Mole is evident. Suffice it to prove this connection just a stroke of the Grossmith brothers' pen:

Carrie reminded me that as her old school friend, Annie Fullers (now Mrs. James), and her husband had come up from Sutton for a few days, it would look kind to take them to the theatre, and would I drop a line to Mr. Merton asking him for passes for four. (...) I was leaning out of the box, when my tie (...) fell into the pit below. A clumsy man not noticing it, had his foot on it for ever so long before he discovered it. He then picked it up and eventually flung it under the next seat in disgust. (Grossmith Brothers, 1892)

This connection between Charles Pooter and Adrian Mole has already been stressed by several authors:

Reading the *Diary* [of a Nobody] against Adrian Mole reveals many new, fascinating shifts and fissures in the topography of the British class structure, but doing so also assures us that, in the realm of the private lives of Middle Englanders at least, a mere century is nothing; the more things change, the more they stay the same (Morton, n.d.)

And in fact, the reader cannot avoid laughing at the similarities between some of the episodes in which both characters are involved. It seems that, despite their good intentions, the elusive fortune rewards them but with further trouble and affliction:

Got a parcel from Auntie Susan [a prison warden]. It is an embroidered toothbrush holder and it was made by one of the prisoners! She is called Grace Pool. (...)

Had a letter from Grace Pool! This is what it said:
Dear Adrian,
Thank you for your charming letter of thanks. It fair brightened up my day. The girls are all joshing about my suitor. I am due for parole on June 15th, would it be possible to come and see you? (...)
See you on the fifteenth then.
Yours with fond regards, Grace Pool
P.S. I was convicted of arson but that is all in the past now. (Townsend, 1991, p. 70)

However, the main difference between Pooter and Mole stems from the fact that they acknowledge their position with regard to their surrounding circumstances in quite a different way. Pooter conducts his life happily but for a few mishaps that occasionally obscure it:

My dear wife Carrie and I have just been a week in our new house, "The Laurels," Brickfield Terrace, Holloway. (...) We have a little front garden (...) We have a nice little back garden which runs down to the railway. We were rather afraid of the noise of the trains at first, but the landlord said we should not notice them after a bit, and took £2 off the rent. He was certainly right; and beyond the cracking of the garden wall at the bottom, we have suffered no inconvenience. ... (Grossmith Brothers, 1892)

Whereas Adrian Mole posits an existentialism worthy of mockery:

I have the most terrible problems with my sex life. It all boils down to the fact that I have no sex life. At least not with another person. I lay awake last night, asking myself why? Why? Why? Am I grotesque, dirty, repellent? No, I am none of these things. Am I normal-looking, clean, pleasant? Yes, I am all these things. So what am I doing wrong? (...) Do I exude an obnoxious odour smelled by everyone else but me? If so I hope to God somebody will tell me and I can seek medical help from a gland specialist. (Townsend, 1994, p. 12)

Adrian Mole's misfortunes are always caused by others. He, in his usual 'mole way', is unable to see his own responsibility in the bad things that happen to him, which he confronts in the most neurotic way as we see in the previous extract. On some occasions, the comic effect on the reader, is provoked by the connection of a series of episodes whose cause-consequence link Adrian is unable to perceive. This way, his bad luck is passed onto other characters that just happen to be there, which contributes greatly to providing the whole episode with a comic resolution:

I am lonely. The only person I spoke to at any length today was a Japanese tourist, who stopped me outside Tesco's in Covent Garden (...) She asked me how to get to Torquay. I was pleased to be able to direct her to Paddington station where she would be able to buy a ticket to Devon. (...) It was in the paper today that a Japanese woman had been found wandering around Torquay 'in a state of distress'. Apparently she had wanted to go to Turkey and had been misdirected to the Devon resort by a Londoner unable to understand her heavily accented English. Coincidence! (Townsend, 1999, pp. 136-139)

Not only is *Schadenfreude* provoked by Adrian's sad and embarrassing life but also by other characters in a variety of situations in other Townsend's books. In the case of *Number Ten*, the comic effect caused by the misfortunes of Edward Clare is mainly aimed by Townsend at stressing the disconnection between the Prime Minister and the British people. All the *Schadenfreude* sequences amount to that which is, on the other hand, the focal point of the novel:

Prime Minister's Questions started badly (...) The leader of the Opposition (...) said contemptuously, 'Is the Prime Minister aware that the rail network of the southeast came to a complete standstill yesterday morning (...) The Prime Minister rose to his feet (...) 'Will the Prime Minister tell us when he last travelled on a train?' Edward replied instantly with an answer that he immediately regretted and was to change the rest of his life. 'I am delighted to be able to tell the right honourable gentleman that I last travelled on a train three days ago, with my wife and my children.' (...) In the press gallery a photograph was being passed from hand to cynical hand. None of them could remember having laughed so hard or for so long as they did at the sight of the Prime Minister in a baseball cap and denim jacket sitting with his knees around his ears on a toy train called the Choo Choo. (...) The laughter became hysterical as the delighted politicians dissected the picture. (Townsend, 2003, p. 56)

In the case of *The Queen and I*, *Schadenfreude* operates at different levels. On the one hand, it pervades the whole narrative, as we cannot avoid but laugh or at least smile at the difficulties of the Royals when trying to cope with the everyday vicissitudes of the low working-class environment they are forced to live in after the victory of the Republican Party:

It was Beverly in an orange dressing gown taking frozen washing off the line.
'Harris found a rat,' said the Queen.

'A rat?'

'A rat, look!' Beverly looked down at the dead rodent at the Queen's feet. 'Am I to expect more?'

'Don't worry,' said Beverly. 'They don't come in the houses. Well, not often. They've got their own complex at the bottom of the gardens,' (Townsend, 1993, p. 54)

On the other hand, it works in a multiplicity of directions and it can be found in some passages where all the participants' negative experiences are intertwined, which far from creating a gloomy atmosphere, increases the comic effect of *Schadenfreude*:

The Queen Mother needed people to love her. (...) She saw Spiggy look up from his labours. There was adoration in his eyes. She engaged him in conversation, enquiring about his wife.

'Run off,' said Spiggy.

'Children?' 'She took'em wiv' er'.

'So you're a gay bachelor?' tinkled the Queen Mother.

Spiggy's brow darkened. 'Who's been sayin' I'm gay?'

Turning to Spiggy, Charles said, 'What Granny meant to say was that you probably have a carefree existence, unshackled by domestic responsibilities.'

'I work hard for my living,' said Spiggy, defensively (...) Charles was discomfited by this misunderstanding. Why couldn't his family simply talk to their neighbours without...er....constant....er....? (Townsend, 1993, p. 82)

Thus, we see that Townsend's use of *Schadenfreude* is mainly functional, employed to stress the comic effect of the situations portrayed. It is basically presented in different ways:

- As the natural consequence of the clumsiness of a character and his/her inability to see things as they actually are, as in the case of Adrian Mole, which, in turn helps progress the narrative discourse and contributes to create a sense of anticipation in the reader who is expecting the character to "fall from grace" once again as the narration develops.
- As a trigger of the novel's main argument line in both, *The Queen and I* and *Number Ten* where the situations the characters must face at the beginning cause them a terrible sense of distress. The narration proceeds by showing the ways in which they try to overcome these difficulties.

- As the result of the inability of the characters to interact in unusual contexts which, in a way, slows down the narrative pace but adds an interesting descriptive element for it provides the reader with a wider context to place the characters in question:

Nigel rang. Hysterical. Graham [Nigel's guide dog] is dead. The vet said he'd probably been dead at least twelve hours. (...) 'Anyway Mole, I want you to come over and bury Graham in the back garden. (...) the deceased Graham lay in a Habitat storage box, surrounded by potpourri. (...) To my great annoyance the box was too wide for the hole and I had to retrieve the spade and resume digging. I am not homophobe but digging a dog's grave whilst being watched by a dozen or so critical gay men is not an experience I want to go through again. (Townsend, 2009, p. 48)

5.1.2 Townsend's *punchlining*

The contribution of Salvatore Attardo to the analysis of humour stems from the Semantic Script Theory of Humour developed previously by Victor Raskin. According to Raskin, a text can be considered a joke if it is compatible, either partially or fully with two different scripts and those scripts are opposite (Attardo, 2001).

The concept of "script" was used primarily in Psychology and it later developed in other fields such as Artificial Intelligence and Linguistics. Attardo defines script (though in a broad sense) as:

An organised complex of information about some entity, in the broadest sense: an object (real or imaginary), an event, an action, a quality, etc. It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how a given entity is structured, what are its parts and components, or how an activity is done, a relationship organised, and so on, to cover all possible relations between entities (including their constituents). (Attardo, 2001, p. 2)

These scripts operate at joke level in short texts, but they are also to be found in complete passages of wider narratives. In this case, the so-called *punch* and *jab* lines are used to introduce the contrasting script whose activation triggers the humour charge. The difference between punch and jab lines is their position within the narrative; punch lines are to be found at the end, closing the textual units, and jab lines are located in the body of the text (Attardo, 2001). Both elements are present in a multiplicity of passages in Townsend's narrative. In the

case of punch lines, these are mainly used to close a passage whereas jab lines contribute to the development of larger passages by increasing the humorous effect being located within the main body of the extract:

It was Geography today so I sat next to Pandora for a whole hour. She looks better every day. I told her about her eyes being the same colour as the dog's. She asked what kind of dog it was. I told her it was a mongrel. (Townsend, 1991, p. 20)

Attardo (2001) describes the different elements operating in jokes as Knowledge Resources, knowledge that is accessed prior or at the same time that the joke is produced. These elements are:

- Language (LA)
- Narrative Structure (NS)
- Target (TA)
- Logical Mechanism (LM)
- Script Opposition (SO)

When applied to the passage previously selected, we see that at language level, the lines are composed by statements and it is easy to identify that the punch line is located at the end, as a way to close the extract, thus helping the functional organization of the information in the text which progresses linearly until this punch line which is the key item to produce the comic effect. The narrative structure is the reproduction in reported speech of a conversation which is characteristic of the narrative form chosen by the fictive author, namely Adrian Mole. This, in turn, introduces an interesting narratological element when referred to the narrative voice. In this case, as the protagonist is the one reproducing the conversation, the reader has limited access to the whole situation and can only imagine Pandora's reaction to the punch line which is not intended as such by the fictive author but it is indeed by the real author. In this sense, Pandora is not the target of the narrative joke but in fact she is of the actual joke as, eventually, she is compared to a dog and, in addition, to one of no breed, exactly the opposite of the image of Pandora created by Adrian from the first time he sets his eyes on her. The situation is one of naive innocence, and it could be shared by a non-humorous text: two teenagers at school, one of them, Adrian, in love with the other, Pandora. Not a surprising or strange setting at all. However,

in this usual situation, the punch line establishes an implicit parallelism as the main logical mechanism to trigger the comic effect. Pandora is compared to a dear member of Adrian's family entourage and important element in almost all the books of the series, the dog who has no name nor breed. Therefore, the Script Opposition operating here is girl/mongrel. The comparison is implicit and the humour is intensified by the fact of the Pooteresque inability of Adrian to see the inconvenience of the final remark as his dog is very much loved.

There are other passages of Townsend's works which could be subjected to this analysis as they are composed following the joke structure containing a punch line. Their functional working is the same but the punch line implies a higher degree of inference on the part of the reader which entails that further knowledge resources are activated in order to fully understand the remark. As a matter of example, let us see the following passage from *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*:

Pie Crust [the TV producers] rang and asked me to go to the Late Night with Derek and June show on Thursday (...) Derek and June is filmed at studios in Soho at midnight. (...) I left the studio as soon as the filming was finished. A spotty girl in denim shorts and thigh boots was leaning against my car smoking a cigarette. 'Hand job?' she said. 'No, it's fully automatic,' I replied. (Townsend, 1999, p. 366)

The dialogic and apparently innocent structure is contextualized by previous elements such as "Soho" and "midnight" which provide the reader with important information so as to later get a full understanding of the passage. Again, the non-intended punch line stresses Adrian's blindness with reference to the actual situation of being offered sex in the street. Thus the target is Adrian himself who turns out to be the laughing stock of the full passage and the logical mechanism operating is a combination of referential ambiguity and a process of reasoning from a false premise, that is, that the girl is talking about the car when, actually, she is talking about masturbation.

In other cases, the structure of joke + punch line is used by Townsend to stress certain constitutive elements of the characters involved in them, which reinforces the plot of the narrative as a whole:

Vince (...) had entertained Camilla and Charles with his terribly amusing stories about Wormwood Scrubs. Charles had said, 'Prison sounds rather agreeable compared to Gordonstoun School, where I

often woke in the night to find my narrow iron bed and rough blankets covered in a light sprinkling of snow from the opened dormitory windows' Beverly (...) replied, 'You were bleedin' lucky to' ave a blanket. I slept under me dad's army greatcoat.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 1)

At a logical level, the mechanism of juxtaposition operates to remark the differences between both participants', Prince Charles and Beverly Threadgold, lives. The narrative operates like a sort of Russian dolls for it starts with Vince's stories about his time in prison and from this element, it proceeds to Charles' particular prison of his boarding school, activating, in turn, a third element, Beverly's deprived childhood linked to the previous script by the reference to the winter cold. The whole passage effect is to clarify that, despite all the difficulties experienced by His Royal Highness in his school days, they are not comparable to those suffered by a member of the proletariat in the aftermath of World War II. I would like to conclude the analysis of some specific humorous lines in Townsend's works by remarking on the way she develops some excerpts by structuring them through a mechanism I termed as "accumulation". The narrative establishes a general frame, proceeds with a jab line, and it is subsequently followed by a second one, to finish with a punch line. Throughout the whole process, the comic effect constantly accumulates by using the jab lines as a scaffolding structure, to reach the highest level of hilarity with a final effect built upon the rest of the structure. In the following case, the different implications of both jab lines and the final punch line supply the reader with an implicit knowledge about Adrian's father and both his parents situation as a couple:

[Adrian is working in a restaurant called The Hoi Polloi in London]

GENERAL FRAME

In the lull between the pudding and the Nescafé-and-After-Eight course, I phoned Wisteria Walk. My mother answered. 'Your dad's got something wrong with his scalp,' she said.

FIRST JAB LINE

'He's always had chronic dandruff,' I reminded her.

'No, this is something else,' she quavered. 'He saw the back of his head in the bedroom mirror and went hysterical. I had to call the doctor out.'

'What's wrong with him, then?' I said.

SECOND JAB LINE

'Apart from the fact that he is being cuckolded.'
She ignored my mumbled reference to her probable infidelity. 'His scalp has gone black,' she said. 'It's especially bad on his bald spot. Dr. Chaudri's baffled. It looks like gangrene,' she added. 'Gangrene!' I shouted. (...)

PUNCH LINE

'If it's gangrene he'll have to have his head amputated,' I said. (Townsend, 1999, p. 53)

The difference between both jab lines and the punch line is that the former's referential link is "head" and therefore, both are part of the same sub-plot of the narrative. The punch line reference is "gangrene" and the set of implications of the term when contrasted to folk knowledge on the matter. As we have seen, the humour content of the extract "accumulates" through the different remarks by Adrian and reaches its highest level with the punch line and the impossibility of its propositional content to be actually performed which not only stresses the humour content of the preceding lines but also represents the climax of the whole passage.

We have seen so far how Townsend deals with humour at the level of joke narrative and therefore some of her lines are susceptible to be studied in terms of the General Theory of Humour developed by Attardo. However, this is, by no means, the only possibility when dealing with the topic as Townsend's works are so rich that they open a multiplicity of analytical perspectives: "Box sat at the table and said, 'You're an educated man, ain't you, Mr. Mole?' I replied I was a bit of an autodidact. 'I ain't interested in your sex life'." (Townsend, 2008, p. 188)

5.1.3 Incongruity or the funny side of collision

As I previously hinted at the beginning of the section, there have been several approaches to the study of humour. Particularly fruitful are those focused on the pragmatic mechanisms that operate when humour is present, which were mainly developed in the 1980s for both, Pragmatics and humour, rely on the contextual common ground shared by the participants in the linguistic/pragmatic exchange as the indispensable component of communication:

Overall, pragmatics is a field addressing communicative processes (or language as deployed by its users) and its relation to language form,

coupled with the cognitive and socio-cultural study of language use. In other words, pragmatics presents a wide interdisciplinary spectrum of topics capitalising on the interactions of cognitive, social, and cultural phenomena and processes (...) The field's intrinsic diversity is also manifest in pragmatic humour studies. On the whole, the past few decades have witnessed intensive development in research into humour within a number of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and even medicine. (Dyner, 2011, p. 2)

Bearing in mind Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) and the maxims in which it articulates, it is undeniable that humour is provoked, at a communicative level and in a variety of situations, by flouting one of the maxims or the CP as a whole, as in the following example where the maxim of relevance is openly flouted: 'Do you have a degree?' she enquired, almost looking me in the eye. 'No', I admitted, 'but I did once share a flat in Oxford with Doctor Pandora Braithwaite.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 11)

However, the communicative exchange does actually take place. What is more, the reader/listener is supposed to "understand" the joke or the punch line despite facing a non-cooperative text:

I said, 'Violence never solved anything.'
He said, 'Tell me about it. I'm in fucking Afghanistan.'
I asked him exactly where he was. he said, 'I'm shelterin' behind the wall of a compound.'
'From the sun?' I asked
'No, Dad.' he said in a flat voice, 'not from the sun.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 359)

On reading terms such as violence, Afghanistan, sheltering or compound, the reader immediately assumes the context in which the dialogue takes place. What seems dissonant is Adrian Mole's last intervention which deviates the attention from the conflict context previously established and focuses on the meaning of sheltering, therefore violating the maxim of relevance again, as his questions seems absolutely irrelevant in relation to the pre-established context. In addition, the mental schemata activated in the reader's mind by the war vocabulary are momentarily shocked by the introduction of a colliding element which forces a readjustment and assumption of the new element to realize its full meaning when contrasting it with their world knowledge, thus identifying the humorous component of the text in question, which implies that the violation of the CP does not lead to misunderstanding.

However, some authors (Yus, 2003) disregard the Gricean approach to humour and favour the possibilities offered by the Relevance Theory developed by Sperber and Wilson (1992). When facing an utterance which is considered to flout any of the maxims of the CP, the listener/reader will try to find a more relevant interpretation despite the extra interpretative effort that the process requires. In this sense, both participants in the humorous communicative exchange play an active role:

The responsibility for the enjoyment of humour is the addressee's and requires a context-bound interaction between particular cognitive environments and the skilled humorist who manages to predict relevance seeking cognitive operations in the addressee's mind. (Yus, 2003, p. 1331)

One of the most interesting and rich sources of humour in Townsend's works stems from her multilevelled use of incongruity conceived as the clash of any given situation (or text) with the mental model into which it allegedly fits. The fact that not all the incongruous situations are humorous implies that pragmatic elements play a major role in the eventual achievement of the comic effect. Both participants in the communicative event must cooperate, though special cooperative effort is made by the listener/reader so as to choose the correct interpretation which is not the propositionally correct, but the one that triggers the comic effect. In the case of Townsend, incongruity operates at different stages, sometimes offering a range of meanings which goes beyond the mere communicative exchange to stress important sociocultural aspects related to class, gender and similar issues. In addition, never is the reader misled to choose a different interpretation of incongruous situations from the one wisely conceived by the writer.

A first level of incongruity applies to some of Townsend's narratives as a whole as the general plot is perceived in that way by the reader. It is the case of *Number Ten* and *The Queen and I*. The reader faces a text which may defy assumed preconceptions on how the world is conceived: a Prime Minister touring the country undercover, dressed like a woman, or a Royal Family forced by a Republican government to live in a low working class environment. Of course, both facts could actually happen but the probability is quite small. Against this mental framework, the narrative develops and confronts the reader with a constant readjustment of their previous notions in every episode:

- The Prime Minister in a woman's outfit- The Prime Minister removing the hair of his legs - The Prime Minister being harassed by a truck driver-The

Prime Minister flirting like a woman.

- The Queen in a council estate house- The Queen trying to shop for food with a scant budget -The Queen in a National Health System hospital - The Queen claiming an advance of her social security allowance.

In both cases, incongruity is used not only as a narrative mechanism but as a tool to expose social and political issues which are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the core element of Townsend's writing.

A second level of incongruity, resulting in one of the most effective ways in which Townsend exploits humour, is the incongruity of speech and specifically that obtained from the particular use of language register. Partington (2006) defines register as the interaction between the linguistic shape of spoken and written discourse, the participants and the contextual circumstances. Therefore it is both a linguistic and a social phenomenon:

It is linguistic in being characterized by a particular vocabulary and phraseology, a particular syntax, a particular discourse organization and, if spoken, very possibly by special intonation patterns and voice quality. It is social in that there is a consensus in a given discourse community about which features normally belong to or are appropriate in a given context, that is, whether the register matches the situation. And it is psychological in that any individual member of the community can recognize whether a piece of discourse which has been produced is appropriate in the current situation. (Partington, 2006, p. 74)

Due to this plurality of perspectives, register, and specifically the social consequences of its misuse, has proved to be an extremely productive source of humour either spoken or written. Register-based humour has been addressed by several authors who have highlighted different aspects concerning the use of register to create a humoristic effect such as the lexical choice (Venour et al., 2011) or the conflict between the status of the event described and the language used for that description (Partington, 2006)

In the hands of Sue Townsend, register turns into a key tool to trigger or stress the comic effect. In addition, as it usually happens with the components of her narrative, register is used to highlight important distinctive aspects of the characters and situations described.

Adrian Mole is the quintessential master of high register, displayed most of the times in the least appropriate circumstances, and related to his unfulfilled, intellectual pretensions which provokes unquestionable comicality:

Mother, My father telephoned me at 11.00 am this morning in some distress. He had just witnessed the unsavoury sight of you and Martin Muffet side by side in the aforementioned' s bed. Your explanation 'testing the tog rate' seems a little, on the face of it, unsatisfactory (...) My father and I are now convinced that your relationship with Martin Muffet is of a sexual nature (...) I am confined here in Oxford with matters of domestic and intellectual nature but as soon as I have fulfilled my commitments I will hasten home and attempt to sort out the mess. (Townsend, 1991, p. 448)

Despite Adrian's pomposity, the world outside is often in charge of putting things right and in most cases, there is a shift from a higher to a lower level of register, what Partington defines as the "bathetic shift" (2006, p. 78)²:

Since being introduced to WWF (World Wrestling Federation) at my mother's house, he [little William, Adrian's son] is now addicted (...) I pointed out to William that wrestling was merely the sublimation of sub-erotic activity. The hulks refused to accept the truth -that they have more in common with Oscar Wilde than they can possibly know. William shouted, 'For God's sake, stop talkin'!' (Townsend, 2008, p. 256)

Gracie came in and climbed on to Glenn's knee. She stroked his unshaven chin and said. 'You know that dead hedgehog we saw, Dad. Is it in heaven? I was about to explain the points of difference between the proponents of creationism and intelligent design when Glenn said, 'Yeah, course it is, Gracie. It's in heaven and it's 'appy.' (Townsend, 2009, p. 213)

Incongruity of register also operates from low to high level, with the same comic effect: "Dear Adrian, I hope you had a very happy Christmas and that you will have a happy and preposterous New Year" (Townsend, 1999, p. 292). In this case, confusion between prosperous and preposterous by Sharon Botts, apart from the comic effect, is used to emphasise class differences. The same as in the case of the Royals in *The Queen and I* or *Queen Camilla* where the display of high register

²Bathos could be defined as the change in register from high to low which can be involved with irony, sarcasm or diverse linguistic resources. The term was coined by Pope in 1727 to describe the comic effect of some writings when trying to be sublime and elevated as imbued by "pathos".

is absolutely out of place in Hells Close, the council estate where the Royals are living:

Camilla asked, 'How's the bowl performing, darling?'
'The bowl is performing absolutely splendidly,' said Charles.
'Clever old you for spotting it,'
'It was on the pavement with a stack of others. One was dazzled by the choice of colours.'
'You did well, my darling. Red is terribly jolly.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 2)

A third level of incongruity with a comic effect is based on the sheer contrast between reality and its perception on the part of the character. This is one of the most salient humoristic resources used by Townsend in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. The main character is, on many occasions, unable to see the reality in which his own disgrace is inserted and only through his words does the reader have access to it, thus participating in an interesting narratology game as we have seen. The reader is placed by the author in a privileged situation able to see both sides of the narrative. The clash between these different levels of reality, unperceived by the fictive character is shown to the reader who cannot help but laughing:

Mr Lucas from next door has been in to see my mother and father who are still in bed. He brought a 'get well' card and some flowers for my mother (...) Mr. Lucas came in this morning to see if my mother needed any help in the house. He is very kind. (...) Mr. Lucas was in the kitchen again when I got home from school. My mother is better now, so why he keeps coming round is a mystery to me. (Townsend, 1991, p. 17)

Adrian's blindness, stressed by his surname as I have previously pointed out, has got its antecedent in his "forefather" Charles Pooter. Both characters, as we have seen, perceive their worlds in their particular manner with a blindness which provokes the most comic effect:

My dear wife Carrie and I have just been a week in our new house (...) beyond the cracking of the garden wall at the bottom, *we have suffered no inconvenience*. (...) There is always something to be done: a tin-tack here, a Venetian blind to put straight, a fan to nail up, or part of a carpet to nail down (...) that reminds me there is no key to our bedroom door, and the bells must be seen to. The parlour bell is broken, and the front door rings up in the servant's bedroom, which is ridiculous. (Grossmith Brothers, 1892)

My last blind date ended prematurely when Ms. Sandra Snape (non-smoking, twenty-five-year-old, vegetarian: dark hair, brown eyes, five foot six, not unattractive) left Burger King in a hurry claiming that she'd left the kettle on the stove. I am now convinced, however, that the kettle was an excuse. When I returned home that night, I discovered that the hem was down at the back of my army greatcoat. Women don't like scruffs. (Townsend, 1994, p. 11)

This décalage between fiction and reality also applies to the character's self perception:

I think I am turning into an intellectual (...) None of the teachers at school have noticed that I am an intellectual. They will be sorry when I am famous. I have decided to paint my room black (...) Finished last bell at 11,25 p.m. Know just how Rembrandt must have felt after painting the Sistine Chapel in Venice (Townsend, 1991, pp 17, 77)

And to his vision of social, economic and historical affairs. In this case, the reader is way ahead of the fictional character which emphasises the comic effect, as shown by Adrian's comment on the eve of New Labour victory in 1997:

The day after tomorrow on May 2nd, as dawn breaks, I predict that the Labour Party will just scrape in, and will form the next government. Talk of a landslide victory is hysterical rubbish whipped up by the media. (Townsend, 1999, p. 3)

Eventually, this topic of blindness when confronted with reality is exploited by Townsend to the full. She introduces some scenes in which the main issue is, precisely, the inability of one of her characters to see things as they are but, despite the illuminating contribution of a second character, the episode quickly shifts to a very different angle and the key fact remains unsolved and unaccounted:

'Is your marriage in trouble, Aidy?'

I told her that Daisy seemed a lot happier recently since she'd gone back to work.

Pandora raised an eyebrow and said, 'she certainly looks quite beautiful lately. She's lost weight and she has a new wardrobe. Does she work long hours?'

I said, 'They work late a few times a week.'

Pandora sighed and said, 'You can't see the rhinoceros in the room, can you?'

I corrected her, saying, 'You mean elephant in the room.'

She said, 'I cannot bloody bear misquotations. The quote was taken from Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, which is an absurdist allegory of the rise of Nazism in Germany.'

What a woman she is, Diary! (Townsend, 2009, p. 305)

Finally, a fourth level of incongruity to be found in Townsend's works is what I termed "the incongruity of the everyday". The comic effect is provoked by the failure of certain characters to conduct a life in certain contexts previously unknown to them, as in the case of the Royals in *The Queen and I*:

Diana showed the Queen around the house. It didn't take long. The décor had been chosen by someone who had never heard of Terence Conran. Diana shuddered at the purple and turquoise wallpaper on the walls of the marital bedroom, the polystyrene ceiling tiles, the orange paintwork splodged over the sash window. She thought, I'll ring Interiors tomorrow, ask the editor to come round with paint charts and wallpaper samples. (Townsend, 1993, p. 45)

At this level accumulation also occurs as Townsend designs complete sequences by accumulating the comic effect provoked by some lines which are built upon previous lines resulting in increasing comicality. In the following extract from *The Queen and I* the elements in conflict refer both to the Royals' inability to adapt their lives to their now working class entourage and the incoherent reaction of the Queen Mother when confronted with the dark situation the Royal Family is suffering and her bewilderment towards an everyday problem, together with the angry reaction of the Queen to her mother's attitude. Every line delves more than the previous one in the comic effect and is, in turn, built upon it until the last sentence which summarises the whole extract and reinforces its comic nature. The effect is hilarious:

The Queen Mother was laughing at the ridiculous smallness of it all. 'It's a perfectly adorable bungalow,' she laughed. 'It's darling. It could be a kennel for a large dog.'

She clutched her mink coat to her and inspected the bathroom. This brought a fresh pearl of laughter displaying teeth that feared the dentist's chair.

'I love it', she pealed. 'It's so containable, and look, Lilibet, there's a hook for one's peignoir.'

(...)

'There's no lavatory paper, Lilibet.' whispered the Queen Mother.

'How does one obtain lavatory paper?'

She cocked her head to one side coquettishly and waited for an answer.

'One has to buy it from a shop,' said Charles (...) 'One does?' The Queen Mother's smile seemed fixed, as though it had been commemorated on Mount Rushmore.
'How simply thrilling.' (Townsend, 1993: 80)

5.1.4 Irony and sarcasm are served

Researchers have dealt with irony from different perspectives. Most of the studies conducted so far focus on a linguistic approach to the issue with special attention to its pragmatic components. It is undeniable that irony establishes an interactive game between propositional content of the ironic utterance and its actual meaning within a given context. However, there has been some controversy regarding the processing of irony. Irony was thought to require a process of violation of Austin's felicity conditions or Gricean Maxims. However:

Even in instances where no such violation was indicated, comprehenders of verbal irony were shown to have inferred such a violation on the part of the speaker. It thus appears that this condition is required for verbal irony comprehension. The second claim concerning felicity conditions for well-formed speech acts, however, was argued to be too narrow. A set of utterances of verbal irony was shown to adhere to these felicity conditions and yet still be interpreted ironically. (Gibbs & Colston in Gibbs & Colston Eds., 2007, p. 6)

This way, ironic utterances are focused on the speaker/writer who juggles with the elements at hand: intention, propositional content, context and even suprasegmental cues in the case of verbal production in order to produce irony.

In turn, Linda Hutcheon (2005) explores irony from the point of view of the listener/reader as the active element in the process of identifying an utterance as ironic. The listener/reader activates further meaning to supplement the previous propositional content. According to her irony "involves relations of power based on relations of communication. It unavoidably involves touchy issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion" (Hutcheon, 2005, p.2). This is what she calls "the politics of irony".

Attardo covers the role of both participants in the ironic exchange through the terms *humour competence* and *humour performance*:

Humour competence is the capacity of a speaker to process semantically a given text and to locate a set of relationships among its components, such that he/she would identify the text (or part of it)

as humourous in an ideal situation. This humour competence is analogous and in fact part of the semantic competence of speakers (...) Humour performance is, on the contrary, the actual encounter of two speakers (not necessarily physically copresent), in a given actual place and time, i.e., in a given context. In its simplest prototypical form, speaker A says something and speaker B processes the text (what A said) and, having recognized the humour, reacts by laughing. (Attardo, 2002, p.161)

Precisely due to this plurality of perspectives that irony poses, its connection with humour is particularly interesting as both share some aspects which can involve common functions, for instance the social component as both serve opposed purposes of group-affiliation and group-exclusion or the possibility of lessening the ironic/comic effect by means of retractability or decommitment (Attardo, 2002)

Townsend's contribution to the comic effect of irony is mainly based on her criticism of the social and political circumstances of her time. However, there are other moments, which are worth to be reproduced fully, when her irony targets other topics such as family relationships.

Dear Pauline,

Your dad and me was sorry to hear about your trouble and we hopes as it is now cleared up. We never did take to George; he had a nasty temper and we think as how you're better off without him. As regards the money, Pauline, well, we only got a few good days at the potato picking so we are a bit short ourselves at the moment, but we enclose a postal order for Adrian, as we know he has got a sweet tooth.

If you would put your trust in the Lord, Pauline, you wouldn't keep having such trouble in your life. God only punishes the heathens and the unbelievers. We was shocked last Christmas as to how much smoking and drinking went on under you roof. You wasn't brought up to it Pauline. Your dad has never touched a drop in his life nor has he been a slave to nicotine. We are decent God-fearing folk what knows our place and we only wish that you would take after us before it's too late.

Uncle Dennis, Auntie Marcia and Cousin Maurice have moved out of the caravan and into a council house. They have got all modern facilities, Auntie Marcia jokes that it is just like Buckingham Palace. Perhaps when you have had the unwelcome baby you will come and see it for yourself.

Anyway Pauline,

We re praying for you. (Townsend, 1991, p. 271)

Townsend presents Adrian Mole's grandparents as uneducated potato farmers whose grammar limitations and stinginess are a consequence of their humble

origins. In fact, some relatives of them consider that living in a council estate house is a step up the social ladder.³ In addition, their religious righteousness stresses their daughter Pauline's sinful nature to their eyes. Free from a poor, sober, sad and God-fearing background Pauline has turned into what they abhor most, and, to make things worse, his husband has left her pregnant and bankrupt. Once well aware of the family fresco presented by Townsend, and counting on the previous information about Pauline filtered through his son's words, the reader cannot help but laugh at the irony that Pauline's answer distils. So acid a reply changes any possible negative preconception about Pauline and her alleged neglect of her family and tips the scales towards her lively, second-wave feminist, chain-smoking, eager-for-life existence:

Dear Mam and Dad,
Sorry about the short delay in replying to your wonderfully comforting letter, but I have only just emerged from a drunken stupor. Adrian was ecstatic to be sent the postal order for 50 pence and rushed straight out to buy me a can of lager. He's such a thoughtful kid. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to come down and inspect Auntie Marcia's council house but I fear that I will be quite unable to drag myself away from the endless round of parties that my life now revolves around. You know what us hedonists are like- living for kicks and not going to church. (Townsend, 1991, p. 272)

The reader is nicely invited by the author to discard the literal meaning of Pauline's words written in a higher register, as they violate all sorts of pragmatic maxim, cooperative principle or felicity conditions. Moreover, according to Hutcheon's interpretation of irony, Pauline is placed by Townsend in a privileged position with respect to her parents, whose authority is diminished by their daughter's remarks, thus placing the reader clearly on her side.

The situation of reproachful complaining that sometimes tinges family relationships is reproduced in later moments of Adrian Mole's life with Pauline censoring Adrian's detachment. Irony and sarcasm pervade the letter exchange between mother and son:

I received the following letter this morning. Dear Adrian, Remember me? I am your mother, Pauline Mole. Currently residing in bed five, ward 20, Glengorse District Hospital (...) I am very hurt that

³Please, note the reference to *The Queen and I* in the connection between the council house and Buckingham Palace and the ones with *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts* (cfr. section 5.2) regarding the father figure.

you haven't been to see me, sent me flowers or written a card. Your neglect is impending my recovery. (...) P.S I have stopped smoking. It is too difficult to manage in an oxygen mask.

Dear Mum. Is it really three weeks? It has gone by in a flash. I'm pleased to hear that you have stopped smoking. I have collected up the ashtrays (all 31 of them) and thrown them into the wheelie-bin so as to lessen the temptation when you get home. I intended to send you a bouquet of flowers but, quite honestly I was horrified at the prices they were asking. (Townsend, 2008, p. 23)

On other occasions, irony morphs into sarcasm and results in quite comic remarks:

I chose library work because I wanted to immerse myself in literature (...) My days are spent taking books off shelves and putting books back on the shelves. Occasionally I am interrupted by members of the public asking mad questions: 'Is Jackie Collins here? To this I reply, after first glancing round the library in an exaggerate fashion. 'Highly unlikely, madam I believe she lives in Hollywood.' (Townsend, 1991, p. 430)

5.1.5 Visual gags and slapstick

The use of visual gags and slapstick humour can be traced back, possibly, to the very beginning of mankind and has been exploited by comedians, clowns, official playwrights, popular comedy actors, film makers, ad experts, etc. ever since.⁴

Despite the cinematographic or theatrical nature of this type of humour, written texts may be good examples of visual comedy based on accurate depictions of both images or displays of movement. The wide range of humour mechanisms present in Townsend's lines also includes some examples of this visual humour:

Volume of traffic, innit', said Ali. 'It's always like this at Walsall' (...) By the time traffic was moving again the three men had memorized the words of 'Knock on Wood' and had even perfected an in-car dance routine which included synchronized knocking on each other's heads. (Townsend, 1999, p. 212)

There was an angry crowd outside the terminal at Edinburgh airport. The air traffic controllers had walked out (...) At one-thirty pm., with ninety-seven planes about to land or take off, the computer system had gone dangerously berserk and had started showing an old episode of Star Trek. (Townsend, 2002, p. 110)

⁴To illustrate this, see the film *Quest for Fire* (Annaud,1981).

In this case, the comic effect is provoked by the incongruity of a visual image from a very well known futuristic TV series in a context which, despite not being totally unrelated from the visual point of view, it is indeed from the logical point of view. The resulting image is much in the line of the film *Airplane!*, and just picturing it in our minds makes us laugh.

In the line of visual and slapstick humour, Townsend includes some priceless passages which show her mastery in action depiction. Actions are described by using the enumerative way typical of a time-table, with times specified up to the minute. The repeated use of anaphora helps create the cinematic sequencing of events and contributes to stress the detachment of the literary author, in this case, Adrian Mole, who is writing a detailed report of a class trip for the school headmaster (Please, note the mounting state of distress of the coach driver):

Class Four-D's Trip to the British Museum
7am Boarded coach.
7.05 Ate packed lunch, drank low-calorie drink.
7.10 Coach stopped for Barry Kent to be sick.
7.20 Coach stopped for Claire Neilson to go to the Ladies.
7.30 Coach left school drive.
7.35 Coach returned to school for Ms Fossington-Gore's handbag.
7.40 Coach driver observed to be behaving oddly.
7.45 Coach stopped for Barry Kent to be sick again.
7.55 Approached motorway.
8.00 Coach driver stopped coach and asked everyone to stop giving
"V" signs to lorry drivers. (Townsend, 1991, p. 114)

As the episode progresses, things inevitably complicate more and more. Repetition, this time of the word "sick", is again "evocative" enough of the situation in the coach.

9.40 Barry Kent sick in coach.
9.50 Two girls sitting near Barry Kent are sick.
9.51 Coach driver refuses to stop on motorway.
9.55 Ms Fossington-Gore covers sick in sand.
9.56 Ms Fossington-Gore sick as a dog. (Townsend, 1991, p. 114)

Finally, mastering the polysemic value of words, Townsend culminates these lines by superposing two "layers of disaster" with a fantastic comic load. And it is only 11.55!:

- 11.50 Coach breaks down at Swiss Cottage.
11.55 Coach driver breaks down in front of AA man. (Townsend, 1991, p. 114)

The reader can easily identify further examples of slapstick humour in Townsend's works. In some cases with interesting intertextual references. The following extract describes Adrian Mole's pains to find a place he needs urgently as his illness forces him to use it more frequently than necessary. According to Jerry Lewis "comedy is a man in trouble" (cited by Dale, 2000, p. viii) and Adrian is, indeed, a man in trouble at this moment. The connection with the film *The Party* (1968), starring Peter Sellers, is not to be missed:

I excused myself to Pandora and hurried to the downstairs lavatory. Finding a queue I then ran upstairs to the lavatory next to Daisy's office. However, the door was locked and so I ran down endless corridors until I could hardly hear the disco music from downstairs. By now my need was urgent and I grew increasingly desperate to find a lavatory. I began opening doors and switching lights on, but none of the bedrooms were en suite. I ran up a further flight of stairs and eventually came to a series of smaller rooms, obviously servants' quarters. In one of this I found a washbasin ... (Townsend, 2009, p. 299)

5.1.6 Intertextual linking threads

Picturing poor Adrian running upstairs and downstairs again and again, trying to find a toilet provokes the immediate mental connection with poor Peter Sellers doing the same in *The Party*. Both episodes have further consequences though, this time, of a different character. Therefore, the comic effect of Townsend's passage is caused not only by the slapstick humour displayed at a descriptive level but also by the link between both scenes, activated by the intertextual use of the guidelines set by the film sequence and followed by the written text.

As we see, intertextuality may also play an important role in humour as it helps, through a number of devices, trigger the comic effect once the hearer/reader establishes the connection between both texts involved, which, in turn, implies the pre-existing knowledge of the text used to create the intertextual reference (Ermida, 2008). For instance the following passage from Adrian Mole's diary displays a funny intertextual connection: "Glenn has been very subdued lately, he has stopped talking and is off his food. (...) I have consulted the handbook *Parents Are From Hove, Teenagers Are From Brighton*" (Townsend, 2008, p.

242). It is, of course, a comic twist of the title of the well-known book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (Gray, 1992). In addition, the title of the original book stresses the main idea of its content, that is, men and women are, metaphorically, from different planets. Brighton and Hove are separated by some mere three miles and form a unitary authority which adds an extra component of comedy to Adrian's title book.

Ermida acknowledges the different uses of intertextuality in comedy that entail the notions of parody and allusion (Ermida, 2008, p.162). In this sense Townsend's works display a great deal intertextual allusions with a hilarious comic effect. These allusions are based on cultural references from cinema, TV and literature, introduced as hooks for the readers so that they can picture in their minds the exact image she is dealing with, provoking an immediate laughable effect. Some of the most fruitful intertextual allusions and their references are:

- Cinema (apart from the one previously analysed):

Our cat has gone mad (...) His name is Max and I think he suffers from a depressive illness of some kind (...) If you waggled a ball of wool in front of him, he would gaze at it with a bleak expression, like an actor in an Ingmar Bergman film. (...) I have a friend who is a fanatical cat lover (...) When this cat lover visits our house, Max goes into Orphan Annie mood. He shivers in the corner and whines pitifully. (Townsend, 2003, p.129)

- Theatre:

'Wouldn't you feel better if you opened the curtains and the window and got some air and light in here?' I asked.

'No,' whined my father, then sounding like Blanche Du Bois, 'I don't like the light.' (Townsend, 1999, p. 20)

- Television:

I blamed my parents because they had brought me up to hide my emotions. I recounted the time I came downstairs to find my goldfish, Cagney and Lacey, floating on top of their bowl. (Townsend, 2004, p. 415)

- Narrative:

Gary Milksop lisped, 'Have you ever written a novel, Mr. Flowers?' Flowers said that in the 1960s he had written 'the definitive English novel.' He had asked his dear friend Philip Larkin to read he manuscript. According to Flowers, Larkin had written back to say 'Hello to All This' is the novel of the age. (Townsend, 2004, p. 163)

Dear Mr. Mole, I am reading your most wonderful good writings *Birdwatching* and I am thinking that this will be good for Serb people to read also. Are you permission giving for my translate this into English from Serbian language? I am translating too *The Catcher in the Wry*, *The Lord of the Files*, and of my latest *Bridget Jones Dairy*. (Townsend, 1999, p. 380)

- Radio and cinema:

Camilla walked away down the crazy-paving path to the hen coop at the bottom of the narrow, heavily cultivated garden. She stared through the chicken wire at the hens, Eccles and Moriarty. (...) Camilla took a last drag on her cigarette and distractedly poked the still-burning stub through the chicken wire. Eccles ran forward, picked up the burning stub in her beak and then, with a flurry of feathers, leapt on to the roof of the hen house. Camilla laughed when Eccles allowed the cigarette to dangle in the manner of an avian Lauren Bacall. (Townsend, 2006, p. 6)

The particularly comic effect of this last passage stems from different intertextual elements, namely the visual image of a sexy Lauren Bacall turned into a hen and the game established with certain specifically British references, for Eccles and Moriarty are the names of two characters of the famous radio programme *The Goon Show*, starring Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, among others, of which Prince Charles, the literary owner of the hens in *Queen Camilla*, is an actual confessed fan.

5.1.7 Further comic resources....and counting

Townsend's ability to use written humour in different formats produced endless examples. I have reflected upon some of them so far but her books are like a huge shop window of many others. Sometimes humour appears in flashes of wit concerning the evocative character of some terms used as names or surnames. This way names contain an interesting quantity of onomastic information, very useful to introduce, stress or put the icing on the cake of the character in question:

Gary Milksop said that Gladys should collect her cat poems together and send them to a publisher. Kent *Blunt* said, 'What for, cat litter?' (Townsend, 2004, p. 69)

Mark B'astard, the estate agent (Townsend, 2004, p. 5)

She complained about the cold weather in Pompeii and talked about suing Cheapo Tours. (Townsend, 2008, p. 10)

Can you trust anybody nowadays? My financial adviser, Terry 'The Shark' Brighton, has been arrested by the fraud squad. (Townsend, 2008, p. 14)

Spent the rest of the morning looking through the Yellow Pages for a solicitor with a name I can trust. Chose and rang 'Churchman, Churchman, Churchman and Luther'. (Townsend, 1994, p. 28)

As a product of Townsend's mastering of literary resources, elements such as alliteration or derivation, turn into comic devices in her hands:

Jason brooded, blindly blinking back big blurry tears (Townsend, 1991, p. 203).

Angela Hacker announced this morning that the writers' group's last meeting was to be held on 'Bare Bum Beach'. My penis shrivelled at the thought (Townsend, 1994, p. 276).

I've decided to delay deciding about decision-making until I feel decidedly better. (Townsend, 1999, p. 146)

Finally, one of the most targeted issues of Townsend's witty darts is political correctness and the absurd situations which the uncontrolled use of euphemisms provokes.

I happened to mention that Bianca's boss, the newsagent, is a fat man. Cassandra snapped, 'He's not fat, he's dimensionally challenged.' (Townsend, 1994, p. 133)

I looked in the job centre window today. There were three vacancies in the window. One for a 'mobile cleansing operative' (road sweeper), one for 'peripatetic catering assistant' (pizza delivery?) and one for a 'part-time clowns enabler (!)'. (Townsend, 1994, p. 147)

I take up my pen once again to record a momentous time in the affairs of men (and, thank God because this is intended to be a secret diary, I am not required to add 'and women'). (Townsend, 1999, p. 3)

Dear Boston, First may I say how much I admire your decision to change your surname from Goldman to Goldperson. (Townsend, 1999, p. 232)

In this section I have dealt with humour, wit and comedy, the three of them pervading Townsend's literature as its unmistakable quality. Playing with words, playing with meanings, playing with incongruous situations and her characters' verbal dexterity or inability, separately or at the same time, Townsend's mastery of written humour places her as an invaluable representative of a well-established English tradition:

Jack. Well, I own a house in Belgrave Square, but it is let by the year to Lady Bloxham. (...)

Lady Bracknell. (...) What number in Belgrave Square?

Jack. 149.

Lady Bracknell. [Shaking her head.] The unfashionable side. I thought there was something. However, that could easily be altered.

Jack. Do you mean the fashion, or the side? (Wilde, 1994, p. 21)

I felt rather weak when I spotted the syringe and I looked away while a fat bloke in a white coat took my blood. To distract myself I muttered the words of the Lord's prayer. The blood-taker said, 'Pardon?' (...) 'I didn't speak,' I said. 'You did,' he said. 'You said, "Amen", Have you, too, found the Lord'? (Townsend, 1999, p. 262)

5.2 Narratives of the self

Against the background of the various themes present in Townsend's narrative, besides providing it with indispensable references, we come across one of the most important traits of her work; the use of different devices that contribute to define the identitarian diversity of some of her characters.⁵ They tell us their own stories through different mechanisms, among which the fictive diary is the most important but not the only one. Alternatively, they use their own recollections of memories, either written or oral, fictitious or real, establishing, in turn, an interesting and conflicting game between the different levels of public/private operating in them, always taking into account that we are referring to fiction no matter its eventual resolution.

⁵This is not to be confused with the narrative exploration of identities which I have reviewed in the previous chapter as here we are dealing with the format in which those are unveiled to be presented to the reader and not with the sociological category and the depiction of its various components performed by Townsend and informed by the social and temporal circumstances of her time.

5.2.1 *Dear diary.* The successful formula of revealing secrets

‘Happy people don’t keep a diary.’ I said this to Daisy this morning in bed.

She said, a little alarmed, ‘So why are you starting one again?’

I said, ‘I’m thinking of writing an autobiography.’

She said, ‘Kipling, I think you are fantastically interesting, but I’m not sure other people will. I mean, you live in a pigsty with your wife and baby, bike to work, bike back, play with Gracie, work on the garden, go to bed, read, make love and sleep. What’s to write about?’ (Townsend, 2004, p. 460)

Writing a diary seems to be a very usual way to record experiences, comments, observations or events that involves the active mediation of the person who writes, what Lejeune defines as an activity practiced by individuals who use “the pretext of creating a private space by developing or deploying (...) a dialogic relationship with themselves” (Lejeune in Popin and Rak Eds., 2009, p. 93). This particular relationship is expressed through a series of metafictional games and affects the different elements involved in the act of writing, and more specifically in the act of writing about what was lived, experienced and thought.

It seems that keeping a diary is, by far, much more common in the British tradition than in that of other countries’, e. g. Spain. Some authors have linked this divergence with the different religious affiliations in the case of both countries:

The Puritan Protestant found in the diary a tailored instrument for self-observation. It became the superior Puritan counterpart of the Catholic confessional, more scrupulously attentive to all daily acts and more purely private -a record for the eyes of God and the communication alone, without clerical mediation. (Potter, 1984, p. 85)

As far as the Spanish context is concerned (and writing without an in depth knowledge of the subject, I must confess) it appears that writing a diary is mainly restricted to teenagers, especially girls, whereas it is seldom practiced by adults although in the case of public figures, personal memoirs are, generally speaking, much more commonly accepted and quite popular in some cases, but their scope, narrative mode and projection are quite different.

Once a person decides to keep a diary, there may be a chance for it to surpass the strict limits of the private sphere in which it was conceived and come to public light. The publication of a number of these diaries implies at the same

time, the transformation of their most representative quality, their intimate and personal character, and the intervention of a secondary agent, the publisher, who decides that precisely a particular diary and not others must be published as a response to an interest on the part of the public either in the writer or the written word. In this sense, it is extremely interesting to have a look at the immense task of collecting a detailed list of actual British diaries written over five centuries accomplished by William Matthews (1950). His collection of published diaries includes references to libraries where they are kept, and notes on both the contents and authors. Nowadays, the use of technology, social networks and the internet seems to have been the solution to the conflict between public and private domains when narrating ourselves but new contradictions have arisen and have still remain unsolved (Kadar et al. Eds., 2005).

What seems undeniable is that Potter's statement referring to "the diary's potential as a literary strategy" (Potter, 1984, p.18) is quite accurate. The possibility of describing the innermost feelings and perceptions of a writing character by establishing a distance between him or her and the actual author of the pages seems too strong a temptation, and a number of authors have devoted their pages to the creation of fictive diaries which has resulted, dare I say -and as far as British literature is concerned-, in the formation of a genre with important representatives. Names such as Defoe, Richardson, Lessing, Fowles, or Lowry among many others, have used the literary form of the fictive diary and produced a wide variety of works, some of which have turned into classical representatives of British literature.

This tradition and further considerations, such as the perfect adaptation of the diary structure for radio broadcasting, may have influenced Townsend's choice of this format for her most successful series of works, the one covering the fortunes and misfortunes of Adrian Mole:

Barbara Bowyer asked Pandora what Tony and Cherie were 'really like'.

Pandora said, 'I'm keeping my trap shut about the Blairs. Adrian keeps a diary, you know.'

Nigel said, 'You'd better not write anything about me.'

I said, 'don't flatter yourself, Nigel.' and I said to Pandora, 'Your secrets are safe with me. My diary is not for publication.'

'And anyway,' said Nigel, 'who would be interested in publishing the diary of a provincial nonentity?'

I took a prawn cracker from the lazy Susan in the middle of the table and bit into it to disguise how much his remark had hurt me.⁶ (Townsend, 2004, p. 103)

Apparently, Adrian Mole's fictive diary abides by the composing rules of an actual one which implies the use of certain devices; those defined by Ruthven (2004) as the "authenticity effects". According to Lejeune (2009), the authentic diary is discontinuous, full of gaps, allusive, redundant and repetitive and non-narrative as it is not written with the same constructive elements that create the sequential effect that fiction stories have, namely a beginning, middle and end (2009, p. 170). As a previous step to compose a fictive diary and taking a real one as a starting point, Lejeune proposes the diarist to regard the diary with "the reader's eye" (Lejeune, 2009, p. 171) in order to establish a distance between the creator and its work, in other words, to objectify the personal component of diaries. This distance is, precisely, the quality of fictive diaries, crafted by their authors favouring the literary subjectivity derived from the essential nature of invented characters:

I am ill with all the worry, too weak to write much (...) Perhaps when I am famous and my diary is discovered people will understand the torment of being a 13-year-old undiscovered intellectual. (Townsend, 1991, p. 24)

Taking this as a starting point, Morton (2006) establishes the differences between both fictive products represented by the pseudo-diary and the mock-diary. In the former, the author presents fiction as real, framed to stress its authenticity and to establish a distance with the diarist, whereas the mock diary deals ironically both with the diarist and the diary itself, with humour as their essential component. In this sense, *The Adrian Mole Diaries* stand out significantly:

Dear diary, I must confide in you a most terrible secret. I am desperately in love with my therapist, Dave mutter. Not sexually (...) Dave is not an especially attractive man: try to imagine Yul Briner with an overactive thyroid, a grey ponytail and a high-pitched voice. (Townsend, 2008, p. 152)

⁶Cfr. with the introduction of *The Diary of a Nobody* and see section 5.1 on Humour:

Why should I not publish my diary? I have often seen reminiscences of people I have never even heard of, and I fail to see—because I do not happen to be a 'Somebody'—why my diary should not be interesting. My only regret is that I did not commence it when I was a youth. (Grossmith Brothers, 1892)

From the point of view of fiction, the fictive diary results from the literary interaction of a narrator, a mode of narration and a fictional addressee (Prince, 1975, p. 477). The way in which these elements operate within the text produces interesting narratological nuances, especially taking into account that, eventually, we are dealing with two authors, two addressees and just one text.

5.2.1.1 Narrator

The image of the diarist is evoked by Potter (1985) in terms of isolation and loneliness. Alone in a room, the narrator reveals all sorts of personal impressions and accounts of the daily facts. The diary is one of their most valuable possessions and requires a hidden place to be kept, far from the strangers' eyes:

Things are undoubtedly bad. However, I have William and Glenn and Andrew and a smoke- damaged diary that a fireman found under the mattress of Glenn's bed. On the cover are the words: Grossmith, 'The top Secret diary of Glenn Mole (13)' (Townsend, 1999, p. 390)

This need for secrecy stresses the special character of the narrator figure as it is an open door to express their most personal feelings. If this leads us to think of any sort of repression or marginalisation of the narrator and therefore the necessity to confide only in a fictitious artefact, Townsend is in charge of dismantling that preconception:

Bert bumbled on about the war for a while and then asked me if I had heard of my old enemy Barry Kent on Stop the Week this morning. Apparently Kent was publicising his first novel, *Dork's Diary*. I am now utterly convinced there cannot be a God. (Townsend, 1994, p. 26)

In addition, fictive diary is linked to different types of authorship which, again, favours a series of fictional games. According to Fludernik (2009), there may be a factual separation between the author of a text and the person who composed it. In the case of fictive diaries, a double sided authorship is present as we find both an executive author and a declarative author:

The executive author is responsible for the creation of the text, in other words s/he writes down the words on the page or composes text on the keyboard. (A scribe or typist, however, only copies an already composed text and is not identical with the executive author.) The declarative author is the person who features as author on the title

page, even if s/he has had nothing whatsoever to do with producing the text (in contrast to the executive author who could conceivably be a kind of ‘ghost writer’). (Fludernik, 2009, p. 15)

Adrian Mole, as the declarative author of his own story, establishes a self-centered relationship with the narration from the moment that he takes part in the events that he also describes. Therefore, the figures of narrator and protagonist are equated in this first-person narrative:

Now I know I am an intellectual. I saw Malcolm Muggeridge on the television last night, and I understood nearly every word. It all adds up. A bad home, poor diet, not liking punk. I think I will join the library and see what happens. (Townsend, 1991, p. 17)

However, as time passes, Adrian’s digressions, opinions and impressions regarding other characters or external facts which he has not been involved in gain importance and take longer sections of the successive volumes of his diaries. This may indicate a link between Adrian’s age and his degree of maturity when analysing and observing what surrounds him: “I felt rotten today. It’s my mother’s fault for singing ‘My Way’ at two o’clock in the morning at the top of the stairs” (Townsend, 1991, p. 13).

Now I truly understand the meaning of the phrase ‘mother-love’. I am fortunate to have the most wonderful mother in the world. I blush with shame when I re-read these diaries. There is hardly a positive entry about this truly kind and self-sacrificing woman. Pauline Mole is a saint-she has saved me not only from humiliation, but also from a lifetime of debt. (Townsend, 1999, p. 297)

On the contrary, maturity does not improve his mistaken perceptions; the autodiegetic character of his narration leaves uncovered angles and is sometimes distorted by the alleged changes that the passing of time provokes in our memories, but the faithful reader is able to spot these non-conformities, always counting on Townsend’s complicity:

As I watched my son chomp through his third bowl of Coco Pops, I tried to remember if I had been as obnoxious as Rosie when I was a teenager. But quite honestly, dear Diary, I feel sure that I was a happy-go-lucky lad, polite, considerate and extremely well adjusted. And, bearing in mind that I had no parental encouragement (no encyclopaedias, no anglepoise) I did quite well in my GCSEs. (Townsend, 1999, p. 23)

This, in turn, questions the reliability of Adrian's narration as, among other things, he establishes no narrative distance or detachment with it.⁷ This degree of reliability does not have to coincide with the alleged truth derived from the text nor, as stated by Prince (1982), the reader does not have to share the narrator's views at all times:

A reliable narrator is not necessarily one that I - as a reader - always agree with: after all, however honest and trustworthy he may be portrayed as, I may find his values repugnant and his conclusions stupid. Conversely, I may find the attitudes of an unreliable narrator very attractive indeed. (Prince, 1982, p. 12)

Marriage is nothing like being in prison! Women are let out every day to go to the shops and stuff, and quite a lot go to work. I think my mother is being a bit melodramatic. (Townsend, 1991, p. 38)

Questioning Adrian's reliability is the result of one evident mechanism used by Townsend to create humour. While the performance of his narrative and testimonial functions places Adrian in the position of a chronicler his, at all levels, shortsightedness regarding certain events dismantles any trace of credibility. The narrative information seems to be restricted to the one provided by Adrian directly as he is the main focalizer of the story (Genette, 1980) but, actually, it is the indirect way of conveying that information that creates a comic effect and provides the reader with the whole panorama of the narration:

Stick Insect (alias Doreen Slater) called round to our house today. I haven't seen her since my father and her broke it off. (...) When my father came to the door she didn't say anything, she just opened her coat (she's put a bit of weight on) and said, 'I thought you ought to know, George,' and turned and went down to the garden path. (...) I said, 'She's looking well, isn't she?'

My father muttered, 'Blooming'. (Townsend, 1991, p. 200)

Although meeting all the requirements of the type of narrator of fictive diary I have described and useful to study the whole series of *The Adrian Mole Di-*

⁷Cfr. with Martin Amis's *London Fields*, on the reliability of the narrator:

I've just taken a casual glance at the beginning -who knows, with a little work, it might somehow accommodate a new ending. And what do I see? Chapter 1: The Murderer. 'Keith Talent was a bad guy...You might even say that he was the worst guy.' No. I was the worst guy. I was the worst and last beast. Nicola destroyed my book. She must have felt a vandal's pleasure. Of course, I could have let Guy go ahead and settled for the 'surprise' ending. But she knew I wouldn't. (Amis, 1991, p. 299)

aries, there is another interesting fictional game in which a diarist is involved. In *The True Confessions of Margaret Hilda Roberts*, the narrator is Margaret Thatcher's young, fictitious self. The inclusion of the diary in the volume follows the convention of the "discovered manuscript" as explained in the "Notes on the Contributors" preceding the text itself.⁸ Together with a young Margaret Thatcher, turned into a fictional character, an actual Sue Townsend and a fictive Adrian Mole complete the interesting combination of fictive and real narrators of the book. In addition, the fictionalized diarist of *The True Confessions of Margaret Hilda Roberts* is given an actual entity with further (unfruitful) references to her whereabouts, which contributes to create an extraordinarily funny metafictional game, with sufficient hints for the reader to take part in it: "These diary entries were found between the pages of the *Be-Ro Cook Book for Girls* at a car boot sale in Grantham on a Bank Holiday Monday in 1988". (Townsend, 1989, p. xi)

5.2.1.2 Fictional addressee

My father got his redundancy cheque today (...) He has asked Doreen Slater to go out with him to celebrate. Guess who Maxwell's baby sitter is going to be? Yes, dear diary, you guessed right. (Townsend, 1991, p. 95)

The communicative scheme suggested by the act of writing a diary implies the inclusion of a narratee or addressee playing the part of the listener, most of the times, either in fictive or actual diaries. This is represented by the presence of the words *Dear Diary*, which embody a highly symbolic charge of abstraction being, at the same time, included in a concrete object; a notebook.

Lejeune (2009) has studied the evolution of addressing a physical object when developing personal narratives, that is when "did people start using the pretense of creating a private space by developing and deploying (and for whom) a dialogic

⁸Cfr. with:

And now, dear Diary, I am about to trust you with some top secret information: for the truth of the matter is, I THINK I AM IN LOVE. Yes! For the very first time. The President of the Association is a girl from Somerville called Margaret Roberts and I have to say she is an absolute pip! An utterly gorgeous head of nut-brown hair -I just wanted to bury myself in it. (...) She made the most brilliant speech. Everything she said was true. It was all true. I've never heard it put so clearly before. My heart and mind are yours, Margaret, to do with what you will. (Coe, 1994, p. 122)

relationship with themselves?" (2009, p. 93) According to his research, this happened in France from the last third of the 18th century and in the United States and Britain from the second half of the 19th century. However, the writing of fiction which establishes an explicit addressee within its lines was nothing new. It had been present in the so-called epistolary fiction whose history and evolution could be traced back to the beginning of the Modern Ages with Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de Amor* (1492). From a narratological point of view, there are differences between the addressee of an epistolary novel and that of a fictive diary. In the first case, the addressee may be multiple when there is a reciprocity, an exchange of letters as in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Choderlos de Laclos, 1782). In addition, the reader finds an explicit addressee, with name and filiation (though maybe fictitious as well).

Although very partially developed, Townsend also includes the exact reproduction of letters both in *The Adrian Mole Diaries* series and *Queen Camilla* as a narrative complement to the body of the story, the addressees are varied which, in every case, helps the author introduce different elements such as interesting twists in the action:

Dear Mr. and Mrs Windsor,
I expect this letter will come as a bit of a surprise, not to mention shock!
(...) It came as an awful shock to me to find out that the 'parents' I had always called 'Mum and Dad' were, in fact, my adoptive parents.
(...)
I am the result of a love affair between Prince Charles and Mrs. Camilla Parker Bowles. (Townsend, 2006, p. 53)

Or some specific traits of her characters, for instance, Adrian's neurotic personality:

Dear Mr Blair,
You may remember me -we met at a Norwegian Leather Industry reception at the House of Commons in 1999. (...)
I am writing to thank you for warning me about the imminent threat to Cyprus posed by Saddam Hussein's Weapons of Mass Destruction.
(Townsend, 2004, p. 3)

In the case of a fictive diary, the reader confronts a *narrative addressee* with no entity but, at the same time, one that imposes its modes on the narrator.

-*Don't ask me* how I am getting through the long school day. *Just don't ask.* (Townsend, 1991, p. 328)

-*Quite frankly, dear diary,* I wouldn't give a toss if all the newts in the world disappeared overnight. (Townsend, 1991, p. 470)

-I didn't take it in, *dear Diary.* It was one of those moments. I felt acutely aware of my own mortality. (Townsend, 1999, p. 128)

Therefore both addressees possess a different entity. In the case of the fictive diary addressee, Potter states "The crucial issue is not the existence or nonexistence of an addressee but the degree to which the addressee is given an independent life and an active textual role in the work" (Potter, 1984, p. 10). When studying *The Adrian Mole Diaries* (where Adrian is not the only diarist) and Margaret Hilda Roberts's diary included in *The True Confessions of Adrian Mole, Susan Lilian Townsend and Margart Hilda Roberts* we discover the interesting role played by the diary as addressee, as it seems to have established an almost affective relationship with its narrator. The diary turns into some characters' sole consolation which, at the same time emphasizes the 'healing' quality of the act of writing a diary which is almost like talking to a therapist:

Am I turning into one of those middle-aged men who think the country has gone to the dogs and that there has been no decent music since Abba? (...) Diary, I've been thinking about yesterday's entry and I am a little disturbed to find that I think the country has gone to the dogs and that there is nobody to beat Abba. (Townsend, 2009, p. 11)

On opening the notebook I was startled to find, on the first page, a note addressed to me.

ADRIAN IF YOU HAVE FOUND MY DIARY AND YOU ARE READING THIS, DO NOT READ ANY FURTHER. THIS DIARY IS MY ONLY CONFIDANT. PLEASE, RESPECT MY WISHES AND ALLOW ME SOME PRIVACY. CLOSE THE BOOK AND REPLACE IT. NOW

I read on. Dear Diary I intend to write in you every day and I will hold nothing back. I can tell no living person how I feel. (Townsend, 2009, p. 4)

5.2.1.3 Narration

Two of the basic constituents of the mode of narration characteristic of fictive diaries are the importance of the act of writing and the use of narrative time. Potter states that "the unique advantage of fiction in the diary mode is its capacity to expose this ordinary, unnoticed, reflexive action by giving the writing itself a

role in the plot” (Potter, 1984, p. 9). Writing a diary, either fictional or actual, is an act of volition in which the diarist participates proactively, but it is subjected to specific modes of narration: the first person narrative, the division of the narration into entries, the mix of both direct and reported speech, etc. However, all these composing rules provide the resulting text with a particular character that surpasses the mere act of writing and turns it into a special protagonist of the narration:

I take up my pen once again to record a momentous time in the affairs of men (and, thank God because this is intended to be a secret diary, I am not required to add 'and women'). (Townsend, 1999, p. 3)

In addition, writing a diary recalls an atmosphere of privacy evoked by the previously mentioned term “sole consolation”. Privacy leads to secrecy and this becomes the main characteristic of diaries, they should be kept in secret. Fictive diaries “flout this maxim” and the diarist may introduce flashes of a reality other than the surrounding one which is depicted in the text thus breaking the seal of secrecy and creating clever metafictional games:

I wish that I could relate that I have found happiness and contentment in my rural retreat but, alas, I cannot-but that is another story. I remain, dear reader, your most humble and obedient servant.
Adrian Albert Mole
P.S. These diary entries have appeared in the Guardian previously.
(Townsend, 2008, p. x)

As far as narrative time is concerned, it is interesting to note the variety of possibilities that fictive diaries offer the author when dealing with it. Gerald Prince uses the term “narrative occasions” (1975, p. 478) to describe the different moments in which the narration is actually told which do not correspond to real, measurable time:

A diary novel always implies several narrative occasions: the narrator does not tell a story in one sitting; he relates a series of happenings in at least two different instances (but actually in many more) and there is no diary novel in which a narrator, deciding to keep a diary, writes one entry then abandons his project. More specifically, each narrative instance does not usually continue a story begun in the preceding entry or complete a description of events started earlier, but, rather, it describes incidents having occurred since the preceding entry. (Prince, 1975, p. 478)

In this sense, *The Adrian Mole Diaries* presents an interesting example of narrative time concerning a whole volume. *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole (1999-2001)* were published and refer to events prior to the previously published volume, *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction*, that is, there is a leap backwards in the whole narrative but the reader is not disenchanted for no important clues are revealed so as to spoil the reading of any of the books:

These diaries were lost when I moved from my modest council estate home back to my parents' equally modest home in Ashby-de-la-Zouch. After the events of Saturday, 24 November 2001, when I was dragged out of my bed at 4 a.m. by an over-enthusiastic policeman citing David Blunkett's anti-terrorist laws, I could no longer return home. My neighbours informed me that after I had been taken away to be questioned, people in white forensic suits took away every piece of paper in large sacks (...) After my release I asked for my 1999-2001 diaries, but was told that the police were hanging on to them (...) Then last week I answered the door (...) to find a policeman holding my diaries, which were inside a transparent plastic bag. (Townsend, 2008, p. ix)

There is also an evolution from the first volume of the Mole series to the last ones. In *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* most of the entries scrupulously follow calendar time but as the series proceeds, more realistic and fictional resources concerning the use of time are employed by the fictive author and, therefore, the real one:

Friday October 15th I have put my name down for the school play (...)
Monday October 18th The weekend was far, far, far too boring to write about. (Townsend, 1991, p. 277)

Some circumstances in the narration also shape some entries and limit them to the essentials, thus erasing the importance of the temporal dimension of the narrative:

Friday 26th October
Treatment
Saturday 27th October
Treatment
Sunday 28thOctober
Treatment
Monday 29th October

Treatment
Tuesday 30th October
Treatment (Townsend, 2009, p. 166)

On other occasions, an entry refers to a previous one also cancelling the apparent time structure of the narration. In the following passage, Adrian takes us ahead of the moment of writing to immediately place the clock back again in the following entry, creating, in addition, a potential narrative realm -not exempt of visual humour-:

Friday November 7th
I am not given to paranoid fancies normally, dear Diary, but I confide in you that I am seriously thinking of withdrawing all my money and placing it in a box under my bed. (Townsend, 1999, p. 238)

Saturday November 8th
What was I thinking of, dear Diary? I wouldn't dream of keeping my money under my bed. I shall hide it in several faux baked-beans tins, and keep them on the top shelf of the pantry. (Townsend, 1999, p. 238)

There are additional issues regarding the narrative time of *The Adrian Mole Diaries* that concern the correspondence between both actual and narrative times in the conception of the whole series. On the one hand, this almost perfect identification allows Townsend to insert the diary within the specific time coordinates we have been analysing in section 4.1, I use *almost* because the temporal impositions of writing, editing and publishing the different volumes establish a short dislocation between the facts as lived and narrated.

On the other hand, Adrian Mole grows up as if he were a real person, thus accompanying the same growing process experienced by his most enthusiastic fans. This turns his diary into a kind of mock *Bildungsroman*. This type of narrative has been present in British literature since the nineteenth century and is specifically alluded by Townsend in the quote extracted from *Sons and Lovers* by D. H. Lawrence that introduces *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*. *Sons and Lovers* is one of the most significant representatives of British *Bildungsroman*, therefore the reference is inevitable. But Adrian's written account is not a usual *Bildungsroman*, Townsend subverts the modes of the genre through satire, irony, humour and criticism which results in a mocking construction of both the psychological development and the maturity process of her character. In the case of Adrian Mole, the faithful reader does not see the process of a character fighting to have

his own place in the world with the awakening of a mature self at the end of this long, dim tunnel of personal evolution. In fact, on many occasions a grown-up Adrian behaves just like his teenage self, therefore the passing of time he experiences does not alter many aspects of his character or some circumstances around him -although, as an intellectual, he should be credited with some improvement of his writing mannerisms:

I have been up and down the stairs all day. I cooked a big dinner for them tonight: two poached eggs with beans, and tinned semolina pudding. (It's a good job I wore the green lutex apron because the poached eggs escaped out of the pan and got all over me). (Townsend, 1991, p. 15)

D.H. Lawrence, my literary hero, enjoyed working with his hands (...) I, too, have discovered the small joys of manual labour. I like to think that D.H. would have been proud of me as I served up a bacon 'n' egg sandwich to our first customer, Les, who was driving an Eddie Stobart lorry (...) Though I say it myself, Les's sandwich was a work of art. The bacon was succulent, the egg was cooked sensitively, so as to prevent yolk leakage, and the bread was as white and soft as a newly hatched maggot. I was quite pleased when Les pronounced it to be 'champion'. (Townsend, 2008, p. 130)

5.2.2 False micro-narratives of the self

There are other textual constructions of literary selves in the pages of Sue Townsend that, despite their brevity, are worth analysing for they are employed by the author to emphasise certain aspects of the characters in question. Not only are the readers involved in the global fiction of the main plot of the book but, in addition, they are confronted with these secondary narratives that present various degrees of certainty in which the difference between fiction and reality is very subtle and does not follow Carr's statement:

One way in which the separation is often made between the lived reality and the literary artifice is to say that the narrative arrangement of events departs altogether from the temporal order to install itself in the logical domain. (Carr, 1991, p. 49)

This applies, for instance, to the false selves constructed by Edward Claire in *Number Ten* or Adrian Mole himself in *The Weapons of Mass Destruction*. In the first case, Edward is forced by circumstances to invent a different identity so as not to reveal his, which would have eventually led to cancelling the reason for the whole adventure:

‘Are you in business yourself, er....?’ Asked Baker.

‘Edwina,’ volunteered the Prime Minister. ‘No, I’m...’ (...) ‘I’m an actress,’ said the Prime Minister, and flicked a black curl out of his eye. (...)

By the time the train drew into Waverley station in Edinburgh, the Prime Minister had constructed a complete acting career from an early struggle in rep to dining at the Ivy with Maggie Smith and going to garden centres with Judy Dench. Jack was impressed with the Prime Minister’s ability to throw himself so vigorously into his own fantasy and was only slightly alarmed when the Prime Minister said as they stepped off the train, ‘Ah, Edinburgh at last, I won a Perrier Award here in 1882’. (Townsend, 2003, p.94)

In the case of the *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, apart from the reader’s previous knowledge of his biography, there is a second level of self-construction based on absolutely false premises but developed by Adrian with the aim of escaping (by the skin of his teeth it must be added) from an oppressive and insoluble situation. Whereas in the previous extract, Townsend uses indirect speech and focalises the narration in Jack Sprat, this time she uses a series of letters composed, though never posted, by Adrian in order to cancel his engagement to Marigold Flowers. Every letter is a further step in a series of escalating lies which accentuates both Adrian’s inability to face his fiancée and terminate the relationship, and, conversely, Townsend’s ability to mock her own characters:

Dear Marigold

Can I be honest with you? I have recently discovered that I am gay. The signs have been there for some time (perhaps this explains why I did not stumble across your clitoris). I almost bought a chandelier recently. I have taken to wearing rubber gloves while doing my house work and I have noticed myself using waspish humour as a method of communication. (Townsend, 2004, p. 286)

My dearest Marigold

Can I be honest with you, darling? I can no longer live a lie. For some time I have been dressing in female clothes and calling myself Brenda. I love the feel of silk, lace and winceyette on my rough male flesh. (Townsend, 2004, p. 288)

Dear Marigold

Can I be honest with you? The man you know as Adrian Mole is an impostor. I have been on the run since I was falsely accused of

violating a dolphin off the Cornish coast in 1989. The police are closing in on me so I must go underground. (Townsend, 2004, p. 290)

Dearest Marigold (...)

For some years I have been suffering from a rare medical condition which produces a murderous rage, which in turn makes me prone to sudden fits of violence. (Townsend, 2004, p. 291)

Eventually, Adrian acknowledges his own cowardice when confronted by his mother who, in turn, has written what she considers the right version to be offered to Marigold. Her words summarise perfectly well Adrian's personal conflict and Townsend's playful narrativity:

Dear Marigold

Ever since I was a little boy I have preferred to live in the world of fiction. I have found the real world to be a harsh place. I avoid confrontation and I am easily manipulated by people who have a strong sense of themselves (Townsend, 2004, p. 299)

In these cases, the falsity of the narratives is easily deduced by the reader when confronting them with the previous knowledge of the characters involved.

There is, in addition, another example of the questioning of a micronarrative developed as an autobiography. In *Adrian Mole, The Prostrate Years* Adrian discovers his mother's manuscript, a bunch of pages in which she gathers her alleged autobiography:

I found the book on the battered table she calls her 'desk', underneath a pile of misery memoirs. *A Child Called 'It', Angela's Ashes (...)* but more interesting to me was a box file labelled *A Girl Called 'Shit'* (...) It was an account of her childhood in the Norfolk potato fields. (Townsend, 2009, p. 54)

Pauline has constructed a whole narrative which, according to her son, is: "A tissue of lies. In fact, it's a brown paper of lies -tissue is too delicate a simile to be attached to such a fraudulent enterprise" (Townsend, 2009, p. 54). Townsend plays with the intertextual reference set by the title of her memoirs in a direct reference to one of the books she keeps on her desk, *A Child Called 'It'* by Dave Pelzer (1995). From this starting point, and after Pelzer's example, Pauline builds up an account of her allegedly terrible childhood, the hard conditions in which she lived and the abuses her own father inflicted upon her. From the immediate

contraposition of “the truth” as stated by Adrian, it seems inevitable to question the truth of both versions. The reader has been introduced to Pauline when Adrian was 13 (and 3/4) years old and there are no grounds whatsoever to doubt the veracity of the account of her childhood. In the case of Pauline, she might well be confirming the usual alterations that actual events suffer when recalled later on:

The conception of reality that usually surfaces when autobiographies are relegated to the status of fictions -or mere fictions, as they are often called- is one that is imagined to somehow be free of our designs, a string of ‘stuff’ that just happens, in time, and that we will inevitably falsify when we later look backwards and try to impose some order. (Fireman in Fireman, Mc Vay and Flanagan, Eds., 2003, p. 115)

However, Pauline’s story is so similar to Pelzer’s that the reader, clearly suspicious of the veracity of the story she writes, eventually positions “on Adrian’s side”:

I was born in the middle of a potato field near the village of Hose in the county of Norfolk. A bitter east wind chilled my mother’s thighs as I made my way into the world of poverty and pain. (...) This is a complete lie. I have seen my mother’s birth certificate, she was born in the cottage hospital at Burnham Market. (...) My father’s first words on seeing me were, ‘A fookin’ girl child ain’t no use to me’. (...) Luckily for me, my father drank himself into a stupor on turnip wine and in the morning had forgotten this directive. He refused to acknowledge me or register my birth and only referred to me as ‘Shit’.(Townsend, 2009, p. 55)

At the house, the dual punishment of hunger and violent attacks continued. By this time, for all practical purposes, I was no longer a member of the family. I existed, but there was little or no recognition. Mother had even stopped using my name; referring to me only as The Boy. (Pelzer, 1995, p. 31)

Throughout the history of British literature, fictive narratives of the self seem to have benefited from the existence of a well-established tradition of both political and private diaries, letters and public memoirs. Townsend’s personal contribution is mostly based, but not restricted to, the fictive diary format in which she excelled with *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. This, and the minor narratives of the kind to be found in her works, are complemented with her own, displayed in various articles collected in *The True Confessions of a Middle Aged Woman*, the preface of her collection of *Plays*, the story of her visits to Majorca or Russia inserted in *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole, Margaret Hilda Roberts and Susan Lilian*

Townsend or her recollection of personal events such as the birth of his first son or her job as a community worker in *Mr. Bevan's Dream*. The construction of herself she offers the reader deals with personal, political and social issues whose fictional or factual quality might be discussed. However, just like Pauline Mole, we all tend, either on our own or in the company of others, to fill in the gaps of our memories in the most convenient way when creating our own life narratives:

Writing this second volume of memoirs proved, slightly to my surprise, even more taxing than writing the first (...) I depended on my memoirs team to display even greater resourcefulness and powers of detection than in Volume I in the search for letters, diaries, cuttings conference reports and all the multifarious files where little bits of modern lives are written down and stored away. (Thatcher, 1995, p. xiii)

I wanted this book to be different from the traditional political memoir. Most such memoirs are, I have found, rather easy to put down. So what you will read here is not a conventional description of who I met or what I did. (...) There have been plenty of accounts - and no doubt will be more of the history of my ten years as prime minister, and many people could write them. (...) So this is a personal account; a description of a journey through a certain period of history in which my political, and maybe to a certain degree my personal character evolves and changes. I begin as one type of leader; I end as another. That's why I call it a journey. (Blair, 2010, p. xv)

5.3 A glimpse of Metafiction

The apparent simplicity of *Townsend's* literature may lead us to disregard some of her interesting narrative devices. This section is devoted to counteract the preconceived ideas with reference to *Townsend's* writing modes. I used the term "glimpse" for the title of the section in order to describe *Townsend's* occasional use of metanarrative devices which appear mostly in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. The first volumes of the series clearly follow a more traditional and linear narrative pattern, but for the fact that they are fictive diaries. However, little by little, some experimental narrative flashes are introduced by the author.

5.3.1 *Townsend's* practice of Metafiction

Considering either the referential construct to frame leading conceptions of human agency, that is, Metanarrative or the narrative devices used to question assumed notions of certainty, represented by Metafiction, it seems that both are fully present within the realm of Postmodernism. Metafictive resources contribute

to dismantle the traditional preconceptions of narrative texts by questioning the roles of the author, the reader, the characters and the plot itself, therefore challenging the line between actual and fictional worlds. In this sense, Waugh's seminal definition is mandatory:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, 2001, p. 2)

From these lines, two connected ideas seem to stand out:

- The conception of the text as an artefact whose components can be dismounted and repositioned back in a different way to produce a different text.
- The interconnectedness of fiction and reality when dealing either with one or the other in literary terms:

Dearest reader, (...)

This book is a collection of some of the articles I have written over the past few years. There is also some previously unpublished material, the Prison Letters between A. Mole and Barry Kent, for example. And some poetry written by A. Mole (included here only because he threatened to starve himself to death unless I agreed. (Townsend, 1989, p. ix)

In this extract from Townsend, the reader, located outside the text is directly addressed by the actual author, which would not be surprising in similar introductory paragraphs but for the fact that Townsend refers to fictional characters as if they were real and had, actually, contributed to the compilation of materials presented in the book with their own fictional works. The usual components of similar compilations are set against a background in which the limits between fiction and reality are blurred.

The literary practice of metafiction is nothing new as it was founded well before Postmodernism. Lodge establishes *Tristram Shandy* as the “granddaddy of all metafictional novels” (Lodge, 1993, p. 206) but metafictional components of

literary texts can be traced back for instance to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* or even Plato's allegory of the cave.

What seems clear is that Postmodernism presented literature with a set of uncertainties as opposed to well-established philosophical notions from previous centuries which were displayed in narratives of various characters and led to question both the alleged components of these very same texts and previous monolithic interpretations:

If we cannot establish the grounds for believing one interpretation to be more 'true' than another then we can claim that the text is simply more useful for one set of purposes than another and then pursue a 'strategic' reading. (Waugh in Knellwolf & Norris eds., 2001, p. 304)

Due to the fact that apparently stable and defining categories of the self are discussed by Postmodernism, one might wonder whether gender influences the production of metanarrative texts, and therefore whether a sort of feminist metafiction exists as such. According to Douglas (2002) authors such as Greene consider that a specific type of feminist metafiction does indeed exist, such as the one practiced by Lessing, Drabble or Atwood, (opposed to the traditional British male dominated novel genre) which is, in addition, a key component of the feminist scholarship. Douglas herself states that women's metafictional discourse is not a by-product of the canon but a basic component of the novelist genre from its very beginning, thus opposing the pervasiveness of women's narrative and the practice of metafiction to the discourse of conflicting gendered narratives from which a specific feminist metafiction derives.

From this point of view, we may reposition ourselves regarding Townsend's narrative and deal with its metafictional elements not as flashes of Postmodernism but as an original constituent, supported by the use of fictive diary from the early stages of her career. In any case, it is quite interesting to see how Townsend dismounts the traditional elements of fiction in such a playful way, thus underlining the ludic character of metafiction which, especially in her case, is presented as a game in which author, characters and readers take part with humour as its main asset and fun as its ultimate goal.

5.3.1.1 The author(s)

As one of the constituents of metafiction, the alleged authorial quality of the singular person who, effectively, composes the literary work has been directly

addressed, questioned, acknowledged or denied by the practitioners of Postmodernism. I am not, however, interested in revising all these well-known theories but in describing, from a more practical point of view, the specific link between metafiction and author by analysing Townsend's relationship with her characters and works.

In *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole*, Townsend writes a short introduction -from which the lines quoted in the previous section were extracted- describing the contents of the book and including some notes on the contributors, of whom she is actually the sole author:

Mole's blackmailing tactics have succeeded to the extent that he has the lion's share of this book, though I must stress that this is not a 'Mole Book', Margaret Hilda Roberts and I also contribute. (Townsend, 1989, p. ix)

Adrian Mole is denied his fictive status and dealt with as a real person:

Adrian Mole lives in Leicester with his dog. In 1986 he won record damages against the failed novelist Sue Townsend after she published his diaries claiming that they were her own works of fiction. (Townsend, 1989, p. xi)

Whereas the two real persons, Margaret Hilda Roberts (the future Margaret Thatcher) and Townsend herself, are fictionalized:

Margaret Hilda Roberts

Nothing (unfortunately) is known about Margaret Hilda Roberts or what became of her. The diary is believed to have been written in the nineteen thirties.

Susan Lilian Townsend

Enjoyed notoriety at one time but has sunk into obscurity since her involvement in the 'five dwarves in a bed' scandal in 1989 for which she received a suspended prison sentence of two years. The judge's remarks were widely reported in the popular press: 'To think that a woman of your age could stoop so low.' (Townsend, 1989, p. xi)

The three of them are considered authors of a book which is based at the same time on the fiction provided by Adrian, the fictive author whose "authority" is disparaged by both the use of "blackmailing tactics", regarding the accounts of Townsend's whereabouts in Majorca, and the remark that this is not "a Mole book" in reference to the previous success of the first two volumes of the series.

The actual author of the book feels the need to warn the reader about hers and Margaret Roberts's own contribution, and on the fictive diaries of Margaret Hilda Roberts whose literary quality as author is not acknowledged for these diaries were found "in a car boot sale". (Townsend, 1989, p. xi)

As we see, the whole metafictional game played by Townsend through the three-fold authorship of the book is aimed at teasing the reader with the alternative movement of the narrative on both sides of the border between fiction and reality. As Waugh's posits:

The 'author' is a concept produced through previous and existing literary and social texts but that what is generally taken to be 'reality' is also constructed and mediated in a similar fashion. 'Reality' is to this extent 'fictional' and can be understood through an appropriate 'reading' process. (Waugh, 2001, p. 16)

5.3.1.2 The Characters

If we conceive of characters as beings in fictional worlds, to which the audience ascribes intentionality or action, we must ask what precisely the difference between characters and real persons is. The differences concern especially the textual construction and fictional representation of characters, (...), and, in connection with that, the difference between the audience's knowledge about characters on the one hand and about persons on the other. (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010, p. 11)

These words by Eder, Jannidis and Schneider target directly the key issues regarding the ontology of fictional characters and are, in addition, susceptible to be applied to Sue Townsend's metafictional development of either some characters or their actions. The ontology of some of these characters is challenged and questioned: are they real? Are they fictive? Townsend constructs their nature as moving between fiction and reality, like in the already seen cases of Margaret Hilda Roberts or Townsend herself who appears as a meta-character, but also moving across fictions, proving the fluidity of the limits between both realms and the interesting narrative possibilities this gives way to:

I examined Savage's companion. 'Who is she?' I asked.
'Bridget Jones,' spat out Kim. 'Her diaries have been in the bestseller list for months.'
'Her diaries?' I checked. 'But she is not famous, is she?'

‘No,’ said Kim, ‘although she might be if Savage makes her his fifth wife.’

But as I watched, Bridget Jones got up from the table and left the restaurant abruptly. Savage shouted after her, ‘Yes, your bum does look big in those bloody trousers.’ (Townsend, 1999, p. 82)

In this extract from *Adrian Mole. The Cappuccino Years*, Townsend introduces a fiction character who is also a famous diarist, in a playful turn of the metafictional “screw”. The reader is presented with a humorous game and, while being absorbed by -and used to- the adventures and mishaps of Adrian Mole, might be tempted to think of him and Bridget Jones as real characters thus discussing their fictive entities and the fictional world constructed around them as a whole which is, in turn, questioned as Eder et al. state:

Models of fictional or possible worlds do allow for an integration of characters into the larger structure of the world presented in, or created by, the text, but they do not manage to clarify the ontology of characters convincingly, because fictional or possible worlds are subject to ontological problems themselves. (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010, p. 11)

On other occasions, fictive characters are turned into metafictional ones as they are transferred from the alleged reality to a fictive world. Fiction within the fiction again, as in a series of Russian dolls:

I was sitting in the kitchen (...) waiting for The Archers to begin, when to my astonishment I heard my name mentioned on Radio 4. I turned up the volume and listened in growing horror to a ‘trail’ of a television programme featuring a man called Adrian Mole, a former offal chef whose family home is in Ashby de la Zouch.

This TV Mole has a mother called Pauline and a father called George. This cannot be mere coincidence -somebody has published my life and is exploiting it for commercial reasons. (...) The BBC must be prevented from broadcasting this series. Surely I have intellectual copyright on my own life? (Townsend, 2008, p. 193)

Several people, including Pandora, have rung up to enquire about the Mole TV series. Pandora was outraged, though I could tell that she is rather flattered that she is being played by Helen Baxendale. (Townsend, 2008, p. 194)

This extract plays with the metareferences created by the readers’ more than probable knowledge of the TV series *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years* (2001),

starring Stephen Mangan and Helen Baxandale. Adrian's reaction shows he is not aware of his fictional condition, nor is Pandora who, on the other hand, seems to be comforted by the qualities of her impersonator.⁹ And to loop the loop:

Tania Braithwaite brought last week's Radio Times around this morning. Inside, was a 'film- set diary' purporting to have been written by a bloke calling himself Adrian Mole. This Mole bloke was also upset that his life was being exploited. (Townsend, 2008, p. 195)

Adrian reads about his own aired reaction after learning about the TV series about his own life. Townsend seems to have been delighted by subjecting her characters to the deepest questioning about their own being. By the use of "this TV Mole", "this Mole bloke" and the like, Adrian intends to separate himself from the other Moles appearing in the media. However, this referentially (see Waugh, 2001) implied by Adrian's language is eventually contested by Townsend if we are aware of the ultimate quality of Adrian, that is, its fictive nature:

A friend of Tania's in publishing had told her that an old hack called Sue Townsend had been trying for years to publish the secret diaries of Adrian Mole, claiming that they were fiction. She showed me a piece of the manuscript. I read with increasing astonishment as details of my private life were revealed. How does this woman know so much about me? Is she tapping my phone? Has she bugged my house? (Townsend, 2008, p. 195)

Finally, real characters are occasionally made to interact with fictive ones in several ways. For instance, and to Adrian's disgust, Townsend concedes herself fictional status. These lines complete a totally fictional micronarrative of the self (see previous section):

Tania said that Townsend grew bitter after going on an Arvon poetry course led by Adrian Henri and Roger McGough, (...) Townsend then made a hysterical denunciation of modern poetry and ran out of the class and down to the river. She threatened to throw herself in (...) Adrian Henri came to the opposite bank and shouted across the river, 'Throw yourself in and give us all a break.' Townsend has hated all men called Adrian since that day. (...) Is she the reason my own literary endeavours have come to nought? (Townsend, 2008, p. 195)

Apart from Townsend herself, other real characters are also fictionalised and feature in Townsend's narrative through Adrian's -most of the times- unfruitful

⁹In the TV series, Helen Baxandale plays masterfully a sexy and manipulative Pandora.

and repeated attempts to establish an epistolary relationship with them. This activity of Adrian's starts in his teens and turns into a habit well into adulthood:

Miss Sarah Ferguson was born to be the wife of Adrian Mole. I have written to tell her so (...) No letter from Sarah Ferguson today. (...) I have sent a Telemessage to my ginger-haired love:
Sarah, I am coming to you. Meet me at the Palace gate at high noon.
Yours with unconditional love. Adrian Mole. (Townsend, 1991, p. 419)

Dear Mr. Blair,
You may remember me -we met at a Norwegian Leather Industry reception at the House of Commons in 1999. (Townsend, 2004, p. 3)

Dear Mr. Brown,
I wrote to you at the Treasury recently regarding a great injustice. (Townsend, 2009, p. 9)

However, there are occasions in which Adrian's hunger for an answer to his letters is satisfied and results in a lasting relationship whose terms are not sufficiently clear for both participants. It is the case of the repeated contacts between Adrian and (malgré lui) the actual BBC producer John Tydeman that start in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and continue through time with increasing and equivalent doses of patience and exasperation displayed by Tydeman:

A letter from the BBC!!! (...) from a bloke called John Tydeman, (...) Dear Adrian Mole,
Thank you for the poems which you sent to the BBC and which, somehow, landed up on my desk. I read them with interest and, taking into account your tender years, I must confess that they did show some promise. However, they are not of sufficient quality for us to consider including them in any of our current poetry programmes. Have your thought of offering them to your School Magazine or to your local Parish Magazine (...)? (Townsend, 1991, p. 33)

Dear John Tydeman,
The last time I wrote to you, it was to apologise for clogging up the BBC's fax machines with my 700-page novel, *Lo! The Flat Hills of my Homeland*. (Townsend, 1994, p. 144)

Dear Adrian,
To be perfectly honest, Adrian, my heart sank when I returned from holiday and saw that your manuscript *Lo! The Flat Hills of my Homeland* had landed on my desk yet again. You say in your letter, 'I expect you are busy'. Yes, I damned well am busy, incredibly so. (Townsend, 1994, p. 157)

The letter exchange between Adrian and Tydeman is another example of the insertion of a different narrative mode, the epistolary narration, within the diary frame and this, in turn, allows the reader to obtain the global panorama of the events narrated for, most of the times -as in the examples above- there exists a décalage between the letters received and Adrian's interpretation of the content. In this sense, the readers' active participation makes it possible the full understanding of the passages.

The fictionalisation of real characters includes some episodes of a humoristic nature which are used by Townsend to stress the absurdity of official regulations and policies. In *Queen Camilla*, Stephen Fry, in flesh and blood -or better said in ink and paper- features as an exile in his own home, subjected to house arrest after being found guilty of 'inappropriate and deliberate mockery of the authorities' (Townsend, 2006, p. 97). Fry's literary imprisonment is the last straw regarding British cultural life regulated by a government led by Jack Barker and the Republican Party: "Fry had been a National Treasure (...) his trial had been seen as a watershed: many comedians had fled the country and were living, for some inexplicable reason, in Belgium" (Townsend, 2006, p. 97). In addition, Townsend targets Fry with gentle mockery when paraphrasing his verbal dexterity:

'I scribble a few words now and then, when the fancy takes me' (...)
'I wonder. Pray, do tell me how your policies differ from those of your rivals.' (...)
'The paucity of your ambitions will, I expect, be matched by the parochialism of their execution.' (...)
'Oh dear, and I was so enjoying my sojourn in the country.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 98)

Eventually, Fry refuses to lend both his and his dog's image for the New Con (Conservative) Party campaign. One may think that showing thus his progressive affiliation, however, Fry's denial is motivated by the horror of being sent to an exclusion zone:¹⁰ "Fry said, 'If I did that, Boy, I'd risk being sent to the Cromer Exclusion Zone. Which truly would be a fate worse than death" (Townsend, 2006, p. 99). As we see, the process of fictionalisation is carried through the insistence on the most identifiable traits of the characters in question (patience in the case of Tydeman or verbosity and wit in Fry's), so as to allow the reader an immediate match between the real persons and their fictive counterparts.

In order to complete the whole panorama of interaction between fiction and reality, a further element must be added; the use of animals, and particularly, dogs,

¹⁰Cfr. next section on dystopia.

as metafictional devices to introduce visions which are different from or complementary to those of humans on several episodes, particularly in *Queen Camilla* where the importance of their role progresses exponentially along with the narrative.

Animals have been present in literature from the very beginning and there are plenty of examples of very famous literary ones: Black Beauty, Flush, the Cheshire cat, etc. On some occasions they are conferred metaphorical character (Moby Dick) or turned into archetypal representations of human qualities (Argos, Ulysses's dog as a symbol of fidelity). In others they are given the ability to reason, speak and interact like humans. This is clearly visible in morality fables, children's fiction or the jungle narrative.¹¹ Finally, there is a type of narrative, the so-called It-fiction, which uses either animals or objects as the protagonists of the story like cohesive elements between the different episodes in which it is articulated.¹²

Dogs feature extensively in Townsend works, particularly (and as far as the corpus used in this research is concerned) in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla*, in this last case with an important role, as Townsend herself acknowledges:

Dogs have featured in several of my novels (...) The dogs in these books (The Adrian Mole series and Ghost Children) represent anarchy and chaos, they precipitate events. They are also a convenient storytelling device. (...) Dogs do things that humans are unable to do. (Townsend, 2001, p. 255)

Generally speaking, animals are both discursively and narratively constructed in literature. Discourses on animal nature led to traditionally consider them “naturally violent in the name of survival and heterosexual in the name of reproduction” (Lundblad, 2013, p. 2). This, in turn, is directly related to the binary human/animal and the alleged opposition it represents. In *Queen Camilla*, dogs are depicted as having external animal qualities but internal human ways of agency, interacting among them like humans and placing themselves above humans. They are used by Townsend to illustrate different issues on gender and sexuality and especially, class, described in a mixture of human and animal terms:

She [the Queen] had two dogs with her (...) One was Susan whom she had inherited from her mother, the other Harris, her own dog, was the son of Harris I (...).

¹¹For an excellent summary of the relationship between the jungle narrative and Modernism and, in turn, with Darwinian and Freudian theories, see Lundblad, 2013.

¹²For a very interesting account of It-fiction, its origins and techniques see Peñas, 2012.

‘This is infuriating,’ said the Queen to Harris. ‘Why won’t they [Prince Charles and Camilla Parker] answer the door? We know they’re in, don’t we, old boy? (...)

Harris said nothing to the Queen, but he growled. ‘I knew it wouldn’t last.’

Susan yapped, ‘All married couples quarrel. We do!’ ‘We quarrel because I’m tired of you,’ said Harris. ‘You’re so cruel,’ whimpered Susan. (Townsend, 2006, p. 7)¹³

Susan and Harris are a long-term couple whose relationship has come to a standstill. Harris exhibits a male dominant position which, in the last part of the book will turn into effective leadership of the numerous dogs inhabiting the Exclusion Zone:

Freddy growled, ‘Er...talking about sex, er...Zs-Zsa is coming on heat soon. Would you mind if I...?’

‘No,’ snapped Tosca. ‘Mount the bitch, see if I care.’ Freddy said, ‘I’m not a one-bitch dog, Tosca. At least I’m being honest.’ (Townsend, 2006, p. 172)

Tosca, Freddy and Leo belong to Prince Charles and Camilla Parker. The threesome devised by Townsend, mixes both animal and biological constraints and human and cultural ways of interaction, as there is no way to describe animal experiences except in terms of human cultural encoding (Armstrong, 2008):

Tosca ran down the stairs and went to lie alongside Leo under the kitchen table. ‘I’ve left him,’ she whimpered (...) ‘Don’t you mind that I’m a mongrel?’ Tosca thought, Ugh! He’s got dreadful dog breath; we’ll have to do something about that. Their relationship was less than a minute old and she was already trying to change him. (Townsend, 2006, p. 172)

Likewise, Gin and Tonic belong to Graham, the secret son of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker. Their homosexuality is acknowledged and performed in the most culturally natural and biologically human ways:

Gin and Tonic had often speculated about the precise nature of Graham’s sexuality. (...)

¹³On dogs’ speech, Spanish readers have the immediate referent of *The Dialogue of the Dogs* (1613) by Miguel de Cervantes. However, Scipio and Berganza, the dogs in the *Dialogue* are fully aware that their ability to speak is unnatural and may not last whereas Townsend’s dogs possess a natural speaking ability to communicate among them that they fully acknowledge and remains unquestioned throughout the whole narrative.

Tonic said, ‘So what? I’m gay, but I’m still attracted to bitches.’
Gin and Tonic had been gay lovers ever since they came to sexual maturity, at the age of eighteen months. Gin was the submissive partner. (Townsend, 2006, p. 233)

However, class issues are the most important component of the dogs’ relationships for they match exactly the human class scheme defied by the introduction of the disruptive high-class element within a low working class environment, that is the Exclusion Zone of Hell Close:

At 4.30 p.m. Freddie came into the front garden and barked an announcement. ‘At 4.27 Harris sat up and requested food and a drink. (...) I suggest that you go back to your homes and wait for the delivery of Pedigree Chum and Bonios.

Micky Toby barked, ‘Will the mongrels get Pedigree Chum?’

Freddie barked back, ‘In accordance with Harris’s wishes, I am calling a moratorium on divisions between the mongrels and the pedigrees. After all, we are all dogs!’

The mongrels among the pack of dogs turned to see how the pedigrees had taken Harris’s relayed dictum. Not well, was the answer. (...) How could a mongrel ever be the equal of a pedigree dog? Did centuries of selected breeding count for nothing? (Townsend, 2006, p. 285)

On the other hand, Townsend devises parallel narratives of both humans and dogs (Armstrong, 2008), one counteracting the other and resulting in different visions of the same fact, sometimes based on comic interspecies lack of communication:

Camilla said, ‘Tosca’s not herself at all Charles. Do you think she is unwell?’

Charles answered, ‘Perhaps she needs worming.’

Tosca barked, ‘I haven’t got worms. You’re obsessed with worms. If I did have worms I’d be scooting my bum along the ground, wouldn’t I?’ (Townsend, 2006, p. 183)

Both human and animal narratives develop through Townsend’s pages, eventually leading the reader to pose the question of whether there is a radical difference between humans and animals (Satner in Herman, 2016). Dogs in *Queen Camilla* see themselves subjected to the same dystopian constraints as humans.¹⁴ In the following extract, Townsend, once again, establishes a parallel with the Nazi measures to spot, isolate and, eventually, eliminate Jews and the similar government policies regarding dogs:

¹⁴Cfr. next section on dystopia.

Dog Control Act

- All dogs must be licensed (...)
- Dogs are not allowed to reside in flats or apartments.
- Licensed dogs must be kept on a lead and muzzled in all public places.
- Dogs are not allowed to bark, howl or whine between the hours of 11.00 p.m. and 8 p. m.(...)
- Dogs violating the orders will be confiscated.
- All confiscated dogs will be taken to a holding centre to await collecting and dispersal to Canada. (Townsend, 2006, p. 390)

Animals' initial reactions follow the same pattern as humans':

Freddy scrambled through a hole in the low privet hedge and ran out into the close and down to the barrier, where he barked, 'Let me through, I've got an appointment in Slapper Alley.' Judge [one of the police dogs at the barrier of Hell Close] barked back, 'Try to leave this close, you short-arsed fleabag, and I'll rip your bleedin' throat out.' (...) Emperor barked, 'And that goes for all of you Hell Close low-life scum. You're all forbidden to leave the close.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 211)¹⁵

However, eventually dogs are responsible for the rebellion against these restrictive laws. While human agency was limited to accept the imposed situation, only with occasional and momentary ruptures, dogs, acting like humans should have acted, question the alleged ways of human and animal agency (Armstrong, 2008):

It was Roy Hattersley's dog, Buster, famous among the dogs as a wit and author, who was credited with starting the civil disobedience movement that swept through the canine population of England like a fire through a hayfield. (Townsend, 2006, p. 412).¹⁶

The dogs are able to find a common element to link them and help them fight together. The references to war, anti-Nazi narratives, insisting on unity, are evident:

At twilight the dogs of the Flowers Exclusion Zone met by arrangement inside the walls and padlocked gates of the long-abandoned adventure playground (...) A truce had been called between the mongrels

¹⁵Cfr. Camilla's escape from the Exclusion Zone.

¹⁶Note that Townsend does not write anything for the love of it. Roy Hattersley is a famous Labour politician and declared Republican supporter, the Republican Party being responsible for the development of exclusion zones in *Queen Camilla*. In addition, Buster was quite famous for an incident with one goose belonging to the Queen while being walked by his master in a park. Later, Hattersley would write *Buster's Diaries* which allowed Townsend to use this reference and turn Buster into a household name for the rest of the dogs in the Flowers Estate.

and the pedigrees, and individuals from both classes were intermingled in the crowd. (...) ‘Mein fellow dogs,’ Harris barked, ‘We come together as dogs, regardless of breed or breeding.’ (Townsend, 2006, p. 413)

The staging of the dog’s rebellion has, undoubtedly, several intertextual connections with *Animal Farm*:

A mongrel called Scarlet (...) jumped gracefully on to the climbing frame and stood next to Harris. She lifted her wedge-shaped head and began to croon (...)

*Dogs of England see the light,
Leave your homes and join the fight. (...)
Now’s the time to show our teeth,
Hail to Harris, he’s our chief.
Humans, hear our battle cry,
We will not lie down and die.*

(Townsend, 2006, p. 415)¹⁷

Eventually, dogs in possession of the reasoning ability that humans should have, express clearly Townsend’s thoughts on power control and people’s necessary action:

Harris said, (...) English men and English women must be free to express what is in their hearts, and if they do not like what their government is doing, they must be allowed to say so, and not be afraid of a knock on their door in the middle of the night. (Townsend, 2006, p. 433)¹⁸

5.3.1.3 The reader(s)

From the well-known theories of reader response developed by Iser, Jauss or Fish, the figure of the reader has been conceded an active role in fiction, greater than the mere recipient of the narratives. This active participation of the reader in the

¹⁷

Cfr. with:
Beasts of England
Beasts of Ireland
*Beasts of every land and clime,
Hearken to my joyful tidings
Of the golden future time.* (Orwell, 1999, p. 8)

¹⁸Interestingly enough, these words are stated by Harris, the Queen’s dog.

creation of the text implies, in the case of Townsend, that this reader is the one to have the whole set of keys to fully understand, for instance, the gap -amusing though it may be- between the reality that surrounds Adrian Mole and the way he perceives it. In addition, Townsend's "flirt" with metafiction also involves the figure of the reader, either real or fictive. She plays with the actual readers by interfering with their preconceptions of the limits between reality and fiction, a different "metafictional paradox" maybe from the one spotted by Hutcheon (2005) but with very interesting results.

On the one hand, actual readers are directly addressed by Adrian who seems to be fully aware of their presence and active participation in reading his diaries, the ones lost after the search of his home by the police:

I wish that I could relate that I have found happiness and contentment in my rural retreat but, alas, I cannot-but that is another story. I remain, dear reader, your most humble and obedient servant.
Adrian Albert Mole (Townsend, 2008, p. x)

In this way, Adrian "jumps" into the real world -as the protagonist of the film *The Purple Rose from Cairo*- and recognises that his life is "in the papers" a fact readers may be familiar with for these papers have been published in different supports. Who is responsible for that leak to the press of his most intimate thoughts and experiences?:

P.S. These diary entries have appeared in The Guardian previously, having been hi-jacked by a woman fraudster called Sue Townsend. She has made quite a lucrative living passing herself off as me. I know where she lives -I have been to her house and rung her doorbell but she refuses to come to the door. Once I saw her through the front window. She was a large shape sitting in the corner of a gloomy room, swigging from what looked like a bottle of Stolichnaya. Her garden is overgrown and her house is in disrepair- she has obviously fallen on bad times. I can't say I am sorry. She has been a parasite on my literary career for too long. (Townsend, 2008, p. x)

Readers are challenged to accept the actuality of both fictive narrative and fictive characters following previous assumptions on these issues they had possibly made. Emmott, Sandford & Alexander consider Sanford and Garrod's Scenario Mapping and Focus Model (2010), as a model useful to analyse the assumptions readers make while reading and, despite being employed in psychology, apply it to reading narratives:

General knowledge is organised in the form of scenarios, information relevant to typical settings. These scenarios are selectively activated during reading, at each stage being used to make sense of the text which follows, hence controlling the reader's expectations. (Emmott, Sanford & Alexander in Jannidis et al. eds. 2010, p. 378)

When referred to the ontology of fictional characters, the theory can be applied to the identification and depiction of the metafictionality of characters which, in itself, defies all kinds of assumptions on the part of the reader concerning the actuality of a character in question. This way, the readers who know Adrian's fictive nature, see themselves addressed directly by him, explaining a real fact -the publication of the entries in *The Guardian*- as a result of Townsend's fictive, though "deplorable", action.

Adrian is also considered a real character when briefly referred in Pandora's autobiography. This time, Townsend plays with the previous knowledge on the part of the reader of Adrian's life and the circumstances surrounding some of his most memorable diary entries:

I turned to the index [of Pandora's autobiography] and was both alarmed and pleased to see that 'Mole, Adrian' was given three entries. Page 17: 'My first boyfriend was a shy, spotty boy called Adrian Mole. I loved him with a passion that blinded me to his unprepossessing appearance. (...) At the time I interpreted his choice of colour as symbolizing revolution and dissent. However, Adrian has since told me he only wore red socks because his black ones were in the wash.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 418)

These lines condense some keys to *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* that the reader is supposed to know. However, once this same reader has assumed that the index entries on Adrian will be devoted to reveal Pandora's point of view on the life and miracles of our protagonist, Townsend gives us the authentic Adrian, the "mole": "Page 219: 'A Mole in MI6 took me out to dinner one night and told me that the September dossier....'" (Townsend, 2008, p. 418).

5.3.1.4 The writing

Apart from the general lines in which the plot of the text could be termed as metafictional, there are other instances of metafictional writing which deal with the act of writing itself. Townsend has included some vivid examples of her characters writing or being written about, as we saw previously. The keys to a

full understanding of these extracts lay outside the book in question and prior knowledge of them is required on the part of the reader:

I have been reading Bridget Jones's diary in the Independent. The woman is obsessed with herself. She writes as though she were the only person in the world to have problems. I'm sure that it is quite brave to share your sad life with perfect strangers, even if they are Independent readers, and therefore composed largely of caring professionals. (Townsend, 1999, p. 97)

The actual reader may know, and may have read, the diary entries written by Helen Fielding's character, Bridget Jones. And he/she is now reading another diary entry by a fictive character as well. Thus the act of reading about a type of writing gives a complete loop as this actual *reader* reads about a person who *has read* those diary entries. Not only does the comic effect obtained by Townsend stem from this spiral but also from Adrian's accusations against Jones' defects which he fails to realise that they are the very same he has been showing in all his diaries.

Townsend makes the most of the rivalry created by publishers and readers alike between Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones¹⁹ to mock her character. Adrian has "actually" seen Bridget Jones, he has read her diaries, hates her for having been published and eventually, cannot help writing her a letter which will have no reply whatsoever:

I drafted a letter to Ms Jones.
Dear Bridget Jones,
I have been reading your entries in the Independent and we also have another tenuous connection. I am Peter Savage's Head Chef at Hoi Polloi.
I will cut to the chase: I have kept a diary since I was 13 or thereabouts, and believe it may be of interest to the general reader, and also to sociologists and future Historians. How did you get your diaries published?
I would be grateful if you would write back to me -or alternatively ring me at the Hoi Polloi and we can arrange to meet somewhere over a coffee (or a glass of white wine!)
Yours, A.A. Mole
P.S. I am a non-smoker. (Townsend, 1999, p. 97)

Adrian is so obsessed with Bridget Jones that he even adopts her mannerisms when writing his diary, such is the influence she exerts upon him. Townsend

¹⁹See for instance Adams, 2008.

knows perfectly well they are going to be recognised by most of the readers due to the success of Fielding's creation:

Thursday 23 February 8st 13 (If only could stay under 9st. and not keep bobbing up and down like drowning corpse —drowning in fat), alcohol units 2, cigarettes 17 (pre-shag nerves —understandable), calories 775 (last-ditch attempt to get down to 8st 7 before tomorrow). (Fielding, 1996, p. 35)

I've decided to record my own personal daily fluctuations.
Opal fruits -2pkts
Alcohol- nil
Cigarettes- nil
Weight- 10 stone, 8 pounds
Bowels- sluggish
Potential bald spot- stable
Pains- throbbing in big toe (left foot)
Spots- one, on chin
Penis function- 3/10
Drugs- Prozac, Nurofen (Townsend, 1999, p. 98)

Once Adrian is tired of Jones's narrative ways, his writing returns to his usual style: "I'm sick of writing in Bridget Jones telegraphese, so will revert to my natural free-flowing prose style" (Townsend, 1999, p. 128).

As we have seen in these extracts, the communication between fictional characters trespasses the limits established by their respective authors'. This fictional crossover implies the previous knowledge on the part of the reader of the worlds of both characters separately and, at the same time, establishes a new sphere in which they interact. Nichols (2010) questions the coherence of this three-world realm and states that it is only possible if the characters involved are similar enough to each other in order to interact effectively in a single world (p. 80). In this sense, the crossover between Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones works because the two of them possess the same primary components regarding both their written production and their disgust with the way they conduct their lives and how different events affect them. Readers of both diaries may have felt identified with these woes of their protagonists and therefore the "realism" of the texts in which they are inserted seems to find a more plausible counterpart in real life:

The likelihood of a crossover reflects the organization of our fictional-world cosmology. Stories that describe highly realistic worlds are close to each other and to the real world in fictional space, and relatively far from worlds that are highly unrealistic, like those in sword-and-sorcery type stories. (Nichols, 2010, p. 81)

Finally, what is not clearly stated is, nevertheless, easily deduced by those readers aware of the literary antecedent of both Adrian Mole and Bridget Jones. Beyond the fictional and metafictional worlds, no Bridget Jones would have existed without Adrian Mole:

At five o'clock as we went on air I was perched at the top of the pole ready to slide down on my cue. Then suddenly in my earpiece I heard Richard shouting, 'Go, go, go go, go!' so I let go of the pole and started to slide. Then he continued, 'Go, go, go, Newcastle! Bridget, stand by in Lewisham. Coming to you in thirty seconds.'

I thought about dropping to the bottom of the pole and rushing back up the stairs but I was only a few feet down so I started to pull myself up again instead. Then suddenly there was a great bellow in my ear. 'Bridget! We're on you. What the fuck are you doing? You're meant to be sliding down the pole, not climbing up it. Go, go, go.'

Hysterically I grinned at the camera and dropped myself down, landing, as scheduled, by the feet of the fireman I was supposed to interview. (Fielding, 1996, p. 115)

I was even more annoyed when William, distracted by the New Dog, upset his second bowl of cereal and a vile mixture of brown milk and sugar dripped off the edge of the table and on to the crotch of my stone-coloured chinos. I leaped to the sink, grabbed a dishcloth and wiped myself down, but the cloth had obviously been harbouring another, worse stain among its folds -orange juice, possibly- and this stain transferred itself to the Coco Pops stain. the two transmogrified into yet another stain -one speaking of long term incontinence. I looked around for the washing machine, only to be informed that it was the subject of a dispute, and was residing back with the manufacturer. (Townsend, 1999, p. 19)

And neither of them without Charles Pooter.

Finding the dancing after supper was less formal, and knowing how much Carrie used to admire my dancing in the days gone by, I put my arm round her waist and we commenced a waltz. A most unfortunate accident occurred. I had got on a new pair of boots. Foolishly, I had omitted to take Carrie's advice; namely, to scratch the soles of them with the points of the scissors or to put a little wet on them. I had scarcely started when, like lightning, my left foot slipped away and I came down, the side of my head striking the floor with such violence that for a second or two I did not know what had happened. I needly hardly say that Carrie fell with me with equal violence, breaking the comb in her hair and grazing her elbow. There was a roar of laughter. (Grossmith Brothers, 1892)

In these pages I have attempted to analyse certain aspects of Townsend's narrative which are fully metafictional and deal with authorial issues, characters' ontology, writing modes, etc. displayed mostly in a humoristic way. Although not present in her whole production, this glimpse of metafiction does show that Townsend was not alien to the fictional ways practiced by Postmodernism. Why this has not been acknowledged so far, as Adrian Mole would say, "it's a mystery to me". Would it be because Townsend's depiction of herself as a factual character who pretends to be a good writer is neither fictionally nor metafictionally engaging for the readers? I do not think so.

Henri told her [Townsend] that she was not a poet and never would be after she handed in a poem called "A contemplation Regarding Earwig Defecation"

How to measure earwig poo?

How to know how much they do?

Are there scales to measure it?

Those tiny piles of earwig shit?

Since the scandal she has lived in isolation in a bleak moorland cottage near to Buxton. She alleges that her only companions are a family of curlews and a large fungus growing in the corner of her living room. She is forty-three. (Townsend, 1989, p. xii)

5.4 Townsend's dystopia or a clear and present danger

Taking into account that Townsend's production is generally linked to the character of Adrian Mole and the topics related to his impressions and comments, mostly seasoned with a great dose of humour, it may seem surprising how Townsend dealt with dystopian issues in some of her works, namely one of the chapters of *Mr. Beevan's Dream*, her play *Ten Tiny Fingers*, *Nine Tiny Toes*, one chapter of *True Confessions of a Middle Aged Woman* and *Queen Camilla*. The three of them belong to different periods of her narrative and therefore, there is an evolution in her perception of dystopia which is, broadly speaking, related to gender, class and politics.

The term *dystopia* has generally been used to describe futuristic, mostly literary or cinematic, scenarios in which, under the appearance of a perfect society, there lies a dark, overcontrolling totalitarianism, sometimes resulting in ecological, postwar-like chaos. Some authors dealt with dystopia as the counterpart of utopia "-utopia's twentieth-century doppelgänger" (Gordin, Tilley & Pakrash,

2010, p.1). Others (Moylan, 2002) deny such a contraposition and propose a close link between the apparent binomy utopia/anti-utopia, dystopia being the product of the evolution of one into the other: "The dystopian text does not guarantee a creative and critical position that is implicitly militant or resigned. As an open form, it always negotiates the continuum between the Party of Utopia and the Party of Anti-Utopia" (Moylan, 2002, p. xiii).

What seems obvious is that there is no clear-cut definition as Gordin, Tilley & Prakash also state that "Despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia (...) Dystopia (...) is an utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society" (2010, p. 1). The approach I will favour in this research is, precisely, this one, as the dystopian components of Townsend's narrative describe the situation to which England is -or will be- reduced once the utopian conceptions of the governing parties about an ideal country fail to produce the desired results.

The analysis of literary dystopian visions is necessarily linked to the social trends and historical circumstances in which those are born for they are a product of the concerns and problematic issues of their time. Moylan (2002) traces back the full emergence of dystopia as a literary form to the beginning of the 20th century. However, examples of dystopia may be found in the literature of preceding centuries.

Once the optimism and faith in the human being inspired by the Enlightenment was overcome, there was a progressive appearance of what could be termed as hints of dystopia generally disguised as satire. Even during the 18th century examples such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Swift or *Vindication of Natural Society: A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind* (1756) by Edmund Burke outline some of the main concerns of dystopia, in the case of Burke, under the appearance of a utopia.

According to Claeys (2010), there have been two turns of dystopia in the history of British literature. The first one includes the references I have previously cited and those works originated as a dystopian reply to the utopia generated by the advent of the French Revolution. By the beginning of the 19th century, science joined the club formed by utopian thinking and its counterpart and from the publication of *Frankenstein* in 1818 which implied the foundation of science fiction, dystopian stories experienced a futuristic bias. The second turn of dystopia stems from the mixture between eugenics and the -envisaged by some authors- failure of socialism based on Darwinist theories and the fear of socialist revolution, combined with

the threat of a Prussian invasion from 1870.²⁰ The main representative of this age's dystopia is H.G.Wells (*The Time Machine* -1895-, *The Invisible Man* -1897-, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* -1896-, etc.).

The historic events that marked the first part of the 20th century represented the actual realisation of previously imagined dystopias. The Great War, the distortion of the soviet revolution, Nazism, all offered little room for utopia. This period gave birth to the most widely recognised practitioners of British dystopian literature, namely Aldous Huxley (*Brave New World*, 1932) and George Orwell (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1944). Orwell would cast a long shadow and the influence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (though sometimes distorted) is still evident nowadays.²¹

Dystopia ebbed during the 1960s and 1970s as new times brought about contestation and revolutionary challenges to the establishment and the subsequent revival of utopia. However, from the 1980s on, the extremes of capitalism and globalisation, the constant destruction of natural life, the victory of international inhuman corporations, the demise of public policies based on welfare provisions and the widespread fear of terrorism have caused a revival of the genre with the support of films, TV series and computer games.

Inserted within the full development of the genre and fuelled by the works by female novelists, the issue of whether there is a specific type of dystopia written by women has been addressed by several scholars. According to Baccolini "It was immediately clear that women's condition placed them in a different relationship vis-à-vis the utopian tradition" (2006, p. 2). She refers to women's dystopia as a form of resistance and therefore practised by women so as to stress gender inequalities and the totalitarian impositions which lead to gender construction. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a clear example of the use of dystopia for gender critique.

Likewise, in some of her dystopian visions, Townsend emphasises the consequences of the extreme control exerted by an oppressive patriarchal state over the female body. One of her plays, *Ten Tiny Fingers, Nine Tiny Toes* (1989) is set in the (then) near future, the year 2001 when the most strict eugenic control is exerted: babies can be ordered, conceived through a "fertilisation ceremony", delivered, sold and bought, the perfect ones are separated from their natural parents and fostered by those families of higher social classes unable to conceive children. In this sense, the theme of the unexpected consequences of an imposed reproductive

²⁰To this respect, see Cruickshank, 2011.

²¹Not to be forgotten are Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1920) and E.M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1928).

technology is directly link to other masterpiece of the genre, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

The play deals, among other topics, with the oppression to which female lower class women are subjected as the breeders of children for a society with a strict class -or "sections"- system where commercial transactions of babies are arranged by men irrespectively of their wives' feelings. The problem arises when two women belonging to different social classes give birth to two babies. The low class baby, a boy, is perfect whereas there is a problem with the high class baby, a girl; one toe is missing. Eventually, the "defective" baby will be "disposed of" and the privileged couple will be granted with the perfect baby from the low-class couple:

Lucinda: It can't have a defect. I've got a guarantee -on paper. A perfect baby: blonde, blue eyes, 5 foot 6 inches at maturity. There's a mistake, it's your baby that's got the defect. government women give birth to Government approved babies. (Townsend, 1989, p. 29)

As is habitual in Townsend, class issues are closely knitted within the rest of the components of the work in question. However these class divisions in terms of economic power and social status are solved in gender terms. The males of both the low class and the high class couples involved in the story reach an agreement to sell and buy respectively the healthy baby. As far as women are concerned, after the heartbreaking farewell to the "ill-formed" baby, the common feeling of maternal love leads them to share the healthy one who, from the end of the play onwards, will have two mothers, the low-class biological one and the high-class stepmother. Maternal love and female bonding help them overcome male and state impositions. Despite the terrible fact of the little girl's "disposal" -note the significance of gender in this case- there is still a ray of hope. Both women will lavish love, culture and education upon the baby boy which will, eventually, make the difference regarding the future society in which he will live:

Dot: We can make a good bloke out of this baby Luce. Teach him things. Get some books in the house. Look at him, he's a lump of clay. (...)

Dot: He'll be beautiful an'all. Nice to know, kind but not scared. He'll walk for miles, he'll know to look after himself.

Lucinda: he won't care how many toes a person has got. Dot, I'm leaking, my milk has come through.

Dot removes the baby.

Dot: Mummy's turn.

Dot hands the baby to Lucinda who puts the baby to her breast. (Townsend, 1989, p. 29)

5.4.1 Urban and natural spaces

What seems undeniable is that dystopia is an open field to conflict between two colliding worlds epitomized, for instance, by the clash between natural and urban spaces and its variations, or between corporate power and the alienated individual. This may or may not give way to rebellion which undoubtedly causes disturbance in the overcontrolled and generally accepted state of affairs. Townsend's dystopias abide by most of the general rules of the genre although her factual connections with the everyday turn them into important sources of criticism of the sociopolitical situation of her time.

The close link between utopia and dystopia is also to be found regarding the location of the spaces where both develop, namely urban or natural worlds. On the one hand, utopia has been linked to urban contexts since ancient times; from Plato and the Greek convention of the polis as the ideal form of state organisation, to the Bible's New Jerusalem or the fifty-four cities of More's Utopia island. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and its uncontrolled urban development resulting in the formation of slums where poverty, dereliction and illness were rampant, cities turned into the privileged stage for dystopia:

The coal mines where the fuel to drive steam engines was produced became, in the eyes of some commentators, the core of a modern Dantean Hell, whose outer circles were formed by the 'slums' that grew up in the vicinity of factories where steam engines were used in the production of goods. (Stableford in Claeys, 2010, p. 262)

The literary term "outer circles", stresses the condition of marginality of specific areas of the urban landscape in which it was easier to locate dystopia as "the deployment of a dystopic narrative structure in contemporary urban studies rests on the assumption that the urban condition in many places is already dystopic" (Robinson in Prakash, 2010, p. 218). In the opposite corner, nature has, in turn, hosted both sides of the coin. The idyllic relationship with nature which takes place in *Arcadia* or *Walden* turns into a dystopian nightmare due to over-exhaustion of natural resources, over population and pollution, on many occasions bathed in an apocalyptic tinge.

For a rebel section of the urbanites of dystopia, nature is perceived as a haven, a sanctuary for the ones who dare to flee from their alienated existence. As Galdón (2014) poses, "Since dystopian cities are, thus, undesirable societies, the opposition between the city and natural environment means that nature stands out as a welcoming shelter for the characters that try to escape from the totalitarian

rule" (Galdón, 2014, p. 88). However, sometimes the inhabitants of cities cannot escape from the suffocating constraints their lives are subjected to. These obstacles may exist due to either natural or sociopolitical reasons: toxicity of the atmospheric conditions, enemies waiting patiently to launch the ultimate attack, or deterrent areas which are under strict surveillance. Transgression or trespass of the borders of dystopia is strictly forbidden but some individuals do reach "the other side" which in some cases is not the promised land whispered about in clandestine conversations and depicted in myths of freedom and evasion.

Townsend's dystopian spaces are urban except in the case of some scenes from *Ten Tiny Fingers*, *Nine Tiny Toes*. However, among the different urban areas, that she sees as hierarchically arranged according to economic criteria, council estates are located at the bottom of the list.²² The physical description of these areas is disheartening but this dereliction is both accepted by their inhabitants and repelled by those out of them. As in other aspects of Townsend's dystopia, the connections with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* is evident:

Looking at the estate, you could be forgiven for thinking that it had been separated somehow from the rest of Great Britain. (Townsend, 2003, p.136)

The Parsons' flat was bigger than Winston's, and dingy in a different way. Everything had a battered, trampled-on look, as though the place had just been visited by some large violent animal. Games impedimenta -hockey-sticks, boxing-gloves, a burst football, a pair of sweaty shorts turned inside out- lay all over the floor, and on the table there was a litter of dirty dishes and dog-eared exercise-books. (Orwell, 1983, p. 22)

In turn, the inhabitants of the council estates are widely regarded like those wild natives depicted in ancient travellers' accounts:

Travellers occasionally came in from the outside world (...) but they did their work anxiously (...)The male adolescents of the Grumpton tribe were culturally programmed to steal any vehicle of any kind" (Townsend, 2003, p. 136).

They walked down Bluebell Lane; known locally as Slapper Alley because of the preponderance of teenage mothers living there. 'We're on slapper territory now, lad,' said Inspector Lancer. 'Some of this slappers can intoxicate a man and make him lose his head' (Townsend, 2006, p. 20)

²²Cfr. chapter 4.2.

In *Queen Camilla*, council estates have been turned into “exclusion zones” where the alleged scum of society is to be relocated. The space is limited and over-controlled so as to prevent its wild inhabitants to escape. Townsend insists on the total and absolute regulation of access in and out of the areas and the strict supervision and register of all the movements of the estate dwellers:

At the only entrance to the Fez [short name of the Flowers State], on a triangular piece of muddy ground, squatted a series of interconnected Portakabins, housing the Grice Security Police. The residents of the zone were required to wear an ankle tag and carry an identity card at all times. Their movements were followed by the security police on a bank of CCTV screens, installed in one of the Portakabins. (...) There were many prohibitions and restrictions imposed on the residents of the Fez. A strict curfew had to be adhered to (...) Residents were not allowed to leave the estate. All correspondence, both in and out the Exclusion Zone was read and censored as appropriate. The telephone system did not extend to the outside world. (Townsend, 2006, p. 12)

The stricture of the measures is similar to the one imposed when trying to control an epidemic; isolation, surveillance, report of any exceptional situation, etc. Only under strict supervision are the inhabitants of these council estates allowed to leave the ghettos: “William had been given permission to leave the estate and work on a contract erecting scaffolding, in preparation for converting a Norman church into a casino in Swindon” (Townsend, 2006, p. 10).

For those living on the council estates, the natural spaces to be found in areas alien to the desolate neighbourhoods they inhabit have the quality of idyllic and pure settings, greatly longed for. In *Queen Camilla*, there was a time in which nature was allowed to be enjoyed and the memories of that happiness are more vividly recalled in particular moments of distress:

Camilla said (...) ‘Sometimes I long for the proper countryside.’ (...) Camilla thought about the outside world and imagined herself walking through woodland and alongside a river. She envisaged hills in the distance and shafts of burnished sunlight glowing through a vast cloud-dotted sky. She began to cry. (Townsend, 2006, p. 178)

One more time, the reader may find a link with *Nineteen Eighty Four* in this craving for nature that, in the case of Winston, its protagonist, it is permeated by an oneiric component:

Suddenly he was standing on short springy turf, on a summer evening when the slanting rays of the sun gilded the ground. The landscape

that he was looking at recurred so often in his dreams that he was never fully certain whether or not he had seen it in the real world. In his waking thoughts he called it the Golden Country. (Orwell, 1983, p. 31)

Nature operates as the realm of freedom where simple, everyday pleasures are enjoyed with delectation. For Townsend, a brief moment of freedom is worth the negative consequences of transgression and thus she constructs the whole extract of Camilla's flight in a sequence of successive movements, from the most morose (dawdle) to the most urgent (run, run back) and, eventually, the most tranquil (lay back). For Camilla, nature is a source of contentment, relaxation and marvel at the contemplation of its simplest components:

It didn't take long for Camilla to remove her tag. (...) Camilla dawdled through the estate, enjoying the warm autumn sunshine (...) The bus passed over a road bridge. Below the bridge was river and a small wood. Camilla ran down the stairs of the moving bus and asked the driver to stop (...) She ran back to the bridge and (...) after a few minutes walking, she was out of earshot of the road. When it was no longer possible to walk alongside the river due to the thick tangle of vegetation, she sat down in the long grass and smoked a cigarette. (...) She lay back in the long grass and watched the clouds passing in the astonishingly blue sky. (Townsend, 2006, p. 185)

Contentment experienced even when nature is the location of social situations of deprivation leading to dystopia, despite being always something to be enjoyed by all social classes and individuals, irrespectively of their economic position. However, there is sometimes the pending sword of Damocles of State or corporate control of these natural sources of pleasure:

April in Derbyshire.

Very high ground. In the far distance a group of six tower blocks. The sun is shining. there is a slight wind. A lamb bleats occasionally. (...)

Pete: Ain't that nice Dot? Look how far away everything is.

Dot: Lovely. (She leans back and loses her eyes to let the sun to her face)

(...)

Dot: no. Oh, it's lovely to be 'ot.

Pete: 'An it's free.

Dot: They can't sell the sunshine. Though I bet the buggers have put their minds to it. (Townsend, 1989, p. 6)

Those escaping from their dystopian everyday need nothing more than a patch of grass, a nearby brook and a clean blue sky with a shining sun. Somehow like those naive children's paintings.

5.4.2 Corporate power vs. alienated individual

One of the main conflicts that takes place in literary dystopian worlds is the one established between greedy, dominating corporations and the individuals submitted by them to the most strict control of every single aspect of their public (and a great deal of their private) lives. Corporations are supposed to facilitate the citizens' existence by means of a scrupulous regulation of class, gender and economic issues and operate upon the basis of a sort of social contract in which individuality is only contemplated when it contributes to improve or support the global system.

In Townsend's works, the introduction of corporations in her initial dystopian visions of society is clearly linked to Margaret Thatcher's politics and the large-scale series of privatizations of public companies, supported by the neoliberal philosophy spreading from 10, Downing Street. In this sense, Townsend's dystopia could be linked with works such as Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) which, although written some years later, also deals with the long-lasting consequences of Thatcherite policies (Mullen, 2015). In Ishiguro's close universe of Hailsham, its boarders' bodies are under absolute control, they are mere clones created to be organ donors, born and raised for that purpose. Townsend's corporations are addressed in a more matter-of-fact way but the eventual consequences of the absolute power they have been bestowed with are similar. Her corporations consist of those privatised companies who make people's lives nothing but a misery and control even the most personal components of their existence. The last article in *Mr. Bevan's Dream* is a recollection of the absurdities to which this situation has led:

Since they had privatised the pavement it was very difficult for Mr. Smith to get to work. He had no car and it was forbidden to walk in the road.(...) He couldn't afford to pay Private Pavements Ltd. for the privilege of walking on their footpaths. (Townsend, 1989, p. 71)

What starts as a normal day in the lives of a working-class couple is soon turned into a disconcerting nonsense as the main components of physical and social human life (air, light, water, work) have been privatised. Townsend constructs the whole narrative in a series of mounting, comic episodes to describe the dystopia

of the everyday in which normal people are involved when private corporations work only for their own profit and forget they should limit themselves to being service suppliers:

He didn't earn much since Work Enterprise had bought all the work in the country and had cut his wages. In fact he was getting a bit worried about money since his savings had gone on one horrific bill to Water Ltd, the result of a broken water main outside his house. He shared his cracked pipe with the old lady next door but she had cravenly committed suicide ten minutes after opening her bill, leaving Mr. Smith to pay for the lot. (...) Mrs Smith and he hardly washed themselves or their clothes anymore. (Townsend, 1989, p. 73)

However, Townsend always leaves room for rebellion. Her characters react to the pressures exerted by the powerful corporations by performing free, simple, everyday activities with no restrictions:

The sunshine meter on the wall was extraordinarily sensitive to light and last quarter's bill had still not been paid. Mrs Smith had gone mad one glorious day in June and had opened the patio doors. 'Bugger it,' she had shouted when he had remonstrated with her. 'I can't live without sunshine and fresh air.' (Townsend, 1989, p. 72)

In this sense, the opposite of dystopia is not utopia but rationality, as the scenario depicted by Townsend results in something completely absurd:

Mr Smith looked at his watch and hurried upstairs to wake his wife (...) He shook her arm and she woke. The meter on her arm (property of Sleep and Doze Co Ltd) clicked off, she sat up in bed and removed her Private Air PLC breathing hood to kiss her husband (...) he couldn't stop himself and the meter on his penis was soon ticking away merrily, 'Oh, sod the expense,' he thought as he began to make love to his dirty but beloved wife. (Townsend, 1989, p. 73)²³

In addition, Townsend's criticism does not only apply to literary corporations invented by her but also to actual ones: "Officialdom has been flexing its bossy muscles lately. I am a customer of Severn Trent Water and, at the time of writing, I am forbidden to use my hosepipe" (Townsend, 2001, p. 101).²⁴

²³The title of the chapter is *Mr. Smith's Privatised Penis*. I have not included it previously so as not to spoil the fun of the last quote which is also the last paragraph of the chapter.

²⁴To this respect, cfr. Melville, 2016.

As time passes, Townsend's dystopia stops being triggered by the imposing presence of private corporations which control up to the tiniest details of citizens' lives but by the overwhelming, dictatorial impositions of the State. The shift corresponds to the evolution of the political circumstances of the time and the movement from the contestation to Thatcher's economic policies and the subsequent dismantling of the welfare state, to the disillusion provoked by Blair's betrayal of both the dearest Labour principles and the most deeply rooted British features. Townsend criticises not only the extent and consequences of privatisation but the absolute ineffectiveness of Labour measures to improve production:

As Wayne and Lancer were crossing the patch of grass in front of the One-Stop Centre, Camilla approached them (...) 'Inspector, could you tell me the time, please? My watch has packed in.'
Lancer said, 'Before I tell you the time, madam, I should warn you that there is now a charge for this service.' (...) Lancer said, 'We are a public-private partnership and if we want to stay in business we have to charge for our services.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 26)²⁵

In any case, every possible measure is justified if the end is to reach absolute control of the population, either by means of the strict supervision of the essentials of everyday life or by subjecting the citizens to constant surveillance.

The imagery of Townsend's dystopia, both persistent and highly linked to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, is epitomised by the presence of several elements:

- Helicopters flying over the city in order to spot those who are transgressing the rules, either in fiction or reality:

The worst is that Severn Trent Water has engaged helicopters and small planes to fly over its area and report anybody infringing the hosepipe ban. (Townsend, 2001, p. 102)

Inspector Clive Lancer, the senior officer in Arthur Grice's private police force, was giving new recruit Dwayne Lockhart an induction to the Flowers Exclusion Zone (...) 'Spotter plane,' said Inspector

²⁵Cfr. with:

We will search out at every turn new ways and new ideas to tackle the new issues: how to encourage more flexible working hours and practices to suit employees and employers alike; how to harness the huge potential of the new information technology; how to simplify the processes of the government machine; how to put public and private sector together in partnership to give us the infrastructure and transport system we need. (Labour Party, 1997)

Lancer, throwing back his huge head. 'He's doing aerial photography, looking for illegal sheds.' 'Is it against the law to have a shed now?' asked Dwayne. (Townsend, 2006, p. 20)

In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping into people's windows. (Orwell, 1983, p. 31)

Helicopters are a usual element of control and surveillance in the hands of power in dystopian fiction. Feenberg (1995) describes them as the usual weapon used by dystopian technocrats in order to locate individual heroes who both try to escape from the overcontrolled society in which they live or resist it by force. This way, helicopters feature insistently in dystopian films and books, in a wide variety of shapes, from the most traditional to the most technologically advanced. They imply a higher level of surveillance and control over citizens and its presence in film or literary texts almost immediately takes the viewer/reader to a war scenario.

However, Townsend's treatment of this strict air surveillance, as the rest of the components of her dystopia, evolves over time, moving from humour at its most in *The True Confessions of a Middle-aged Woman*:

Can you imagine the ludicrous conversation that must frequently take place between the pilot and Severn Trent Water HQ?

PILOT: hose spy plane to HQ. I have a positive sighting. Repeat, I have a positive sighting. Over.

HQ: Details, hose spy plane. Over.

PILOT:17,Acacia Avenue. Man with bald head wearing spectacles, plaid shirt and army- surplus-type shorts directing hosepipe towards group of sunflowers approximately seven feet tall. Over.

HQ (excitedly): Seven feet tall! He'll be easy to identify then, won't he? Old baldly? Over.

PILOT,: No, the sunflowers are seven feet tall. (...)

PILOT: He is shaking his fist at the sky. Over.

HQ: (...) We are sending Hose Ban enforcement to Acacia Avenue now. Over.

PILOT: What'll happen to him, HQ? Over.

HQ: He'll get fifty lashes with the nozzle end of a hosepipe on his bare buttocks in a public place - usually the car park of a garden centre, a £ 1,000 fine and confiscation of his hosepipe and outside water tap. Over. (Townsend, 2001, p. 102)

To dictatorial reminiscences in *Queen Camilla*:

The police helicopter suddenly clattered over Hell Close (...) then an amplified voice boomed out. 'This is an official police announcement: three minutes to curfew. Will residents please return to their homes and stay there.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 132)

- Citizens gatherings:

Disturbance in the form of rebellion, either individual or organised, provokes the immediate counterattack on the part of the authoritarian rulers of dystopian societies. One of the ways in which their absolute power is displayed is the submission of citizens to massive gatherings in order to be informed of the new punishment to be exerted upon those who dare to oppose the status quo or, in some cases, of future "relocations", which sparks an immediate reference to the Nazi Final Solution procedures:

The forty-six residents of Hell Close were evacuated from their homes at midnight by the security police and were gathered together. (Townsend, 2006, p. 197)

She had been in a deep sleep when an announcement from the police helicopter ordered her to leave the house immediately. Once outside, a phalanx of security police had corralled the residents and marched them to the One-Stop Centre. There have been no WRVS and, thought the Queen, it was unlikely there would be a singsong. (Townsend, 2006, p. 199)

Townsend stresses the nightmarish atmosphere of the moment by presenting a brief picture of terror; night, helicopters, evacuation. Moreover, with the terms "gathered", "corralled" or "marched", she compares the population with cattle being conducted (to the slaughterhouse?) and therefore the feeling of bovine submission imposed upon the inhabitants of Hell Close.

- Ghetto:

Spatial segregation as the most visible trait of social dislocation features in a number of dystopian visions from *Total Recall* to the District 12 of *The Hunger Games*. The deprivation with which the inhabitants of segregated areas live is marked by significant levels of poverty, unemployment, high teenage pregnancy rates, monoparental families and welfare dependency (Wilson, 1987). The separation from the rest of the city and therefore the rest of the social groups is evident and the borders of these areas are sometimes physically delimited.

In Townsend's narrative, as we saw previously, poverty causes both social exclusion and spatial reclusion. Hell Close is surrounded by a physical barrier and its houses face the inner part of the estate, turning their backyards to the rest of the world. Her references are, once more, clearly linked to the Nazi ghettos: "A twenty-foot-high metal fence topped with razor wire and CCTV cameras formed the boundary between the back gardens of Hell Close and the outside world". (Townsend, 2006, p. 12). Even in the number of citizens living in these "exclusion zones": "*Six million*, five hundred thousand plus antisocial criminals, suspected terrorists, drug addicts and social incompetents have been taken off the streets and are now living in restricted areas". (Townsend, 2006, p. 228)²⁶

This is the government's "final solution" to any disturbance of regular, law-abiding, meek citizenship. But Townsend goes further so as to envisage a kind of, *mutatis mutandis*, Malthusian problem: "Prime Minister, these figures are rising at an alarming rate. How long will it be before there are more people inside the Exclusion Zones than there are outside?" (Townsend, 2006, p. 228).

- Ubiquitous watching eyes:

On the walls were scarlet banners of the Youth League and the Spies, and a full-sized poster of Big Brother. (Orwell, 1983, p. 23)

Dystopian scenarios are closely related to omnipresent surveillance practices used as a tool for the control of the citizens' movements and the early detection of subversive behaviour. This is symbolically represented by either real or fictitious "eyes" whose presence may be conspicuous or remain hidden and undetected. The topic, of undoubtedly Foucauldian reminiscences,²⁷ implies watching *and* reporting to the authorities which, in turn, leads to a somehow Manichean division of the society between those who are good, the ones who report any suspicious behaviour and therefore conduct an exemplary life according to the power's instructions, and those who are bad, the ones who perform these suspicious practices which, to the reader's eyes, are perfectly normal. Thus, dystopia arises in this sense, when irrational control on the part of the power is exerted upon the everyday: "There are areas in the country where milkmen are being encouraged by the authorities to report any suspicious dawn-light activity. The scheme is called Milkwatch" (Townsend, 2001, p. 103).

²⁶My emphasis.

²⁷See Foucault, 1975, especially the section devoted to comment of Bentham's *Panopticon*.

The issue has, in addition, an important political bias. Surveillance and control are carried out through the use of a variety of technological devices. According to Lyon (2003) the proliferation of these coincided with the dismantling of the welfare estate:

The very concept of state welfare involves a social sharing of risks, the converse occurs when that state welfare goes into decline. What are the results of this? For those still in dire need, because of unemployment, illness, single parenthood, or poverty otherwise generated, surveillance is tightened as a means of discipline. (Lyon in Lyon Ed., 2003, p. 20)

In this way, in Townsend's dystopia, the presence of vigilant eyes is mainly exemplified by the ubiquitous CCTV cameras whose references in her pages increase exponentially in every volume written under Tony Blair's tenure, thus corresponding to government policies on welfare reorganisation: "We live in a Stalinist society, Adrian, watched and spied on 24/7" (Townsend, 2009, p. 81).

As a response to Blair's motto "tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime" several schemes were devised by successive New Labour governments in order to fight crime. In July 1998 the government launched its *Crime Reduction Programme* which included the *Crime Reduction Strategy* and the *Crime and Disorder Act*. Within this legal and organisational context, CCTV systems were seen as a key tool to prevent and tackle social disorder and crime:²⁸ "The UK is the currently unrivalled world capital for video surveillance in public places" (Lyon in Lyon ed., 2003, p.16). The popular perception of CCTV systems was, most of the time, negative and, following this line, Townsend's criticism of the government's somehow naive conception of surveillance reaches the whole set of components involved in the actual application of the CCTV scheme:²⁹

We'll be perfectly safe, we are protected by CCTV.' The cameras were everywhere, swivelling their inquisitive heads slowly in 360-degree turns. Jack said, 'CCTV is a joke, Ed. You get badly trained security officers watching a bank of blurred, out-of-focus screens which make everybody on the street look like the abominable snowman. You got caught up in the hysteria whipped up by the private security firms who are hungry for contracts.' (Townsend, 2003, p. 271)

²⁸For a complete study of New Labour and CCTV implementation and the different theoretical and philosophical implications see Fussey, 2004.

²⁹See Atkins, 2007 for a critical analysis of New Labour surveillance policies and specific counterarguments for the government's statements on the issue.

In a single extract, Townsend has described with her usual acuity the global panorama created by the installation of CCTV cameras and the economic background of the whole issue, which corresponds to the extended practice of public-private economic partnership stimulated by New Labour. The expressions used by Townsend speak for themselves: inquisitive heads, badly trained, blurred screens, hysteria, hunger for contracts. In her usual way she outlines the problem with just a few strokes of her pen, considering its multiple dimensions and participants.

- Devices for immediate citizen identification

ID cards could be considered as the most immediate and effective means to identify citizens, who must produce them at the authorities' request and in response to any other official procedures that involve identification. In Britain, they had been used during both World Wars to distinguish between British citizens and foreign enemies but they lost effectiveness and gained opposition on the part of citizenship once the war period was over (Stadler & Lyon in Lyon ed. 2004, p. 79). Intended to keep track of citizens, the issue of ID cards was reintroduced by the New Labour government again by the end of the 20th century fuelled by the increasing mobility of citizens in a globalised world and the anxieties created by terrorist attacks. However the *Identity Cards Act* of 2006 was repelled and so were successive attempts to reintroduce it despite the occasional claims for its re-establishment.³⁰

Townsend does not spare her criticism of the evil side of ID cards as an instrument to reveal the most private information:

I have long suspected that my sister Rosie is not my father's child, and that she was sired by Mr. Lucas, our next-door neighbour. My theory was confirmed today when my white-faced mother burst into my kitchen and sobbed, 'If they bring in ID cards with DNA profiling, I'm done.' (Townsend, 2008, p. 264)

In addition, in *Queen Camilla* she denounces the nightmare symbolized by both, technological devices to restrict citizen's movements, exemplified by the compulsory use of ankle tags, and the wickedly programmed and malfunctioning computers responsible for dealing with extensive data bases with all possible information about every single citizen:

³⁰For a full summary of British policies on ID cards, see Santo, 2016.

When he expressed his amazement at the extent of the information kept, Lancer said, 'Vulcan knows everything about us, lad. It's like a lovely warm duvet on a cold night.' (...) 'What you've got to take on board, lad, is that we are living in tomorrow's world, today. We are science fiction. (Townsend, 2006, p. 28)

The futuristic atmosphere created by the computerized surveillance rooms is dismantled by the ineffectiveness of the whole system:

Vulcan, the Government's gargantuan computer that was trusted to process and issue ID cards, visiting orders, benefits, National Health Service records and a myriad of other bureaucratic duties, was so inadequate to the task and had such bafflingly complicated software that no on person, civil servant or government official could understand how it worked. An investigative journalist had recently written in *The Times* about her successful attempt to be issued with six ID cards, under the names of Saddam Hussein, Joseph Stalin, Osama bin Laden, Mickey Mouse, Dr. Frankenstein and William Shakespeare. All six of the cards had been delivered to the same address in the same post. (Townsend, 2006, p. 255)

In *Queen Camilla*, the inhabitants of the exclusion zones are subjected to the full combination of all the possible means of control:

The residents of the zone were required to wear an ankle tag and carry an identity card at all times. Their movements were followed by the security police on a bank of CCTV screens installed in one of the portakabins. (Townsend, 2006, p. 12)

And Townsend lucubrates on the consequences of such absolute control. The most immediate being the evident loss of privacy. Again the references to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are unavoidable:

A banner backdrop said 'The Entitlement Card -a corporate opportunity'.

Jack said 'Not so much Big Brother, but big sister and he whole bloody family.'

The Prime Minister snapped, 'that's just paranoid hysteria.'

Jack said to the Prime Minister, 'Ed, surely you can see the point of being anonymous occasionally, of being able to just sod off without anybody knowing who you are or what you're doing?' (Townsend, 2003, p. 198)

The pro-ID cards argument of having nothing to hide is counterbalanced by Townsend through the enumerative series of personal information about private life which would be at risk if privacy is challenged:³¹

The Prime Minister said mantra-like, 'If you've got nothing to hide what's there to be afraid of?' Jack said, 'but I've got things to hide. My credit rating, my taste in library books, the political party I support, my stepfather's criminal record, how my brother died, how much booze I buy in a week, my genetic code. Why should some insurance company know all that?' (Townsend, 2003, p. 198)

Nevertheless, what Townsend stresses to a greater extent is the destruction of privacy with the official excuse of fighting terrorism. The argument between her position and the government's is represented by the figures and opinions of two of the policemen controlling the Flowers Estate, the freshman and the veteran:

Lancer said, 'Vulcan is a policeman's best friend.'
Dwayne said, 'Isn't it a bit...well...intrusive?'
'I'll tell you what is intrusive, Lockhart, and that's a bleeding terrorist bomb!' (Townsend, 2006, p. 28)

The end of privacy is fully justified and Townsend deals with the topic also in *Adrian Mole. The Prostrate Years* in a short extract where she attributes the government arguments expressed in a way slightly reminiscent of religious wording:

I have just read that the government has passed a law whereby 652 agencies of the state will be able to find out who I have phoned and who has phoned me. It is the end of privacy. The government claims, in the sacred names of terrorism and criminal activity, that these measures are vital to our security. but how secure am I going to feel when I phone Parvez and we talk about my finances? Is some government snooper going to be listening and assume that I am laundering money smuggling Kalashnikovs into Leicester? (Townsend, 2009, p. 136)

Eventually, the extreme measures of control, lead, as we saw previously, to extreme absurdity:

'Right, I'll demonstrate a female stop and search.' (...) 'having ascertained the identity of the suspects, we proceed to the search. (...)
'You are looking for drugs, stolen goods,, concealed weapons and

³¹See Epstein, 2016.

bomb-making materials,' said Lancer. (...) 'Al Qaeda are known to have infiltrated slapper society in the past Dwayne. So we take no chances.(Townsend, 2006, p. 22)

So sombre a general panorama as the one described in Townsend's dystopian visions is summarised in a passage of *Queen Camilla* which opens with the mournful words: "England was an unhappy land" (Townsend, 2006, p.11). These words are related to the famous popular song *Oh What a Happy Land is England* written by H. Adams with music by Charles Godfrey. The connections go further than the mere similarities of both the title of the song and the initial sentence of the extract. In the case of *Oh What a Happy Land is England* (1887), irony pervades the whole composition as the words are used as a mocking way to describe the situation of England at that moment with increasing pressure on the poorer classes and generalized hypocrisy:

'Tis the bonafide duty of an Englishman to sing,
Oh what a happy land is England! (...)
A newspaper can manufacture any kind of news,
And only lowly people have to mind their Ps and Qs
And you pay for gas and water that you know you never use.(...)
Rates and taxes soon will overtop the sum you pay for rent,
Oh what a happy land is England! (...)
We've a class who will have clothes if they go without their grub,
We stop the poor man's betting but allow it at the club,
And the Parson and the actor can be seen inside a pub. (...)
Singing. Oh what a happy land is England! (Adams & Godfrey, 1887)

In this same critical line, Townsend depicts a society paralysed by a sense of fear artificially imposed on citizens by their governments or some obscure corporations:

England was an unhappy land (...) The people were fearful, believing that life itself was composed of danger, and unknown and unknowable threats to their safety. Old people did not leave their homes after dark, children were not allowed to play outside even in the daylight hours and were escorted everywhere by anxious adults. (Townsend, 2006, p. 11)

So as to allow a kind of social relief, consumerism is the password to help subjugated citizens to view a glimpse of an alleged happiness. The same as the one enjoyed by Victorians of the song when visiting the pubs and drinking, that is, in both cases, artificial pleasures unable to fulfil their empty lives:

To make themselves feel better the people spent their money on things that diverted and amused them. There was always something they thought they must have to make them happy. But when they had bought the object of their desire, they found, to their profound disappointment, that the object was no longer desirable, and that far from making them happy, they felt nothing but remorse and the sadness of loss. (Townsend, 2006, p. 11)

The economic pressure under which the least favoured sectors of the society are put is emphasised in both the song and the extract but in this last case, the solution offered by the government is of an extremely dark nature:

To help alleviate the pensions crisis, the laws on euthanasia were liberalized and pensioners contemplating suicide were encouraged by a government information leaflet entitled 'Make Way for the Young.' (Townsend, 2006, p. 11)

And again, in both cases, politicians are far from what is expected from them, in *Queen Camilla*, they are those responsible for the creation of living, actual dystopian worlds apart to enclose the less favoured members of a society where they do not belong any more:

In a desperate attempt to be seen to be 'doing something' about crime and social disorder, the Government's Department of Liveability embarked on a bold programme to convert the satellite council estates into Exclusion Zones. (Townsend, 2006, p. 11)

Is there any hope left? How can dystopia be cancelled? Is there any possible way to conduct a free life? For the protagonists of dystopia, an extremely limited number of possibilities exist; open rebellion (like Camilla's) or inner dissent (like Winston's):

The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced labour camp. He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was the decisive act. In small clumsy letters he wrote: April 4th, 1984. (Orwell, 1983, p. 11)

Nevertheless, despite the existence of actual dystopia exemplified in *Queen Camilla* by the disheartening exclusion zones, exiled from the rest of the city, constantly

under surveillance by the government by any possible means, with their inhabitants' privacy exposed and the impossibility of individual escape without compromising the integrity of their own kin, in Townsend there is always room for hope. Love, as a powerful force, will help save the deep clash between both dystopic and free worlds:

By nine thirty the streets of the Flowers Exclusion Zone were deserted (...) Dwayne found herself patrolling Slapper Alley (...) He wanted to give Paris a book he had just finished reading, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It was far-fetched, because it was set in the future when a totalitarian government controlled the population using a television screen. But at the heart of the book was a romance between the hero, Winston Smith, and a girl called Julia. (Townsend, 2006, p. 134)

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

These previous pages have intended to shed light on some constituents of Sue Townsend's world by binding together a mixture of personal feelings, authorial peculiarities and literary achievements and, in doing so, eventually to reach some conclusions on further issues concerning both the relationship between literature and history and the open discussion between popular and highbrow literature. This last section consists of several parts through which I have attempted successively: To summarise the different aspects covered in this research, to provide an answer for the set of initial questions that inspired the study by deepening in the analysis of the different issues brought to the fore and, eventually, to set future lines of research also stressing the limitations found on my way. My personal involvement in this thesis exceeds the limits of the logical link between a doctorate student and his/her research, for the previous idea to study the most salient aspects of Sue Townsend's production to be found in a specific selection of her works derives from previous knowledge and enjoyment of the author. This bond was stressed due to several circumstances such as my visit to the David Wilson Library at Leicester University where I could actually see and read the manuscripts and other documents related to some of Townsend's works and, especially, to the sad news of her passing. The reading and re-reading of Townsend revealed a richness of topics, connections and resources much wider than initially thought. If I have been able to transmit that, I strongly feel the effort was worthwhile.

Not only was a kind of affectionate connection felt during the whole process of the writing but it also was perceived from the point of view of the author and the link between both her life and work. They appear as inseparable and a multiplicity of references to personal situations are found in her pages; from the illnesses that some of her characters suffer to the different episodes, personally experienced by Townsend, staging the fight against officials and the erosion of the welfare state,

the acid depiction of her mockery against Conservatism or the disillusion with the betrayal of her political beliefs represented by New Labour policies.

Throughout the whole thesis, it has been stressed the relationship between Townsend's works and the social, historical and cultural background to which they are related, thus proving the clear insertion of the author within her time either taking into account the topics she covered in her pages or the specific narrative tools she used. However, this thesis would not be concluded if the analysis of all these aspects was not aimed to the attempt to provide an answer for the whole set of questions that prompted this research in the first place. In trying to do so, it has been made a selection of those works by Townsend considered best suited for this initial purpose. Other sources such as some of the folders of Townsend personal archive, kept at the Special Collections Section of the David Wilson Library were also consulted in order to obtain a better impression of certain aspects under consideration in this thesis. This selection of works and documents of the author, though restricted to a specific number of novels, plays and archived folders may, in turn, account for the multiple analytic dimensions and perspectives that could be addressed and specifically for those connected with time, space, identity and narrative technique.

6.1 Summarising findings

The temporal dimension considered is marked by two main historical events represented by the arrival at 10, Downing Street of two strong and well defined personalities: Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair. John Major, Gordon Brown and David Cameron play second fiddle in Townsend's works, in contrast with the main role played by Thatcher and Blair, although, Townsend deals with them from a very different position. Therefore, this study is bracketed between Thatcher's first tenure and Blair's resignation only for practical reasons as there are some issues (war, for instance) that are prolonged through subsequent premierships.

The period covered by Margaret Thatcher's successive tenures is characterized by a total transformation of Britain. Paramount economic changes took place: the crisis provoked by the clash between the official State control of the economy on the one hand, and the ever changing reality and the growing needs of a growing population during previous Labour governments on the other gave way to a wave of privatisations in key industries which, in turn, provoked social conflict at class and race levels, with strong reactions on the part of traditional sectors such as the miners who, eventually lost their battle against Thatcher's new economic ways

theoretically based on Friedman's monetarism. The social cost of this transformation was the widening of the social breach between the working classes and a new affluent class whose fresh money had been obtained through stock market speculation and resulted in rampant unemployment and a dangerous erosion of the welfare provisions. As far as foreign affairs are concerned, Thatcher searched for a reposition of Britain in the world scenario, hardly overcome the loss of the Empire after World War II and the Suez crisis in 1956. This led to the providential intervention in the Falklands war which boosted Thatcher's popularity and momentarily gave British people the impression of having recovered their previous place in the world affairs.

The radical transformation ushered by Margaret Thatcher's strong and ambivalent personality had a reflection in all the sectors of British life. Her influence would last for decades and be felt at all levels, as proved by the negative reactions generated by the death of the premier in 2013. The cultural world was not alien to this conflict against the official power represented by the PM manifested in, more than a wave, a tsunami of counter culture instances. An increasing number of intellectuals of the time reacted strongly against Thatcher's premises and questioned the transformations experienced by the country and, particularly, the social cost they brought about.

Sue Townsend is part of that intellectual reaction against Thatcher. Her criticism is displayed in two main ways: openly, as in the pages of *Mr. Bevan's Dream* where she laments the erosion of the welfare provisions, and through the literary persona of Adrian Mole and his written remarks against Thatcher, either explicitly or deduced from the actions and words of characters other than him. Unemployment and its economic, physical and moral consequences and the major social changes that took place under Thatcher's premierships are some of the main issues addressed by the author in the first two volumes of *The Adrian Mole Diaries*.

But not only did Townsend's witticism and critical remarks against Thatcher target the consequences of the PM's policies but also two of the most salient characteristics of her strong personality: her gender performance and her religious faith. Through considerable doses of humour, Townsend made her contribution to the mocking discourse created around Margaret Thatcher's figure, mainly based on her gender performance; on some occasions masterfully played by the premier. Questioning Thatcher's gender turned into a usual humour trigger (see reference to Spitting Image series) and Townsend was not alien to this tendency, as seen in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* and an

isolated reference in *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*. In addition, Thatcher's Methodist faith is caricatured in the pages of *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts* as the origin of some of the most despicable traits of Thatcher's policies. Tony Blair represents the other pole around which the temporal dimension of those Townsend's works under consideration turns. Thanks to a series of events within the Labour party, Blair appeared as the perfect candidate to articulate the growing opposition against the Conservative party, led by John Major once Thatcher was out of stage. Blair knew how to play masterfully with the British population's tiredness of the Conservative Party and was able to raise their hopes in a better Labour future. His actual policies based on new programmes to boost education levels, fight against crime or safeguard the bases of the NHS, among others, were, in fact, a continuation of Conservative trends supported both ideologically by the abolition of the Marxist Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution and the reformulation of the very same concept of *Labour* into *New Labour*, and economically by the changes in global economy. However, the hopes initially raised were soon deluded and Blair's favourable star faded mainly due to the participation of Britain in the Iraqi conflict. Blair was forced to resign and left the country in the hands of his second in command, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown who covered the bill with a more serious and less telegenic quality than his predecessor.

Blair provoked a two-phase reaction in British intellectual arena. Initially, he was welcomed especially by those intellectuals who had strongly opposed the Conservative Party. Little by little this enthusiasm gave way to a strong critical reaction as Blair's New Labour was unable to clearly make the difference with previous Conservative policies. The official spirit of a new, modern and cool Britain, making its optimistic way towards the new millennium was soon overcome by the reality of a country trying to come to terms with conflicting situations derived both from previous internal realities and new external challenges.

Sue Townsend took part in the aired reaction against Blair (particularly due to British involvement in the Iraqi war) in a more acute way than in the case of Thatcher, due mainly to the betrayal of her socialist ideology epitomised by the New Labour leader, an issue to which she devotes two whole volumes, *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years* and *Number Ten*. Although gender issues are also present, particularly in *Number Ten* with Blair's alter ego Edward Claire touring the country dressed like a woman, the Blairite ways and entourage are the target of the most acid criticism in *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years* as a result of the clash between reality and the wording of it on the part of official authorities.

Townsend depicts the disillusion of British average citizens who had placed their hopes in a new leader only to be confronted with the reality of his premiership which, according to Townsend, was as inconsistent as a cappuccino, made of three quarters of froth.

Apart from the consequences of the policies impulsed by Thatcher and Blair and the presence and influence of the PMs themselves, there are some main issues related to this temporal framework whose persistence may be detected through different volumes: unemployment, the situation of the welfare state and the wars in which Britain has participated from the Falklands conflict onwards.

The high levels of unemployment suffered by British society in the Thatcher period eroded the traditional gender divisions of the roles played by the different members of the family. Fathers, as unemployed, were not the bread winners and mothers, working outside their homes, were not the home carers any more. This situation contravened, in turn, the official idea of what a family should be. Townsend's characters experience the same vicissitudes as real people, with the men of the house remaining unemployed and the women working, mostly in menial jobs, for a living, all of them experiencing first hand the consequences of the government policies: a life on welfare, depression and loss of manhood, social and personal instability. Finally, Townsend describes how unemployment caused the erosion of the traditional working class values and the feeling of "every man for himself" that had been supported by the individualism instilled by Thatcher's policies.

The bases of British welfare were laid by *The Beveridge Report* in 1942. It established a set of provisions on the part of the State based on the inland contributions and aimed at cover the social needs of the population "from cradle to grave". However, the ever changing national scenario and the growing needs of the population caused the first fractures in a system previously taken for granted. Thatcher's measures based on Victorian conceptions of society provoked the first important crises in the schemes of welfare, putting an end to the so-called "spirit of consensus", that is, the common agreement by Conservative and Labour alike to provide and respect the guiding lines of the welfare state. Under Tony Blair, several attempts were made to reinforce the system with different measures such as public-private partnerships but the situation prior to the end of 1970s was (and later has been) impossible to recover.

Townsend vision of the welfare state is mainly generational as she belonged to that generation who experienced it at its best. In her narrative, the erosion

to which the system was being submitted is a recurrent topic that is addressed fully in *Mr. Bevan's Dream* and occasionally, as something at the background of the different stories in the rest of the volumes considered. Schools, hospitals, elderly homes, neighbourhoods, etc. reflect increasing dereliction against which Townsend's characters struggle to obtain what they are apparently entitled as British citizens, those provisions that a State which must cater for the needs of the population is outrageously failing to do.

Britain emerged from World War II as the moral winner against Germany and the Nazi party overwhelming war machine. However, this did not result in effective profit as such, on the contrary, it gave way to a wave of independence movements and, eventually, to the loss of the Empire. The innermost feeling of loss and the reinvention of the role to play in international affairs led, among other reasons, to the participation of Britain in different conflicts of diverse nature; from the Falklands to the Gulf wars, the Iraqi war and the Afghan conflict.

War pervades the whole series of *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. In *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* Townsend describes the Falklands war as a way for Thatcher to reinforce her political position. The war gave Townsend the opportunity to describe British military paraphernalia but also to criticise the sense of a conflict that the population perceived initially as alien and distant. In *Adrian Mole, the Wilderness Years*, Townsend also denounces the first Gulf war as a media product whose coverage is followed by the population, and her characters, on television. Not disregarding the importance of these two conflicts, the Iraqi war and the previous involvement of Blair with the affair of the presumed weapons of mass destruction are the subject of a complete volume, *Adrian Mole and the Weapons of Mass Destruction* where war takes its toll by causing the death of the best friend of Adrian Mole's elder son. Whereas the Falklands and Gulf wars seemed distant conflicts, the Iraqi war was conceived by Townsend as a close madness. Thus, Townsend's perception of war moved from the, somehow, noble World War II which brought to light the best of British character to be celebrated in the Remembrance day, to the somber consequences for both British soldiers and citizenry of those conflicts with an evident economic background: fear in the battle field and impotence and incomprehension in the home front.

The analysis of the spatial dimensions of any narrative appears as an essential element in order to provide the necessary referential framework in which the stories told are inserted. In the case of Sue Townsend, this spatial component is paramount and provides the reader with a whole set of references which are inseparable from the rest of the narrative constituents. In this sense, for instance,

Townsend's works, although of a universal appeal, cannot be separated from the local reality represented by Leicester and the role this city plays in most of her books either as the main location of the action or as a stage in various travel narratives.

Trying to map Townsend's fictional spaces was both complicated and interesting at the same time and it was addressed by juggling different elements: the facts and official policies that provide the actual context for the resulting narratives, the spaces described by the author mainly taking into account the relationships they establish among them, the affective connections between them and Townsend's characters and the ways in which these perceive and perform the different locations they move around.

Historical facts and official policies provide the actual context of the narrative of space in the case of Townsend. The regional measures designed to solve the North-South divide in the country and favour areas such as the Midlands gave way to different programmes under Thatcher's and Blair's tenures which did not result in the desired improvement. The movement from the city centre to the suburbs will provide these areas with a specific character which sometimes gathered what can be termed as "cultural antipathies". Usually connected with Conservative ideology and epitomised by Thatcher's somehow parochial ways when referring to the conduct of the country's affairs, the suburbs played also an important role in the New Labour imagery as the areas to be politically targeted with the "middle-way" policies.

The philosophy that had inspired the building of council estates from the 19th century had a true turning point with the passing of the *Housing Act* in 1980 thanks to which thousands of tenants were able to become owners of their own houses in the so-called "right to buy" spirit. However, the negative image that these areas conveyed was impossible to erase.

Most of the movements of Townsend's characters benefit from the bettering of the transport sector from the 1950s onwards. The increasing number of cars improved the construction and improvement of roads and motorways (the M25 with Thatcher) and particularly during Blair's campaign prior to 1997 elections, the image of the "Mondeo Man" as the average British citizen pictured as the owner of a specific car model represented the assumption of the car as a symbol of status and even political force. The steep rising of displacements either for working reasons or pleasure was not accompanied by a betterment in the railway transport and British Railways were, eventually, privatised under John Major.

Finally, closed spaces such as local pubs, youth clubs and schools were targeted by successive government policies; from the passing of the Health Act in 2006 which banned smoking in public places, to the rejection of comprehensive schools by Thatcher and the different, and mostly vain, attempts to improve education levels. All these measures are subjected to Townsend's criticism. In addition, she does not miss the opportunity to denounce the loss of community life through the closure of local entities such as pubs and post offices, and the destruction of neighbourhood life thanks to the inveterate neglect of successive governments.

Townsend's depiction of the different fictional spaces of her narrative may be perceived basically through the relationships among them, mainly articulated around antithetic pairs. The opposition between provinces, epitomised by an omnipresent Leicester, and London as the arriving point of a variety of narratives, is particularly important in *Adrian Mole*, *The Wilderness Years* and *Number Ten*. A second contrast turns around city centre and suburbs. Townsend's narrative is mainly suburban. *The Adrian Mole Diaries* are set in a suburban entourage which is clearly enclosed especially for teenage characters. The suburbs, conceived as a world in themselves, and the council estates are poles apart of the same trend to abandon the city centre but, this time, based on Victorian conceptions of poverty.

This set of relationships between different locations is evident also when studying the movement of various Townsend's characters around them, caused by several reasons and performed in a variety of ways. Mostly for commuting, the displacements by car represent an interesting component of Townsend's fiction and are responsible for some short narratives as in *Number Ten* or *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. Train also features in Townsend's pages with a purely instrumental character, mostly used to criticise the failure of the service as part of the general situation of neglect of previous State industries. Townsend's characters also move around different locations for pleasure. The author makes the most of her characters' leisure time, for instance in *The Adrian Mole Diaries* and follows them to working class holiday locations such as Skegness with an interesting repetition of situations in both *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole*, abroad to sunny destinations in Spain or Greece and even to Russia, this time with an uncanny connection between Sue Townsend and Margaret Thatcher's actual trips and Adrian Mole's fictive one.

The opposite spheres of the private and the public are also addressed by Townsend. These categories apply initially to her definition of house as the building itself and home as the atmosphere and bond created by its dwellers. She considers as well other intermediate realms placed between the private and the public, namely

Buckingham Palace and Number 10, Downing Street. As for public locations, she devotes a number of pages to closed spaces of sociability either free and of a leisure character, such as the pub and the youth club, or forced as in the case of school which features especially in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* where it appears as a world on its own.

The whole process of mapping would not be completed without the presence of the neighbourhood which is given a special attention in *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla* and to a lesser extent in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*. Townsend spares no occasion to criticise the evolution of neighbourhoods which were once spaces of conviviality where community was an important component of British citizens' lives and the subsequent process of decay and abandonment.

Townsend's characters display a series of affective connections with the spaces in which they move. This, in turn influences their perceptions on them and the way they perform them. The provinces appear as a major stage for Townsend's fiction and are considered in different ways by the different characters; seen with growing contempt by Adrian Mole in his youth and as the stage of Pandora Braithwaite's political purposes. The eventual recognition of their value as a key constituent of the essence of British culture and spirit on the part of Adrian summarises the author's own feelings. In turn, London is depicted as an intermediate stage in Adrian's life, a restrictive locus of agency for Edward Clare and the arriving point of her career in politics for Pandora.

Together with the presence of suburbs as the main setting of *The Adrian Mole Diaries*, with the subsequent set of personal connections, phobias and phobias towards them, council estates feature heavily in Townsend's works. They are spaces which seem to be in permanent conflict with the rest of the world who seems to feel the need to separate and isolate them. Council states in Townsend's pages and submitted to a general sense of decay and dereliction as seen in *The Queen and I* and especially *Queen Camilla*.

Apart from previous considerations as far as sociopolitical circumstances are concerned, maybe the most interesting spaces Townsend's characters show a higher degree of connection with are those included under the binary opposition public-private. Houses and homes, pubs, youth clubs, schools and, neighbourhood as the global component that encloses all of them and encompasses those feelings of belonging or rejection play a key role in Townsend's narrative. The performance of these places is mainly based on the concept of sociability, either forced as in the case of schools which are devoted special attention by the author, or free as

with pubs or youth clubs. Neighbourhoods are perceived by Townsend's characters as small worlds in themselves, defining the essential coordinates of their lives, sometimes physically and most of the times also psychologically outlined and differentiated as in the case of council estates.

What I termed as the "identity dimension" of Sue Townsend's production is based mainly on the study of different analytic categories individually defined and socially constructed and the study of how the author depicts the processes of evolution and change of these identity components in her pages which, in turn, allows the reader to obtain a global vision of the social and economic changes experienced by Britain from the 1980s.

The idea of class, and specifically working class, pervades Townsend's literature. Many of her most significant characters belong to different sectors of the working classes, including those slowly sliding into precariat, mainly the dwellers of council estates or those unemployed as a consequence of Thatcherite policies who are unable to overcome their difficulties in Blair's years. Townsend describes the social evolution of a working class apparently reduced to a minimum due to the process of class levelling that Britain had experienced after World War II and the re-enactment of the class struggle in Thatcher's times coupled with the destruction of the traditional working class values. Her characters denounce the sharp contrast between official discourses based on Victorian morality and individualism and the reality of unemployment and its consequences. The alleged modernisation of the country under Blair is also put in question by the author by insisting on government's verbiage in opposition to the scarcity of real social and economic improvement of the less favoured sectors of British society.

Gender may be considered as one of the core issues in Townsend's production. It is paramount in works such as *Rebuilding Coventry*, *The Woman who Went to Bed for a Year* or her plays *Womberang* and *The Great Celestial Cow* and plays an essential role in the construction of some of her most beloved characters' identity.

Opposing the monolithic position of the male characters who have assimilated perfectly well the traditional gender roles, Townsend's key female characters represent different female models coexisting in the British society from the 1980s well into the new millennium. Thatcher's construction of her own gender was a conflicting one, made of a mixture of traditional values, female charm, strong personality, etc. This conflicting images are epitomised by the different women present, for instance in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. Edna Mole, Adrian's grand-

mother personifies the Victorian values whereas Pauline Mole, Adrian's mother is the clear example of the second-wave Feminism with her gender awareness raised by the reading of Germaine Greer, contesting traditional gender assumptions regarding women as home makers and family carers. Finally, Pandora Braithwaite, elected PM and one of the so-called "Blair's babes" is the main representative of the Post-feminism, the concept of "Female Power" and the contradiction between the female -even sexy- image women were required to have for the sole fact of being women and the constant questioning of their professionalism when doing so. In addition, Townsend pays attention to several complementary issues connected to gender: the women's political compromise represented by the Greenham Common movement, the acknowledgement of other female realities influenced by racial circumstances which culturally hindered feminist advance, and the fact that class is the determining factor of gender performance. Working class and proletariat (or precariat) women are not allowed feminist whims as they are forced, sometimes literally, to abide by the traditional gender roles.

In relation to gender, Townsend also addresses sexuality by focusing on several aspects. On the one hand, teenage sexual awakening is approached as the most natural thing in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, in contrast with the aired reaction against it on the part of conservative educators, which only served to boost the books sales. On the other hand Townsend deals with teenage pregnancy mainly in *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*, dealing with a social problem never solved by the successive Thatcher's administration whose official discourses blamed single mothers for exploiting the resources of the Welfare State and eroding the traditional family values. Things did not improve during Blair's tenure as single parenthood continued to be seen negatively. Finally, Townsend devotes some of her most juicy pages and references to a variety of gay characters, with special attention to the extended use of stereotypes such as the lesbian "butch" or the allegedly "artistic" gay men. Age plays an interesting role as she introduces a couple of gay elders thus contrasting with the modernity and apparent superficiality of the younger gay generation. In *Number Ten* the author also presents the reader with an example of cross-dressing which is an essential component of the narrative.

The issue of sexuality is complemented by other two ones of capital importance: the absolute criticism towards the policies of sexual repression which would be later epitomised by the passing of the infamous Section 28 of the *Local Government Act* in 1986 and the menacing presence of AIDS in British society. Townsend's lines seem to acutely preview certain reactions to the passing of

the law. She places one of her characters (Nigel, Adrian Mole's best friend) in the middle of the social debate on homosexuality and schools and acidly dismounts the official discourse on an issue which would be clearly manipulated by the Conservatives in order to restrict the power of Labour councils. Far from the AIDS scare at the beginning of the 1980s based on the idea of the "Gay Plague", Townsend deals with the topic in a realistic way in *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years* with Adrian and his girlfriend taking the AIDS test at the Terence Higgins Trust thus making the most of her pages in order to convey the message that AIDS could beat anybody, not only gay men, and stressing the social work done by private institutions devoted to fight the disease.

Townsend's perception of the category of age as a constituent of identity has resulted to be very useful in order to obtain both a narrative and discursive depiction of the successive British age generations coexisting in the time span covered by her novels, especially as far as *The Adrian Mole Diaries* is concerned, with further examples in *Number Ten*, *The Queen and I* or *Queen Camilla*.

Members of the so-called Greatest Generation, those who lived both World Wars, feature extensively in Townsend's production. Theirs is a generation marked by the hardness of wartime and its aftermath, embodying, especially the women, those Victorian values of cleanliness, righteousness and contempt for idleness. Townsend displays a tender affection when introducing these elders in her narratives and cannot fail but recognise the importance of the role they played in the construction of present-day Britain and the poor conditions in which many of them found themselves at the end of their lives. Their generational replacement is represented by the baby-boomers, exemplified by Adrian Mole's parents and their entourage towards whom baby-boomer Townsend does not spare her witty criticism. Born in a country still immerse in the process of reconstruction after World War II, they were the privileged children of the welfare state and the instigators of social changes exemplified by diverse protest movements or the second-wave Feminism, trying later to come to terms with their own ageing process and its social and economic consequences. Finally, the Generation X, represented by Adrian Mole and his contemporaries, children of the Thatcher years, are given the greatest attention by the author, corresponding to the official discourses on children of the time. Eventually, these Generation Xers will confront their parents inheritance and react by adapting to the new political and economic circumstances of the Millennium with uneven results.

Townsend's treatment of race is directly linked to the concept of Englishness whose reformulation has come coupled with the loss of the Empire and the increas-

ing number of population from the former British colonies living in the former metropolis with the resulting conflicts derived from the friction between different ways of living and perceiving the reality, particularly acute in the Thatcher period with previous antecedents in the sixties.

Townsend portrays the contradictions of a society trying to redefine itself in terms of “nation” by coping with the different realities represented by the peoples nowadays living under the shadow of the Union Jack. Particularly interesting is the case of Leicester with the highest rates of Indian population and, in this sense, Indian characters are present from the beginning of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* proving their integration in suburban life, despite the initial reluctance of Adrian’s neighbours. However, episodes of racism in the name of an alleged Britishness, understood as the traditional white, Anglo-Saxon, Anglican, are also described in *Number Ten* or *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*. The Muslim community gathers a greater importance in Townsend’s production as conflicts in Kuwait and Iraq develop. Against the irrationality of a fight that she perceives either as created by the media or by politicians personal interests, Townsend proposes dialogue and mutual understanding.

With the term “technical dimension” I allude to those narrative modes and techniques used by Sue Townsend when composing the works studied in this thesis. Although on some occasions they respond to a extended and productive literary tradition, their formulation allows to establish a link with the narratives of other authors of her time.

One of the essential elements analysed has been the different shape of certain narratives of the self that appear in Townsend’s works. The most interesting has undoubtedly been the diary format so successfully used by the author in *The Adrian Mole Diaries*. Stemming from a long British tradition of writing personal accounts, the first volume of the series was previously shaped as a radio programme benefiting from the fact that only one narrative voice was needed. The whole series of diaries allows the reader to follow the story and personal evolution of the main character with, in this sense, presents certain touches of Bildungsroman but of a mocking nature. The diary format implies that the writing is inserted within an interesting communicative scheme which connects the narrator, whose reliability is immediately questioned in the case of Adrian Mole for the reader is able to deduce from his own words what is actually happening, the false addressee, not the “dear diary” but the reader, and the typical writing techniques, characteristic of this format, based on the constraints imposed by the facts narrated and the time span covered by every entry.

Other narratives of the self are of a minor importance and, in most cases, their falsity is acknowledged by their creators or other characters around, as in *Number Ten* or *Adrian Mole, The Prostrate Years*. Even Townsend herself offers the readers scraps of her own life narrative which renders her writing closer and more familiar to the reader.

Directly connected with this element Townsend displays a number of metafictional games “a la Waugh” which introduce a rich series of technical references and contribute to place the author within those literary trends of her time based on both questioning the clear-cut limits between fiction and reality and the statism of the basic constituents of a narration, namely, author, characters, readers and the writing itself. However, thanks to works such as *The True Confessions of Adrian Albert Mole*, *Susan Lilian Townsend and Margaret Hilda Roberts* or *The Lost Diaries of Adrian Mole* the reader realizes that these metafictional games have evolved in time to the point of having turned into an original constituent of Townsend’s narrative and are mainly used to increase the humorous effect of the whole work.

Fictive and real authors and characters from Townsend’s production or other authors’ interact merrily in the pages of the above mentioned books and in *Adrian Mole, the Cappuccino Years*, *The Queen and I* or *Queen Camilla*, with the subsequent questioning of their ontology. Animals are given human qualities and a special ability for an agency that has been restricted to humans in *Queen Camilla*. Actual readers are directly addressed by some characters and are trusted with the complete set of references necessary to obtain the real and complete picture from the words of some characters. Even the process of writing itself is altered in by the interference of narrative modes in *Adrian Mole*, *The Cappuccino Years* typical, in this case, of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* proving in a sort of gentle mockery of the alleged rivalry between both novels.

Townsend’s dystopian visions of some aspects of British society are present throughout her production in several pieces of a varied length and is fully developed in *Queen Camilla*. Her perception of dystopia is expressed in terms of gender, with women’s bodies controlled and submitted to reproductive technologies as in *Ten Tiny fingers Nine Tiny Toes*, class as the basis of the separation and restriction -at all levels, even spatial- of the less privileged sectors of the population as in *Queen Camilla*, and politics, with the exposure of the incongruities of official policies of extreme citizen control and the resulting absurdities as the ones described in *Mr. Bevan’s Dream* or *The Public Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman*. Townsend’s dystopia shows interesting connections with the masterpieces of the genre, espe-

cially with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. It also deals mainly with the most usual conflicts dystopian literature turns around. This is mainly represented by the clash between urban and natural spaces and between individuals and corporations. Nature appears as the sole realm of freedom for those who dare to flee from their dystopian, urban lives as in *Queen Camilla* or *Ten Tiny fingers Nine Tiny Toes*. The struggle of individuals against corporate or government powers is also present in the last episode of *Mr. Bevan's Dream*, *The Public Confessions of a Middle-Aged Woman* or *Queen Camilla*. Townsend targets both Thatcher's and Blair's deletion of public services and erosion of the welfare provisions, and citizen control based on an artificially created feeling of insecurity respectively which has given way to a society hardly recognisable by British citizens.

Finally, although addressed in the first place in the section, the technical dimension of the Townsend's works analysed in this thesis would not be completed without the study of the most pervasive element, present throughout her whole production: humour. Used either technically or discursively, even in those pieces which were not initially conceive as humorous, Townsend's humour happily links her narrative to a long and well established British tradition. The approach to the topic has been based on different theories on humour and has focused on a variety of elements present either separately or at the same time in the selected extracts from Townsend's works.

The author's wide use of *Schadenfreude*, especially important when applied to the character of Adrian Mole although present in her depiction of other characters' afflictions, stems from the complicity of the reader who cannot help but laugh at the misfortunes of the protagonist, an honourable heir of the Grossmith brothers' hero, Charles Pooter. Some of Townsend's most humorous and witty remarks have their origins in her mastering of the different scripts that, according to Attardo, are the key linguistic components of a joke, especially interesting when the accumulation of successive jab lines result in a final punch line which both summarises and enhances the comic effect. The field of Pragmatics has provided fruitful insight on the field of humour, for instance, based on the flouting of Grice's Maxims and Cooperative Principle or Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. In this regard, incongruity is a rich mechanism used by the author to create all sorts of humorous situations which develop at different levels: considering the narrative as a whole like in *Number Ten*, at speech and register level with interesting social and class issues at the background, for instance in *The Queen and I*, as a result of the contrast between reality and its perception by one character as in the case

of Adrian Mole or used like a sign of some characters' inability to cope with the world around as in *The Queen and I*. Other mechanisms applied by Townsend to provoke a humorous effect play with irony, sarcasm, slapstick, political correctness and intertextual references. All these, so masterfully managed that allows to place Townsend among the best practitioners of British literary humour.

6.2 Answering questions

This summary of the issues approached by this thesis may help reach the initial objectives set in the introductory chapter. The global aims were both to analyse the ways in which Sue Townsend dealt with the themes of her time through the depiction of the everyday lives of her characters in order to, eventually, reach a plausible conclusion on the validity of literature as a source for historical knowledge, and a possible explanation for the scarce scholarly recognition of such a popular author whose expertise cannot be denied, thus questioning the grounds of the so-called Divide between popular and high-brow literature. To that avail, a set of subsequent questions which guided the study of the different issues was established and the conclusions obtained after trying to answer them have contributed to indirectly achieve the main goals of the research.

The first sub-question was related to the concept of "everyday life" and its presence in Townsend's narrative. In this sense, chapter 2 has been devoted to list the most significant contributions to the conformation of the concept of everyday life as a research category with special accent on some of the authors and the trends they represented. The concept of the everyday is present in the whole of Townsend's production so as to become the essence of her narrative. Even those works which set an extraordinary circumstance as the starting point of the action, for instance *Number Ten* or *The Queen and I*, (including those works not considered by this research such as *Rebuilding Coventry* or *Ghost Children*), the basic frame for the characters' actions and reflections is their entourage and their usual activities, the ensemble of those repeated, familiar and recognisable actions. Thus, the readers see themselves immerse in an everyday world which would be, in turn, the one of any person living in the same circumstances, where the social and individual, the public and the private are constantly interacting.

In this regard, the everyday of Townsend's characters is inserted within the social, political and economic reality of their time, which is the author's time and according to the release of the different volumes, the readers' time. Lefebvre stated "the everyday may have been absorbed (among others) by politics and the

vicissitudes of political life” (Lefebvre, 2002, p.2) and this is, undoubtedly, the key of the analysis proposed for Townsend’s production, as she chose that the everyday of her characters was marked by the constant interaction of both realms. Their working activity, the spaces they inhabit, their leisure time, their ways of sociability, everything is influenced by the rhythm established by the political decisions, many of them of great importance, of the politicians of the time.

In addition, from the point of view of every character’s individual sphere, it was very interesting to discover how these characters present themselves to the world and perform their everyday. In cases such as Adrian Mole’s, there is a constant comic effect created by the contrast between his aspirations and his presentation to the others and the reader, and the reality of his performance. In other cases, the reader finds interesting examples of individual positioning, such as Pauline Mole’s or Pandora Braithwaite’s, which are very significant in the context of certain sociological realities. Likewise, those personal defining traits I analysed as essential in Townsend’s narrative, race, age, gender and sexual orientation and social class impose a series of constraints in the everyday of the characters, for example by restraining their access to certain spaces (Ali in *Number Ten*), determining their ways to organise their living spaces (Granma Mole), limiting the scope of their political agency (Pandora Braithwaite), blocking or welcoming the public expression of their sexual orientation (Mr, Carlton-Hayes and Nigel) or predisposing them to conduct their lives within specific limits determined mainly by the presence or absence of external elements such as job or education. In this sense, Williams’s concept of structure of feeling proves to be quite fruitful when applied to the ways in which Townsend’s literature depicts a bunch of characters acting with respect to the official discourses in question that concern to those constituents previously cited.

Finally, it has also been very interesting, after De Certeau, to discover how Townsend’s characters develop a set of tactics to manage their everyday life in contrast with the strategies imposed by external powers. This is more evident in the case of the council estate narrative, especially in *The Queen and I* and *Queen Camilla* with the inhabitants of Hell Close conducting their lives around a set of coordinates determined from above that, nevertheless, they know how to adapt and occasionally elude. Particularly interesting, especially in these two novels, is the practice of neighbourhood as the intermediate realm between the public and the private in which the performance of the individual selves develop according to the different social impositions.

In the light of the above mentioned, it can be concluded that the pervasive pres-

ence of the everyday in Townsend's production turns it into an essential constituent of her narrative and contributes to a great extent to her popularity. A great deal of readers may find in her pages an identitarian reference to match their personal conditions or circumstances as depicted in plausible terms, thus creating a close connection between the readers, the characters and their author.

The second sub-question referred to the discursive representation of time and space in Townsend's pages and how those influence her characters' lives. It has been clearly stated through these previous pages that not only do these categories provide the basic referential framework for the events narrated but also they are used to relate them to support or contest official discourses on several issues.

The spatial dichotomies around which the process of mapping performed in these pages has been articulated serve Townsend to insert her characters within a series of affective landscapes which are those of the author herself, namely the provinces, and it is, precisely, this "deviation" from centre to provinces, the focus on the periphery which marks deeply Townsend's production. Provinces, the Midlands and specifically what Leicester represents acquire a key proportion in her narrative which, by insisting on the most prudish aspects of the parochial and provincial, stresses, at the same time, the positive aspects represented by the periphery with respect to the centre. In Townsend's pages the Midlands and Leicester change from being a geographic location to becoming a literary world thus contravening the rhetorical construction of the centre, represented by London, as the desired arriving point of all sorts of provincial anxieties.

In addition, the author describes the different movements of the characters around the spaces of her narrative as a result of their usual activities which gives her the opportunity to criticise the mismanagement of those aspects connected to transport and communications that affect deeply the everyday life of the average British citizen. On other occasions, the displacements of the characters are representative of social mobility (Jack in *Number Ten*, Pandora in *Adrian Mole, The Cappuccino Years*) or material progress (tourism and leisure time in the *Adrian Mole Diaries*). In this last case, Townsend is a privileged witness of the economic evolution of British society which brought about changes in the cultural construction of tourism and holidays.

Areas such as suburbs and council estates are given special attention by Townsend. They both represent usual spheres of agency for her characters who, occasionally, concede a higher symbolic status to the first over the second. These suburbs are no monolithic realms whatsoever, on the contrary, they encompass an interest-

ing array of realities in terms of class, race and social status that are present in Townsend's pages, especially in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. The author also criticises the institutional definition of council estates mainly in terms of conflict, with the established powers wishing to control these spaces as a way to control their dwellers, sometimes resulting in metaphoric episodes of a dystopian tinge as in *Queen Camilla*.

Certain spaces such as houses and homes, neighbourhoods, schools, pubs and youth clubs feature extensively in Townsend's narrative and represent the intersection of the public and the private, the social and the individual which interact with accepted formulations of class, race and gender in the case of both houses and homes, and neighbourhoods or those of sociability, either forced or free. School is a privileged domain in Townsend's pages; a single universe on its own, with behaviour scripts whose performance occasionally serves as a means of contestation of power impositions which operate either horizontally or vertically, as seen in *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*.

The time span in which the action of Townsend's narrative is inserted represents a crucial period in British history which is marked mainly by the presence of the two phenomenal figures of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair, both standing out and attracting most of the references at the expense of John Major, Gordon Brown or David Cameron. In addition, the period covered was paramount for British history as, on the one hand, it closed the imperial phase definitely in terms of foreign affairs but was still highly indebted to it from the social point of view and on the other hand, it proved futile the rhetoric of the Millennium and the allegedly new reformulations of well-known political and economic schemes as evidenced by *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, *Number Ten* or *Adrian Mole*, *The Cappuccino Years*.

Some specific issues are transversally approached by Townsend covering the periods represented by Thatcher's and Blair's premierships. In the first place, the public image of both leaders, contesting the official discourse in the case of Thatcher by sharing a generalised trend of mocking counter discourse based mainly on gender and religion, as seen in *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* and *The Secret Diary of Margaret Hilda Roberts* and in the case of Tony Blair by aligning herself with the general reaction against the betrayal of Labour postulates represented by the premier's verbosity.

Townsend deals with the impact of official policies at both individual and social levels, mainly those referred to education, unemployment, welfare provisions and

war. At a small scale, by reflecting on their negative consequences not only for the less favoured members of society but also for the average British citizen. On some occasions she postulates the necessary personal responsibility in the management of issues such as literacy or the correct use of the welfare provisions. However, hers is a biased position both generationally, as far as employment (and the lack of it), welfare and war are concerned, and politically, taking into account her progressive political views. At a social level, Townsend draws attention to the cost of political decisions for British society as a whole and the ways in which it reacts by means of implementing changes in the attitudes, values and behaviour of its members in order to adapt themselves to new circumstances, of rejecting any possibility of change therefore remaining stubbornly firm in their ways or lamenting the evolution of the country expressing themselves with the most bittered disillusion. Townsend plays with the three possibilities to eventually illustrate the continuity between Thatcher's and Blair's periods despite their apparent opposed discourses. The third sub-question dealt with the different components of identity used by Townsend to construct the literary selves of her characters. The identitarian traits favoured by both the author and this research have been class, gender, sexuality, age and race, operating at diverse levels and helping the reader obtain an interesting vision on how the characters' literary identities were formed by responding to certain social and historical constructs. In this respect, Townsend offers a fascinating vision of how these facets of identity have evolved in the time span covered by this research, their connections to official discourses and in an indirect way, the media representations of them.

Operating within the wide concept of "working class", Townsend gives voice to a series of realities that cover the whole spectre of the term. She criticises both the transformations that the working class experienced under Thatcher which resulted in an erosion of its traditional constituents and a rapid slide into increasing levels of poverty, and the acquiescent of the marginal improvement of the situation under Blair and his seductive postulates of newness. New affluent social groups, whose wealth is based on the surreal concept of "the markets" are also analysed by Townsend, particularly to criticise the origins of their fortunes obtained by means of speculation and manipulation.

Townsend's somehow traditional conception of working class is present wherever and overlaps with other components of identity, especially gender. Not disregarding personal responsibilities on the failure to improve women's condition, the author considers that official policies and discourses on family, conception, welfare and education are exclusively applied to working class women whose pos-

sibilities to see themselves free from traditional female roles are scarce. However, Townsend manages to introduce different models of women who coexisted in the time of her writing. The aged Victorian-like housewife is dealt with affectionate and gentle respect as the representative of a time when women were forced to show their courage for their families and their country. The Second-wave feminist is given prominence through the description of the whole process of awakening to Feminism, including its political angle and contesting the impositions of official discourses on family and gender. The woman with a different racial background is described by Townsend as torn between the need of abiding by the traditional role her community imposes upon her and the wish to get rid of it. The author solves the conflict by providing this woman with the necessary inner force to overcome those impositions and with the support of her female entourage, unless in the case of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, (In the play *The Great Celestial Cow*, Sita is left alone in her rebellion). Finally, Townsend criticises the Post-feminist, empowered woman and the concept of “girl power” for being a media construction destined to erase the advancement obtained by previous generations of feminists.

As far a sexuality is concerned, we have seen how Townsend, contravening obsolete conceptions of adolescence and sex, describes teenage sexuality in a very natural way and, in addition, introduces the topic of teenage pregnancy reflecting the importance of the issue for British society. She uses humour to dismantle the Thatcherite discourse on the alleged promotion of homosexuality in schools by Labour councils and mocks, as well, the series of stereotypes on gay men and lesbians alike. What is most important, maybe is her positioning towards AIDS, with a high degree of social compromise, opposing the conception of gay-plague and using her pages to promote the labour of institutions of great social weight as seen in *Adrian Mole, The Wilderness Years*.

Townsend’s construction of race is directly linked to her concept of Englishness and the new social panorama derived from the processes of decolonisation and the increasing presence of former subjects of the British empire in the old metropolis. Her idea of Englishness is connected to the traditional elements that influence people’s everyday lives and especially to her “William Brown-like” memories of her childhood. But there is no racial bias in this concept. Townsend mirrors the evolution of Leicester as a privileged location to observe the increasing importance of former racial minorities and, little by little, gives way to characters belonging to different races interacting in the usual contexts of home, school and neighbourhood, opposing stereotyped images, fighting racist prejudices and favouring tolerance and mutual knowledge in place of intolerance and obscurity.

Townsend's presentation of age as an identity component echoes the social reality of her time by depicting three coexisting generations. The representatives of the Greatest Generation who grew up in the aftermath of World War I and battled the expansion of totalitarian Nazism in World War II are depicted as both respected and forgotten by the country they fought for. Through the words of Adrian Mole, Townsend mocks the members of her own generation, joking with the generalised conception of baby-boomers as the culprits of the evils afflicting British society. She also uses her pages to deconstruct both the Thatcherite constructions of childhood and the Blairite ones of youth applied, in both cases, to the members of the so-called Generation X.

Finally, when dealing with these second and third sub-questions, a further issue related to how all the previous elements interact so as to provide a wide panorama of the coordinates in which Townsend was inserted was indirectly presented.

The fifth sub-question was connected to Townsend's most interesting narrative traits, some of them clearly related to the temporal and spatial references of her works, particularly those examples of dystopian visions that are clearly interconnected with the trends of the genre. On the one hand, she describes the anxieties of a society that is progressively more worried with the loss of privacy and the undesirable generalisation of state control practices in the name of already hackneyed concepts that actually hide the economic interests of the world powers. This way, Townsend's dystopian visions are linked to discourses of totalitarianism, thus connecting to the most eloquent and fruitful literary tradition of the genre epitomised by *Ninety Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*. On the other hand, she delves into unresolved class issues which clearly exemplifies the Postmodern incredulity in the metanarrative of modernity and progress, reflecting on a society increasingly dehumanized with the gap between the least and the most favoured social groups of British society constantly widening.

The study of how Townsend managed this and other narrative ways has supported the idea that she was well aware of both the tradition of British -and European- literature and the Postmodern, literary modes of her time which she used to her own convenience.

She toyed with different layers of interaction between reality and fiction by occasionally picturing the figure of an intrusive author questioning thus accepted structures of authority which resulted in a higher degree of unreliability on both narration and narrator. She also delved into the construction of the literary entity of some characters by mastering the conceptions of fictive self-conscious narra-

tion resulting not precisely in a fragmented presentation of a conflicting self (e.g. Adrian Mole) but in a homogeneous one, eventually, giving way to the readers' active role in the actual construction of both the narrative and the image of the character, once acquainted with the mocking tone in which the presentation of the character's self is performed.

In addition, Townsend questioned monolithic positions by giving entity and voice to realities other than the traditional ones, contrasting both positions and leading to reformulations of previously assumed postulates concerning race, gender or sexuality. In all cases humour is the key resource mastered by an author who knew perfectly well how to use it in the most fruitful way, responding unintentionally to the presuppositions on the relationship between humour and Postmodernity (McDonald, 2012): word-play, contradiction, intertextuality, subversion. . .

The answer to the sixth sub-question regarding the possibility of, by reading Townsend's pages, obtaining a general picture of Britain of her time and, eventually, conclude whether history may be a reliable source for historical knowledge could be no other than affirmative. Townsend depicted masterfully the average citizens' lives of her time and how official policies altered them. She insisted on the demolishing effects of government economic decisions which modified the previous status quo by describing the evolution of the role of the State in Britain and the erosion of British citizens' rights. By denouncing the official rhetoric, she offered a whole panorama of the participation of the country in foreign conflicts aimed at repositioning Britain as a world power. She acutely criticised the discourses of power and how public opinion was influenced by them, to the point of questioning the alleged differences between the two major British political parties and their policies. In this sense, she also supported the counter discourses on political figures of her time by using humour at its most. From her pages we learned that the stability of class formulations was also at stake in her time, for the former definitions of working class were not valid any more and the success of the new classes born under the shelter of financial manipulation was as brief as hard the fall. She insisted on the reformulation of the role of women and its perception on the part of society and consciously depicted the new racial and sexual reality of a society who was trying to advance while still firmly tied to its imperial, Victorian past by presenting the conflicting ideas on history, country, family and work of every group age coexisting in her pages.

Therefore, Townsend's reader is actually able to extract, sometimes openly, sometimes reading through her lines, a picture of Britain in the period covered by the author's production. However, it may be argued that hers is not an innocent

regard but a highly biased one. Indeed, it is. She is not a mere “holder of the mirror”, her life is interwoven in her writing and whole actual episodes of her life experiences appear in her works to illustrate the issues in question. Her pages are inseparably linked to her class, gender and political convictions but not for that reason they are less valuable as a testimony of a time. In this sense, once acknowledged both the artificiality of the concept of “real event” and the level of narrativity used in the representation of reality as pointed out by White (1980), it is undeniable that History and Literature are inseparable for, as Hawkes poses: “The literary is thus conceived (...) as one realm among many for the negotiation and production of social meaning, of historical subjects and of the systems of power that at once enable and constrain those subjects” (Hawkes, 1996, p.19).

In addition, and trying to provide an answer for the last three sub-questions - which are closely related- this thesis has attempted to find the reasons for the significance of Townsend’s popularity and the conflict between popular literature and highbrow literature that she seems to represent, epitomised by her exclusion from scholarly attention. In *The Shaping of a Cannon*, Richard Ohman stated: “Novels move towards a canonical position only if they attained both large sales (usually, but not always, concentrated enough to place them among the best-sellers for a while) and the right kind of critical attention” (Ohman, 1983, p. 206). Some examples of Townsend’s sales figures have been provided together with the position some of her books reached in the sales lists elaborated by well-known publications. This implies that Ohman’s first condition was met by Townsend.

On the other hand, when Ohman refers to critical attention, he implies the placing of the literary works in the college curricula once passed the filters of general press and specialised journals reviews. What reasons have impeded Townsend from passing both filters? As I have tried to prove, she used narrative devices similar to those of her contemporaries. Maybe not to the extent of turning them into the key components of her narrative but it can be argued that not all the novels included under the label of Postmodernism are narrative experiments and, in addition, some of this new narrative modes are not so new as, for example, metafiction does exist almost from the very beginning of literature as such. These widely recognised novels may or may not be experimental but, undoubtedly, deal with issues at stake in the period in which they were written, and so does Townsend narrative which, among other issues, reflected social squalor and the gendered definition of working class, denounced Thatcherite impositions and depicted the racial redefinition of suburbia just like *Trainspotting* (Welsh, 1993), *Under a Thin Moon* (Michael, 1992), *What a Carve Up!* (Coe, 1995) and

The Buddha of Suburbia (Kureishi, 1990) did, all of them widely recognised as excellent British examples of Postmodernism. Therefore, the most pervasive elements of Townsend's narrative might account for the scholarly obscurity of her literary production. The topics connected to the everyday life of average, British citizens and her depiction of class issues, mainly as far as the working class is concerned, are to be found in all her narrative, but they were also addressed by other writers of her time. Consequently, the extensive use of humour might be the culprit. However, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* did not follow this pattern, which leads me to conclude that neither of these elements could be retained as responsible for the lack of attention given to Townsend's production.

In view of all the aforementioned, I am of the opinion that Townsend did not pass the "second filter" of specialised journal reviews which, according to Ohman might have led her works to be included in the college curricula precisely because the sales figures of her works reached their peak with *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, both classified as teenage fiction and despite having developed a long series of works for adults, in the 'unconscious' of college realms she remained linked to that type of fiction in those "pre-Harry Potter's" times when children and teenage literature was not given the proper scholar attention.

This way, officially cultural realms of the time, wishing to overcome the impositions of the Great Divide between popular and highbrow literature, exerted, in turn, a particular kind of unnatural selection of works that were labelled under the encompassing term of Postmodernism creating, this way, their own literary tradition and cannon that left behind unselected titles, writers and literary genres. However, these are as valuable as those "chosen for the glory" for their are also representatives of a time and a place, of social trends and political ideologies. In this regard, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* is as relevant as Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, Richardson's *Pamela* or Blyton's *Famous Five* series and therefore, the long-term debate between popular and high-brow literature is highly linked to Modernist assumptions that have remained firmly established with the Postmodernism resulting in a sort of "Leopardian" turn: "'everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same" . This way, the new Great Divide has proved to be absolutely fruitless.

6.3 Looking back, looking ahead

This thesis has intended to be a wide study of a selection of those works by Sue Townsend whose reading has led to question different key aspects related to the specific temporal, spatial and cultural coordinates that define them, eventually giving rise to further queries on the nature of literature as a source for the knowledge of history and the value of popular literature from the present-day scholarly perspective.

Despite the initial intentions to address the different issues in the most comprehensive way, some constraints have limited this research at both personal and academic levels. On the one hand, the pressing time, the brevity of my stay at Leicester University to study Townsend's personal archive, the constant fight to overcome the difficulties of writing an academic document of such entity in a second language, the high degree of self-control when writing these pages in order to allow only the proper quantity of feelings to be shown and the impositions of both personal and working life constantly "interfering" in the process.

On the other hand, the scarcity of references of the author which otherwise would have allowed to establish a better contextual framework, the manifold possible perspectives to be addressed, the selection of the approaches best fitted to the starting presuppositions only to realise that the discarded ones were as rich and interesting as the ones chosen and the difficulties to select the proper quotes to illustrate the different issues at stake.

Precisely for these reasons of personal inability and not-followed angles, future lines of research remain opened. Among them:

- The study of Sue Townsend from the perspective of genre, that is, focusing on her dramatic production which represents her introduction to the world of public authoring and opens interesting ways to explore the connections with the historical facts and themes of the time in which the plays were composed.
- The already mentioned -and only hinted- analysis of the gender perspective so indissoluble from Townsend's production, which would, in turn, benefit from placing the focus on works other than the ones addressed in this research.
- The whole process of mapping Townsend's fiction has proved to be one of the most interesting sections of this research and it would call for further deepening.

- The editing of the discarded materials of Townsend’s iconic works with an annotated edition of the most significant ones. However, this would require specific permission on the part of the author’s family and the need to follow a long series of official procedures in relation to copyright and possible further publishing.

The long and winding road of writing this thesis has proved to be a real acid test for personal organisation and writing skills, with headaches beyond the usual limits and sad readings of friendly messages inviting to “leave the cave” and see the sun outside. But it has also been full of enjoyment, pleasure and learning, and the initial conception of Sue Townsend as one of the most valuable and rich authors of contemporary British literature, whose pages are an endless source of knowledge and fun, has been, I would like to think, demonstrated. However, the appreciation of these facts is not only limited to those personal feelings that I proudly may consider as supported by this research, in his review of May, 28 1986 Richard Eder, the *Times* book critic, gathered the praise for *The Adrian Mole Diaries* and quoted, in turn, the one published in *The Listener*: “When the social history of the 1980s comes to be written the Mole books - astonishing as they may seem now- will probably be considered as key texts”. I think the review was absolutely right.

Chapter 7

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APPENDIX 1

Illustrative sales figures of some Townsend's works

1. *The Secret diary of Adrian Mole 13 and 3/4*

Sources: DWL- ST 1/2/7, DWL- ST 1/1/1/7 and DWL- ST 1/1/5

Date	Best Seller Ranking	Format	Source
22/7/84	4		The Sunday Times
28/7/84	1		The Birmingham Post
4/8/84	1		The Birmingham Post
20/10/84	1	paperback	Express & Echo (Exeter)
2/12/84	3		The Sunday Times

Date	Sales Figures	Format	Source
October 1984	100.000	hardback/	Leicester Mercury
October 1984	700.000	paperback	Leicester Mercury
9/11/84	1.104.000	paperback	Publishing News
26/4/86	5.000.000	all	The Bookseller

2. *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*

Sources: DWL- ST 1/2/7, DWL- ST 1/1/1/7 and DWL- ST 1/1/5

Date	Sales Figures	Source
October 1984	75.000 (sold prior to publication)	Leicester Mercury
9/11/84	297.000	Publishing News
31/01/85	175.000 copies since its publication	The Bookseller
Dic. 85/Jan. 86	430.000 copies	The Sunday Times

Date	Sales Figures	Source
20/10/84	1	Express & Echo (Exeter)
25/11/84	3	The Sunday Times

3. The Queen and I

SOURCE: DWL- ST/1/7/34

Date	Ranking	Format (if available)	Source
22/10/92	1		London Evening Standard
25/10/92	1		London Evening Standard
06/12/92	1		The Sunday Times
14/02/93	1		The Sunday Times
05/09/93	4		The Sunday Times
12/09/93	1	paperback	The Sunday Times
17/09/93	1	paperback	Evening Times -Glasgow
19/09/93	1	paperback	The Sunday Times

Date	Sales Figures	Source
14/12/92	More than 40.000 copies	Daily Mail

4. Adrian Mole. The Wilderness Years

SOURCE: DWL-ST/1/7/34

Date	Ranking	Format (if available)	Source
05/09/93	1	hardback	The Sunday Times
12/09/93	1	hardback	The Sunday Times
17/09/93	1	hardback	The Sunday Times
19/09/93	2		Evening Times -Glasgow
31/10/93	1		The Sunday Times

