“The World’s Gone and Passed You By:” The Music of Ray Davies and the Poetics of Modern Loss at the End of The British Empire

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Abstract

By the end of the 1960s, Ray Davies, singer and songwriter for the British rock band The Kinks, began to look at his own personal and national identity as a source for his emotional song lyrics. He and his community were standing at a crossroads in their history. The end of the British Empire left an undeniable mark on the souls and the minds of his Britain. While there is a huge range of topics addressed by Davies’s work of this period, this thesis interests itself with the growing specter of loss in his work as it pertains to this new era of reduced geopolitical stature. The emotions of loss and mourning are shown symbolically in the work of Davies in this era; his work shows idealized English country villages, stately homes as well as revisiting historical landmarks like trench warfare and the Blitz. The emotions of loss prompt a deep seeded retrospective, resulting sometimes in nostalgia while other times traumatic flashbacks. Davies is attempting to speak about emotional pain and trauma as well as the collective dehumanization and humiliation of the first sixty years of the British twentieth century. This thesis compares the lyrics of Davies to the modern poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan to better understand how loss (national and personal) is constructed poetically and thematically. Empire, for Davies and his brethren, provides the grounding and the driving patriotic principles of civic and national engagement; with it gone he is aimless, asking the question “what does it mean to be British in the wake of Empire?”

Coupled with this feeling of loss, the songs investigated here (primarily from the albums *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* (1968) and *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (1969) and the singles “Waterloo Sunset” (1967) and “Apeman” (1970)) show an era in Davies’s music obsessed with reconstructing and understanding British collective pasts and heritage. The first chapter explores the spatial losses felt in the urbanization in an industrial Britain. Davies satirizes nostalgic impulses within his community, which leans towards the drive to preserve or reconstruct imagined landscapes, the loss of which leaves a mark on Davies and his society. The second chapter is interested in the ways in which a history of trauma in Britain fosters a detachment from the grounding principles of national identity. The end of Empire, as captured by Davies, culminates in what scholar Paul Gilroy calls “postcolonial melancholia”, a deep sadness and guilt held by white Britons coinciding with the end of the Empire. The intransmissability of modern day experience fosters a collective, Freudian “compulsion to repeat” as the traumatic experiences of British history are repeated and relived through contemporary material culture. The third chapter brings Ray Davies into conversation with scholars Hal Foster and Svetlana Boym, bringing about the intersection of traumatic experience and loss, with the collective, mass culture of contemporary Britain. Ultimately, Davies plays the role of Charles Baudelaire’s poetic hero, the urban wanderer, the flâneur, as he attempts, through song, to emotionally and personally experience the contemporary British world.
Introduction

By the end of the 1960s, Ray Davies’s music, which had always held a personal touch, became increasingly focused on the land he called home. In reacting to a changing world, a Britain in flux becomes an integral character in the melodramas, operas, and albums of his middle career. His struggles to come to terms with his own middling existence within decades of national decline led to an existential questioning of his own British national identity. While recent scholarship on the music of Ray Davies and The Kinks has tended to focus on his engagement with class-consciousness and Romantic nostalgia, this thesis seeks to widen the scope by situating these albums within the greater narrative of the shock and trauma of the modern world itself. Both nostalgia and class-consciousness will play an important role but will be seen within the larger context of traumatic experience, which defines his understanding of late 1960s Britishness. Rather than fully discounting these thematic alignments, my work will show how these are symptoms rather than the causes of his national identity crisis, and that they are a reaction to the poetics of modern decline and trauma. My goal is to show Britishness as defined by a combination of nostalgic longing for the lost landscapes and pasts coupled with an extreme anxiety stemming from the traumatic events defining British history.

Engaging with several songs from three Kinks albums at the end of their first decade, including *Something Else by The Kinks, The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* and *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)*, I seek to show that these albums exist as a chronicle of British traumatic existence at the end of the Empire. By comparing the lyrics of Davies’s songs with the poetry focused on the crisis of modernity by Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan, I will show that Davies’s conception of Britain at the end of Empire is one defined by shock. The first chapter of this work will explore nostalgic representations of lost English landscapes and the ways in which Ray Davies poetically longs for constructed spaces of
the idealized British past, not unlike Paul Celan’s poetic constructions of a post-Holocaust Jewish home. The second chapter focuses on the specter of warfare and the trauma of urban crowding and the dehumanizing effects of British modernity within the context of detachment explored in the poetry of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin’s unresolved experiences of warfare. The third, and final, chapter ties the previous two together in order to understand the changing role of subjectivity in Ray Davies’s work and the way these songs contribute to a growing “traumatic subjectivity” in modern and post-modern poetry.

Central to this thesis is the understanding that what Davies’s work engages is not with abstract individual pasts but with collective English identity itself. Davies’s songs famously explore and challenge the foundations of British identity. On a spatial level, Davies’s songs imagine villages and village greens, rural fields, sooty streets viewed from high towers and stately but generic English homesteads. Not only does he reconstruct English landscapes and homes, but he re-imagines the cultural historical milestones of the twentieth century as well. This includes the two World Wars and, most importantly for Davies at this time, the ending of the British Empire. These events defined and continue to define British cultural identity; as a result, warfare, decline, and loss are central subjects to Davies’s work. Davies is at once a member of this community but also one of its greatest critics; he understands that his own subjecthood plays a role in how he understands his British community.

Britishness, as defined here, is interlinked with cultural heritage and idealized pasts, and, as such, it is heavily linked with the politics and psychology of cultural memory. There are two distinct types of memory explored in the following thesis, each coinciding with a chapter. The first, dealing with landscape, explores positive recollections in nostalgia, harkening to the equation past > present. The second, dealing with traumatic experience, explores the Freudian
compulsion to repeat for traumatics, or the equation past < present. These two cultural mnemonics allow the British people to access certain parts of their past and find either comfort or shame in the hallmarks of their shared experiences. What is happening on the macro cultural level here is that there is a distinct rupture between the collective and their past cultural traditions; traditions that define and ground the modern national subject. This rupture, or severance, is what is captured in Ray Davies’s music.

It is difficult to comprehend exactly what is meant by “Britishness” or “Englishness,” used here interchangeably.¹ I am building on the work of scholar Dan Shoemaker who writes that he conceives “Englishness” as “being composed of two components: a sense of place and a feeling of nostalgia.”² Nostalgia is, simply, the longing for the past. England and Britain are physical places and landscapes, but the idea of England and Britain as cultural spaces exists interconnected with history and, more specifically, the nostalgically constructed collective past. There is trauma embedded within this because nostalgia requires some sort of severance between the individual and their memory-fueled past, resulting in longing. Landscape and boundaries are defining as they give tangible space to intangible ideals of identity. My work will couple the loss of landscape with the emotional pain of modern warfare, urbanization, and geopolitical decline. It is not only that this idealized Britain no longer exists, but also that, through both time and

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¹ For the most part I will use the term “Britain” as I am talking primarily about the loss of geopolitical stature and that “British Empire” is the focus of Ray Davies’s own work, but, when I talk about landscape, I will be using the term “English” and “England,” because of England’s idealization within British National Heritage. It is not the landscape of Scotland that is Nationally revered, it is the English countryside that takes forefront. In terms of landscape (which is most important to Chapter 1) David Lowenthal writes that “the countryside is not British; it is English, ‘such a spot of ground’ to the incoming Romans and Saxons, as a seventeenth-century panegyrist put it, ‘that they thought it worthy to be fenced in like a Garden-Plot with a mighty Wall . . . and with a monstrous Dike’ to keep out the Scots and the Welsh.” David Lowenthal. “British National Identity and the English Landscape” Rural History volume 2, no. 2 (1991), 205-230, 213

modernization, the individual is no longer connected to their former home. This brings its own set of traumas to the British psyche.

My work seeks to capture this rupture between the individual and the collective past in terms of the poetics of modernity. While I will show how these rupture, for Davies at least, exists at the ending of the Empire, it shares similarities between ruptures poetically captured in previous eras. French poet Charles Baudelaire confronted the changes from a rural to urban environment and the ways that technology destroyed the previous modes of societal encounters. German speaking Romanian Jew Paul Celan’s work constructs a new homeland and landscape for the displaced diasporic communities in the wake of the Second World War. My mode of analysis will primarily engage Davies’s words, not the music; I believe it is the narrative, constructed lyrically, that is most important for this work. By looking at Davies’s lyrics as poetry, disconnected from the music for the moment, we can come to an understanding of how he fits into the greater context of modern poetry. These experiences are inherently traumatic; they create experiences that cannot be fully incorporated into the minds of these artists. As a result, the poetic experience allows for a kind of resolution of these severances.

Davies, unknowingly or not, is encountering not only the vicissitudes of British identity but also the changes at the core of Western modernity. The work that follows will show how Davies’s lyrics echo the phrasings, themes, and subject matters of modern poets preceding his work by decades if not, in the case of Charles Baudelaire, nearly a century. I am hoping to provide insight not only into the way that Davies understood the changing British world, but to show the importance of these modern poetic forms in our own contemporary times. These similarities between Davies and Charles Baudelaire, in particular, are not coincidental, as they, in a general way, seek answers to the same questions, albeit within wildly different political and
technological circumstances. By linking Davies’s lyrics to the works of Baudelaire and the later
poetry of Paul Celan, my work shows that the political and economic declines investigated take
on the terms of previous battles between the artist and modern world. For this understanding, I
am building upon the recent work of literary scholar Ulrich Baer whose work, Remnants of Song,
outlines the commonalities between modern poets across time to find encounters with modernity
using the terminologies of psychoanalytic assessments of trauma. The declines of the British
Empire, the bombs of World War II and the feelings of loss felt in the work of Davies show a
greater obsession with the traumas of the modern world than just individual political
developments.

There are three major scholarly collections that contribute to my work. My work is
weaving together contemporary understandings of the sociology of memory and nostalgia with
the modernist explorations of shock and trauma, and contemporary work on the post-colonial
British tradition. This will help me understanding the role that trauma and memory play in this
time of change as it is shown through the work of Davies. Central to this is not only the poetry of
Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan, but also their philosophical understandings of the traumas
they chronicle, as well as the works that explored them.

In addition to this literary studies pillar, context wise, I am drawing upon the works of
Kinks scholars Thomas M. Kitts, Neville Martens, Dan Shoemaker, and Michael K. Bourdaghs,
as well as the primary documentations of Ray Davies’s autobiography X-Ray and that of his
guitar-playing brother Dave Davies, Kink. I am placing The Kinks’ work and their words into
consultation with current scholarship on the modern phenomena of diaspora and loss in spatial
terms, which fosters the contemporary feelings of Nostalgia sung about in these songs. This
includes Lucy Lippard’s work on tourism and nostalgia entitled On the Beaten Track, Svetlana
Boym’s *The Future of Nostalgia*, and Fred Davis’s seminal *Yearning for Yesterday*. Lastly, my effort is to tie the above work to recent assessments of the mentalities of British contemporary life. Instrumental here is the work of sociologist Paul Gilroy, whose work *Postcolonial Melancholia* shows the connection between nostalgic reinterpretations of British cultural history, the traumas of the modern world, and the melancholia surrounding the loss of the British Empire.

**Ray Davies and the Modern World**

What do I mean by *Modernity*? The two mechanized world wars, the economic depressions, industrial wastelands, diaspora and suburban cookie-cutter homes of the twentieth century are all symptoms of the greater blight of the modern world, but I haven’t defined what modernity means for this thesis. I chose Baudelaire, in particular, because he is the originator of our contemporary understanding of modernity, which includes the emotions and psychologies of shock with the technology of progress. In his “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire writes “by modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and immutable.”

Innovation, change, and progress here lead to shock, which is often attributed to an overarching traumatic nature of modernity itself. It can be seen that the modern world is surrounded by change—physical, geographic, technological—and denotes a departure and a break with the world before it. For some, this ephemerality shows violence. Literary scholar Walter Benjamin writes that Baudelaire “speaks of a duel in which the artist, just before being beaten, screams in fright. This duel is the creative process itself. Thus, Baudelaire placed the shock experience [Chockerfahrung] at the very center of his art.”

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change and the opposition to the “eternal” encompasses the same feelings that the characters of Davies’s songs experience.

How does this shock manifest as trauma? In addition to the struggle born from the ever-changing aspects of modernity, there is sadness (emphasized in literary Romantic circles with whom Ray Davies is often aligned) surrounding the losses brought about by modern innovation, technology, and migratory patterns. Sociologist Fred Davis tangibly grounds modern ephemerality within the loss of home, writing that “increasingly, and at an almost frenetic pace by the mid-twentieth century, this constant movement in socio-geographic space had begun to dislodge man’s psychological attachment to a specific house, in a specific locality, in a specific region.”

Terms like frenetic harken back to the shocking changes associated with literary modernity, and this detachment from psychological groundings contributes to the feelings of traumatic separation. This sadness is the result of the rupture between person and homeland and is keenly felt by Davies in his songs. Fred Davis’s understanding leads to a tangible and relatable sadness shared amongst perhaps all contemporary and modern people, and is central to Ray Davies’s nostalgic re-imaginings.

We call this separation and longing between a person and his former home nostalgia. Davis writes, “Nostalgia became, in short, the means for holding onto and reaffirming identities which had been badly buried by the turmoil of the times.” In other words, nostalgia can be defined as the sum of its two rhetorical Greek parts, nostos or “to return home” and algia or “longing.” These feelings of loss culminate in the material representation of idealized homelands, which is evident in the works and the satire of Ray Davies. The result is, according

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6 ibid. 107
7 Ibid. 1
to Davis, that we reject the present in favor of the idealized past.\(^8\) We pine then not only for the slower rhythms of the past and the localities of our childhood but also for the constructed and reconstructed material pasts lost in contemporary societal fluctuations.

How does this manifest at the end of Empire? Paul Gilroy understands this as “postcolonial melancholia.” He writes it is its own mourning. It is opposed to an “older more dignified sadness that was born in the nineteenth century.” There is an element of post-war fear built into Gilroy’s “postcolonial melancholia.” It longs for the past much like the Romantics with which Davies is often aligned, but with the added anxiety of mechanized warfare and the atomic bomb.\(^9\) This melancholia is an inward turn, not only resulting in the nostalgia Davis outlines above, but the culmination of a larger, broader inferiority resulting from an obsession over the glories of Empire.\(^10\) Davies’s songs exist within the context of these feelings and reflect the growing anxieties associated with living in Britain at that time. Gilroy understands this melancholia as manifesting in a kind of Freudian repetition compulsion as the collective retraces geopolitical landmarks in the wake of decline.\(^11\) Victories in war take center stage in post-Imperial British culture, and Davies’s own reconstruction of the battles of the World Wars attests to this. The victories in warfare and imperial subjugation are inherently traumatic, as they involve the literal deaths and dehumanizing effects of contemporary geo-political power.

Holding on to the remnants of power, be it the memories of war victories or nostalgic pining for the “good ol’ days” of the ancient villages and tight-knit communities of the past, is a way that Britons choose to ignore their changing environment. It is in this way that Davies’s songs traverse the entirety of the British experience. Flowing from the fall of the village and the birth

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\(^8\) Ibid. 12
\(^10\) Ibid
\(^11\) Ibid, 94.
of the urban industrial wasteland to the trench warfare of The Great War and the blitz in the Second World War, Davies comes to terms with the sadness of the losses that modernity and the decline of the Empire bring.

Chapter One, will draw upon research connecting nostalgia and modernity to show how feelings of loss, in particular for the spatial clues inherent in identity formation, are lost in the rise of the industrialized and modernized world. The songs of the album Village Green and the opening tracks of Arthur envision the “pre-nostalgic” time, in critic Svetlana Boym’s words, in which the British subject is perfectly contented with their lives and lots. Davies shares with Baudelaire and Celan a deep poetic mourning for these lost landscapes. In an age transformed, these spatial markers that once defined identity become all the more important. Drawing upon Boym’s The Future of Nostalgia, this chapter will connect the feelings of loss felt by the characters of Davies’s music are consistent with those of the generations of immigrant and modern diasporic groups; not only is there the connection drawn between the story of emigration central to the narrative of Arthur but the transformed landscapes of Britain make the characters, and The Kinks themselves, feel like “tourists at home.”

The second chapter will connect the definitions of modernity through the works of Baudelaire, drawing connections between the concepts of traumatic shock and unresolved experience to post-imperial British identity. The end of empire leads to a detachment from the symbolic order and results in his neurotic British characters. Furthering Gilroy’s “Postcolonial Melancholia,” Davies’s songs explore the minds of white Britons in the decades following the end of the Empire. Tales of triumph and loss during times of war become relied upon more and more as the political power of Britain wanes. The war remembrances “connect people to the fading core of a culture and a history that is confronting a loss of certainty about its own
distinctive context and its noble world mission.” In the end, trauma here exists as a sense of temporal and societal detachment from the collective traditions of British life. Here Davies identifies with Baudelaire’s famous “artist in the tower,” and finds his severance between himself and his collective past as the culmination of Benjamin and Freud’s understandings of unresolved experience. Detachment becomes a welcomed sight to the mournful and traumatized. Davies seeks to mirror the repetitive elements of modern British culture, in order to help himself and his community come to terms with their own emotions of loss.

In the final chapter, we see the role that Davies’s songs define for himself and the solutions they envision. Ray Davies plays the role of the flâneur, the urban wanderer and the observational gentleman. His works allow him insight into the collective experience of Britishness, creating a kind of “traumatic subjectivity,” as the repeated instances of traumatic popular experience play again and again in his and the collective minds, furthering the traumatic experience onward through time. Real emotional anger creates a powerful subjective force in Davies’s music. This inward turn in British cultural production and political rhetoric, as British artists, musicians and leaders obsess about “Englishness” becomes central to identity formation in the postwar decades. The songs show the growing importance of self-reflection, autobiography and ethnography in coming to terms with the transforming British self. There is here resistance, but not against the older generations as would exist in the angry pop music written by his contemporaries (for example The Who’s “My Generation” or Rolling Stone’s “Street Fighting Man.”) We find commonality across temporal lines. Davies’s conflict becomes not generational, as it was seen in the years during which the albums were released, but rather a conflict shared by all white Britons. Ultimately, his work seeks to answer the question “what does it mean to be British after the end of Empire?”

12 Ibid. 88
The Kinks in Context: The Early Years

“My name is Raymond Douglas Davies, and I would like to tell you my life story, because I feel that it is the only way I can help you,” writes The Kinks lead singer in his autobiography. He concludes, “If you listen to me, you may learn something about yourself.”

As a raconteur, Davies spends time finding connection between himself and his audience, his contemporaries, and previous generations of Britons. Serving as the band’s singer and main songwriter, Ray Davies set forth on a similar goal during his musical career, telling his story in order for us to better understand our own common experiences. Starting with a string of hits during the mid to late 1960s, The Kinks (led by Ray Davies and his brother Dave on lead guitar) reinvented their music, their causes and themes many times producing twenty-three studio albums over an impressive thirty-two year span from 1964 to 1996. Perhaps overshadowed by their more famous brethren in 1960s, like The Beatles, Rolling Stones or The Who, The Kinks nonetheless set the standard for politically and socially motivated popular music to follow.

Seeking answers to the great questions of modern times— who am I and where do I belong—The Kinks music, especially in the late 1960s focused on dueling themes of nostalgic longing and fragmented self-identity while drawing similarities between the works of English rockers and their lyrical predecessors of late Romantic and Modernist poetry. In this way Davies’s lyrics have as much in common with his English rocker compatriots (like Pete Townsend’s The Who or The Beatles) as with Romantics like Dylan Thomas or Moderns like Charles Baudelaire. Ultimately, the songs find commonality between ordinary Britons. The unnamed narrator of Ray’s autobiography comments that “his songs had celebrated sunny

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14 In a somewhat confusing style, it should be noted at this point that Ray Davies’s autobiography is written as a narrative supposing that an aged Ray Davies is pouring his soul out to a fictional journalist in the dystopian near future. The narrator, we are told, is an orphaned journalist given the assignment of...
afternoons and sunsets at Waterloo; they were about normal British people, and had communicated ideas which in some ways had educated and engaged ordinary people more than any video or history book had ever done.”¹⁵ (I will expand upon later how this view of ordinary takes on racial tones of “white” in the post-colonial context) Nevertheless, this focus on the ordinary perhaps sets Davies apart from his counterparts both in the pop musical field as well as in the field of British cultural criticism showing a willingness and an obsession with getting deeper into how the British worldviews are constructed along personal, private and ordinary lines and how they affect the individual subject.

After The Kinks’ first single, a cover of Little Richard’s “Long Tall Sally,” disappointingy reached only #42 on the Melody Maker charts, they were searching for something to capture their own brand of youthful energetic rage.¹⁶ “You Really Got Me,” released on August 4th, 1964, became their first hit single. Thomas Kitts writes that “although audiences had responded enthusiastically to the song since [March 1964], record executives thought it too loud and crude, lacking in melody, and too far removed from the harmonies and smooth rhythms of popular Mersey beat¹⁷ sound...”¹⁸ Not only did the sound set The Kinks apart from the rest of the Beat artists (Beatles and Rolling Stones included,) they embedded within their loud crunching guitars an important working class ethic. “The song came out of a working-class environment,” states Dave Davies, “people fighting for something”¹⁹ This working class chip on their shoulders influences the rest of their musical creations.

covering the aged singer, but these views are, ultimately, written by Ray Davies himself. Written in third person, Davies is able to emphasize important points about how he should be appreciated.

¹⁵ Davies, Ray, 12
¹⁶ Kitts, Thomas. Ray Davies: Not Like Everybody Else (New York: Routledge, 2008), 36
¹⁷ Mersey beat sound is an allusion to The Beatles referencing the River Mersey that runs through their native Liverpool.
¹⁸ Ibid, 39
¹⁹ Ibid, 42
Striking it rich with the heavy guitar driven rock of their first successful singles, “You Really Got Me” and “All Day and All of The Night,” The Kinks found themselves the commercial and artistic equals of the bigger acts of the English Beat movement. In the decades of flux after these initial hits, the common threads of the guitar of Dave Davies and the voice and words of Ray Davies remained constant.

**The Land of Hope and Gloria**

Ray Davies was born in the days after D-Day. His brother Dave was born 3 years later.20 From early in their lives in the North London community of Muswell Hill, the Davies’s were haunted by class distinction’s grip on English communities. This working class community, including his family, “supported the Labour Party and passionately rooted for their favorite sports teams and for England in the World cup.”21 This class-consciousness goes beyond mere athletic and political affiliations. Ray Davies attempts to show in his autobiography that these issues were on his mind from an early age. Ray asks the narrator “When did you first realize that you were not born to be a King? [Answering his own question] I finally realized I was not a king that night my dad came home and said he was out of a job.”22 It is hard to know which moment of unemployment the older Davies is referring to in this segment, although it could have been one of a number of periods of unemployment for their butcher turned gardener father.23 Regardless of how often these bouts of unemployment happened, the Davies boys could feel a separation between themselves and the upper crust of England, which comes to dominate their musical musings as they matured.

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20 Ibid, 1
21 Ibid
22 Davies, Ray, 72
23 Kitts, *Ray Davies*, 3
This tendency towards inward and ethnographic insight on the English condition perhaps stems from a tour ban instigated by the American Federation of Musicians in 1965. This resulted from a disastrous first U.S tour the summer previous, which climaxed in fights between band members and unpaid dues to the musicians’ union. Ironically perhaps, and in common with the other English Beat acts, The Kinks’s early influences were American pop and Rhythm and Blues musicians, and while a tour ban in the world’s largest pop music market hurt financially and psychologically for the young band, there is an important silver lining. While other British bands were able to tour and sold quite well in the United States, the ban reduced The Kinks to only touring Britain and the Commonwealth, increasing their already pronounced lean towards English themes.

The ban resulted, in Thomas Kitt’s estimation, in Ray Davies rejecting “America just as America had rejected him,” culminating insofar as “his influences and inspirations for the next several years would be predominantly English and English folk traditions.”24 The string of singles that followed explored the normal, and slightly, if not heavily, idealized, English life, using their own English accents, locations and politics. Starting with “A Well Respected Man” (October 1965), “Sunny Afternoon” (June 1966), “Waterloo Sunset” (May 1967), the songs expressed a certain inward take on what it meant to be English. Remarking on the success, especially in America, of “A Well Respected Man,” Ray writes that “Its success astonished us all, as the lyric was particularly English, and I had abandoned any attempt to Americanize my accent . . . The ban imposed on us in the US gave us even more mystique to American audiences.”25 The first album to fully forward the social critique that would come to dominate

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24 Kitts, Ray Davies, 83
25 Davies, Ray, 269
the latter 2/3rds of their careers was 1968’s *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* (henceforth *Village Green*).

*Village Green* was “initially contrived as a concept album” taking the rise out of old English life and customs . . . based on Dylan Thomas’s [radio drama] ‘Under Milk Wood,’” the finished product, though, strayed from this direct allusion to a more general exploration of Romantic lyrical impulses. The overarching concept remained but its focus changed to a plot loosely surrounding The Kinks’s appeal to “save” a fictitious village green from the ravages of the modern world. As a result the album laments the end of the rural British order and the idyllic settings manufactured in British imaginations. Kitts writes:

Village Green represents Davies at the pinnacle of his Romanticism incorporating all the major preoccupations of the traditional Romantic consciousness . . . the album alternates between the Byronic brooding voice of the sensitive artists struggling on the margins of an unappreciative culture and the contented Wordsworthian voice uplifted through nature and friendship and the very act of creation and speculation. In other words, the nostalgic romantic underpinnings were incorporated from the start.

Having been born and raised in the London suburbs, it is unlikely that the Davies brothers have fondly held memories of village greens and rural settings like those portrayed in the album, although more urbanized green spaces exist in their hometown. The village green itself seems to represent not a fixed place in the memories of these musicians but the whole idea of English identity itself. Dave remembers “The revolution, we felt, if indeed there was to be one, could not happen purely by freeing ourselves completely from the ties of our past, our culture. It was obviously a question of integrating that of the old that still worked with the new.” Recall that scholar Dan Shoemaker sees Englishness as a combination of nostalgia and landscape; this

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26 This is, shortly, an album that tells a defined, consistent narrative from beginning to end rather than a collection of singles, which dominated the albums produced in the first part of the decade.
28 Kitts, *Ray Davies*, 116
29 Davies, Dave. *Kink* (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 106
mixture of old and new alluded to by Dave Davies is essential. As the title suggests, The Kinks hope to save and preserve the past cultural landmarks of Britishness, providing, in part, a certain amount of hope about their own prospects. In other words, if they are indeed setting out to save the village green then in this world there is still a village green to preserve. In the world of the follow-up album, titled Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire) the eponymous character finds an England gone forever. If the world of Village Green is Romantic, then the world of Arthur is frighteningly Modern.

In Arthur, Davies replaces any hope or Romantic naiveté with the melancholia of past traumatic experiences: the loss of home and family and the abatement of English political prowess. While dealing with weighty topics, the plot of Arthur narrowly focuses on the life of a single British man, named Arthur Morgan (based, at least in part, on his brother-in-law, Arthur Anning) living through the major events of the British twentieth century. The liner notes state:

Arthur? Oh, of course-England and knights and round tables, Excalibur, Camelot, ‘So All Day long the noise of battle roll’d among the mountains by the winter sea’ Sorry, no. This is Arthur Morgan, who lives in a London suburb in a house called Shangri-La, with a garden and a car and wife called Rose and a son called Derek who’s married to Liz, and they have these two very nice kids, Terry and Marilyn. Derek and Liza and Terry and Marilyn are immigrating to Australia. Arthur did have another son called Eddie. He was named for Arthur’s brother, who was killed in the battle of the Somme. Arthur’s Eddie was killed, too-in Korea. His son, Ronnie, is a student and he thinks the world’s got to change one hell of a lot before it’s good enough for him. Derek thinks it’s changed a bloody sight too much-he can’t stick England any more, all these bloody bureaucrats everywhere, bloody hell . . .

This dissatisfaction with the present of England and the imminent departure of his son, Derek, and his family causes Arthur to reanalyze his own life as an ordinary British man. The liner notes continue “It’s a sad day for Arthur, seeing them off. People haven’t been as nice to Arthur as

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30 Davies, Ray. 211
31 The Kinks, Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire). Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.
he’s been to them, and what’s it all about, then? Is this what he lived for? He’s got the house, hasn’t he? And the car? It’s been a good life, hasn’t it? Well, hasn’t it?”32 This intense self-questioning creates an album that “does nothing less than present a cultural history of the first three-quarters of the twentieth century England and the psychological effects of the culture on its people.”33 The result is the British experience, from the reign of Victoria, through two world wars to the end of the Empire, chronicled to its tragic and sad end in the lonely heart of an old man.

While not a commercial success, the album was nonetheless highly influential in the way that it was crafted to tell a coherent story along similar lines as Village Green while carving out its own artistic niche as a “rock opera.”34 Originally, the album was envisioned as working in conjunction with a television miniseries starring Arthur and his family, fleshing out the majority of the narrative.35 Without its companion television series the internal structure and complex nature of the narrative is perhaps lost. The different voices and narrative create a community in sound, as the album seeks to create a narrative that stretches across generations whilst dissecting the state of British culture at the end of Empire.

The album explores three eras of British cultural experience chronologically told within its eleven tracks: the pre-war era, wartime Britain, and post-war Britain. “Victoria,” the opening track, offers perspective of a pre-war British working class soldier showing pride for his home, his lot in life (to die for the Empire) and for the powerful status of Britain at home and abroad. “Yes Sir, No Sir” “Some Mother’s Son” “Drivin’” and “Mr. Churchill Says” show a Britain at

32 Ibid.
33 Kitts, Ray Davies, 131
34 Marten, 102, A Rock Opera is a concept album following not only a complete and compact plot but with interlinking songs sung by different characters as in traditional operatic form. According to Davies, and Marten, Arthur was the first true Rock Opera to be produced, even though The Who’s Tommy beat it to market. An intense artistic rivalry formed between Davies and The Who’s leader Pete Townshend.(Marten 102-3)
35 Ibid, 100
war, both the Great War and the Second World War. Arthur experiences the Great War from training at boot camp ("Yes Sir, No Sir") to the fields and trenches of France and the downtrodden homes of the lost soldiers ("Some Mother’s Son"), the anxiety of the interwar years ("Drivin") and the bombings and rationing of the Second World War ("Mr. Churchill Says"). The last section explores the commodification, suburbanization and accompanying dissatisfaction and irony of the post-war era. Davies, through the character Arthur, explores the irony of naming one’s suburban abode (Shangri-La), the silliness of commodity culture and royalty ("She Bought A Hat Like Princess Marina"), the lust for “good ol’ times” ("Young and Innocent Days" “Nothing to Say"), political and economic strife ("Brainwashed") and the hope of emigration ("Australia"). It is through this exploration of the last nearly seventy years of British history that the character of Arthur finds discontinuity between his own experience of trauma (of war, commodity culture and loneliness) and the expectations of national cultural representations. The resulting work straddles not only temporal and generational lines but also musical genres as the album samples many of Britain's proud musical traditions from marches and music hall pieces to the progressive sixties psychedelic and American inspired rhythm and blues.

The album _Arthur_ is an attempt, figurative by the character Arthur and literal by The Kinks themselves, to reconstruct an imagined history of Britain. It is through this engagement with both the real and the imagined British home and history that the listener comes to a better understanding of the role of Britishness in post-Empire late 1960s Britain. Home and Landscape for Davies and his characters are wrapped intensely within the web of emotions resulting from the geopolitical loss of stature at the end of Empire. In the end British culture can only be understood in the post-Imperial age as a culture that is inherently fragmented, one that exists only in terms of a nostalgia (that is the longing for a lost home or past) and traumatic experience
(war, empire, and class distinction) rather than in positive terminologies. *Arthur*, then, is not only a snapshot of Britain coming to terms with the end of Empire but also with modernity itself. In other words, the pre-industrial England preserved in *Village Green* is buried and mourned in *Arthur*. 
Chapter One
Preservation and Nostalgia in the Landscapes and Spaces of Village Green and Arthur

A repeated line in the ending song “Arthur,” in the album Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire,) states, “Arthur, the world’s gone and passed you by.” The character Arthur, to whom the song is addressed, has lost touch with his landscape, his home, and his “Britain.” Englishness, or Britishness as the case may be, according to scholar Dan Shoemaker, is derived from a combination of the actual physical landscape (the villages, homes and island of Britain) and the “nostalgia”(the longing for a lost past) of British history. The feelings of loss, felt by both Davies and his characters, are constructed spatially in the fallen and destroyed landscapes of childhood, an idealized past, and are, curiously, defining of contemporary British identity. Here the changing and lost landscapes of Britain stand in for the losses felt in geopolitical and cultural realms. What is being chronicled is a deeper emotive spatial loss felt by the British at the end of the Empire, where oriental dreams return to the dreary little industrially pockmarked island replacing the long lost mythical rolling hills and rural village Britain.

This chapter will examine the theme of loss and resurrection of home and its landscape within Davies’s songs from 1967 to 1969. It is an attempt to show how Davies uses nostalgic constructions of landscape and home to both define and condemn post-Imperial British identity. Davies understands Britain as Dan Shoemaker above. Britain’s reliance on nostalgia only exists at the moment of its erasure. In other words, British subjects only feel emotional about their land when it is gone, just as one would feel nostalgia for childhood only in adulthood. This is evidence, I will argue, of an acceptance of the role that modern trauma plays as a defining factor in contemporary Britishness. Here trauma is much more nuanced than open conflict or warfare.

37 Shoemaker, 176
(which will be addressed in subsequent chapters.) Instead, it is the mere severance of the Briton from his ideal Britain. I will show how this idealized English landscape manifests in Davies’s music, and how it flexes its power over Davies and his people. I am bringing these Davies pieces into conversation with the work of landscape poet Paul Celan, whose work attempts to come to terms with a vanishing European homeland for those displaced by the Holocaust. While obviously this is a radically different situation than the Holocaust, I am showing how Davies’s critiques find sympathy with his community and attempt to find a poetic solution to the problems posed by the impossibility, coined by scholar Svetlana Boym, of the “mythical return.”

My focus in this chapter is upon Davies’s work of the late 1960s. I am using the songs from the concept album *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* (1968) and within the character of Arthur in the songs of the rock opera *Arthur (Or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (1969) to better make this point.³⁸ Britishness, as a thematic element in this work, is intertwined with an idea of a past England, both as physical place and as a home. As a result, there are two distinct manifestations of British spatial identity explored here. One is the particularly English landscape, the inspirational favorite of Romantic writers and poets as well as Imperialists like Rudyard Kipling. The second is the British middle class home, which becomes the manor over which middle class kings rule their kingdoms. Both of these symbols are integral to the British experience of spatial identity and faced rapid changes through the modern ages. Davies anticipates how the symbol of the idealized past home or village green became more and more important as the detachment from the collective experience becomes more apparent. The

³⁸ There are certainly other examples from The Kinks’s catalogue including *Muswell Hillbillies* (1971) and the song “Ape-man” (1970) as well as examples from the Beatles “Penny Lane” (1967), “Yesterday” (1965) and “In My Life” (1965) and undoubtedly more. The sheer number of British songs of the 1960s and 70s, which contain pastoral and village life with a nostalgic idealized past, alludes to a greater significance than this chapter can capture.
increased use of these symbols, as commented upon by Davies’s lyrics, results from the changing world that “passes” the British by.

In response to the “lost Britain,” building upon the Romantic tradition in British poetry and prose, these songs set out to create an imagined Britain. This is in the same way as novelist Thomas Hardy’s Wessex is fictitious but suggests defining British contextual agreements that create it not as a fictitious land but a pastoral English paradise. Then, with the internal eye of Modern poetry and literature, he is able to reflect upon the entire construction and tear down the manufactured walls of British identity. The resulting satire exudes not an outsiders put-down shaming others for buying into the hegemonic cultural imaginings, but, rather, fosters unity and sympathy between those who “get it” and those who don’t. It engages with nostalgia while in turn tearing down nostalgic impulses that drove the British Empire.

Above all, the island home of British patriots serves as a source of pride and of identification. The loss of this landscape leads to nostalgic longings for the quaint villages and the rolling hills of yore. Davies’s work, again, adeptly uses the constructions and tools of nostalgia, not to reinforce the jingoistic love of the land, but to comment on the role that loss and trauma play in post-Imperial British identity. Change is the ultimate source of danger to the ideal landscape. Here it is neither the trauma of war nor really the end of Empire, as much as the perceived loss of a defining landscape. Davies’s allusions to the poetics of modernity, as exemplified by Charles Baudelaire and, in particular, Paul Celan, allow him access to the tools of criticism and, ultimately, reconstruction. Any real critique here of the process of nostalgic reconstruction of the English landscape is lost as he cultivates, through satire, a new Britain to remember.

**Yearning for Yesterday**
If nostalgia is central to understanding Britishness, what is being longed for in this context? Nostalgia, at its core, is centered on space. From the combination of the Greek words nostos, meaning “to return home” and algia, meaning “painful longing,” nostalgia is a term literally meaning “homesickness,” and it is in this way that I am choosing to use it. It is an overwhelming feeling; a drive towards remembrance and preservation in turn related and thriving upon decay, decline and loss. The home painfully longed for in Davies’s work is wrapped into the landscape of England itself. The emotions of home are interconnected with the heritages of countryside and landscape. David Lowenthal writes “One icon of heritage has a distinctly English cast. That is the landscape. Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy. Nowhere else does the very term suggest not simply scenery and genres de vie, but quintessential national virtues.”

This landscape is, somewhat ironically, praised for its manufactured qualities, it is connected not only to human development (in the formation of farmlands, plots, gardens and homes) but heavily invested within the societal bracketing central to Davies’s class-conscious work.

What does the idealized English landscape look like? Recall that this landscape is decidedly English rather than British, Lowenthal writes “the countryside is not British; it is English, ‘such a spot of ground’ to the incoming Romans and Saxons, as a seventeenth-century panegyrist put it, ‘that they thought it worthy to be fenced in like a Garden-Plot with a mighty Wall . . . and with a monstrous Dike’ to keep out the Scots and the Welsh.’ The protectionist imagery of the wall and the fence, accentuate the uniqueness and the sacredness of the land itself. Rolling hillsides and meadows define the idealized England. England is heavily invested in the poetic, literary and cinematic icons of British history. Lowenthal writes:

\[39\] Davis, 1.
\[40\] Lowenthal, David, 213
\[41\] Ibid, 215
“Myth and art add extra auras. Arthurian echoes carry to each Wessex wayside; a woodwind figure in the rondo of Elgar’s Second Symphony is said to ‘breathe the scent of Severnside [area adjoining the River Severn] to those who know it’. As Wordsworth graces the Lake District, Constable decorates Suffolk and Hardy enhances Dorset, so every hillock accretes attachments that humanize ‘the whole mother island [as] a campo santo’. ”

With such varied landscapes, and varied imaginings of these landscapes, no wonder it is difficult to understand the ideal England. In times of cultural struggle, as we shall see further on, society latches onto icons and mythologies that reinforce cultural paradigms. For Davies, it is the imagined landscape that fosters the most Britishness for his subjects.

According to both Shoemaker and Lowenthal, English landscape identity is heavily invested in the yearning caused by bouts of nostalgia. Lowenthal writes:

[The] English love of landscape attests the demise of its previous functions. As agriculture ceases to be viable, farmers become scenic stewards for tourism…Landscape-as-heritage lends itself to nostalgic myth-making: childhood memories ‘of sunlit fields where we could play all day without fear, of picturesque villages unshaken by foreign juggernauts, of peaceful beaches with the English enjoying themselves in their own quiet, time-honoured fashion. ’

Importantly, we have here not the individual longing for a lost childhood or former home, but a collective emotional yearning and spatial mourning on the part of the dominant British society as a whole. How is nostalgia classified? Sociologist Fred Davis writes in his book *Yearning for Yesterday* that “nostalgia, despite its private sometimes intensely felt personal character, is a deeply social emotion as well. By this I mean that, like many other feelings and thoughts we experience, nostalgia derives from and has continuing implications for our lives as social actors” and that he is seeking to find the “consequences it has for society as a whole.”

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42 Ibid, 216
43 Ibid, 217
44 Davis, vii
nostalgia in a societal and collective context? Simply, it is the feeling that yesterday was better than today.\textsuperscript{45}

In The Kinks’ work, nostalgic impulses take on personal groundings while still having this collective meaning for society as a whole. What the listener is privy to within The Kinks’s work of this era is a simple understanding that nostalgia and nostalgic phenomena are influencing and crafting British identity in important ways. Be it the creation of preservation organizations like the Open Spaces Society as mocked by The Kinks’s own Village Green Preservation Society, or the grasping at imperial straws in the late sixties as the power is drained from Rule Britannia’s last gasp of Imperial power, as felt by the character Arthur and his neighbors; collective imaginations of the past are important in how the present is consumed and understood. The Kinks and Fred Davis are not, for instance, interested in the resurgences of certain fashions or music as constituted by Jamesonian postmodern corporate historical rehashing (Davis calls these “fades” or “crazes”) but rather in the way that nostalgia is a “general phenomenon” within the psyche of contemporary society.\textsuperscript{46}

Despite the source of our understanding of nostalgic phenomenon being the seventeenth century Swiss physician Johannes Hofer,\textsuperscript{47} nostalgia is a contemporary societal disorder and the twentieth century is notorious for this kind of disease. After all, Davis is writing in the late 1970s and acknowledges his own time’s predilection towards nostalgic melancholia, writing that the decade is “perhaps the most wide ranging, sustained and profound assault on native belief concerning the ‘natural’ and ‘proper’ that has ever been visited on a people over so short a span

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 18. He writes that it is a “positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance....(a) subjective state which harbors the largely unexamined belief that THINGS WERE BETTER (MORE BEAUTIFUL) (HEALTHIER) (MORE CIVILIZED) (MORE EXCITING) THEN THAN NOW.(sic)
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, viii
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 1
of time." Davis refers in this “assault” to the assassinations of the brothers Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as the Vietnam War and the shootings at Kent State University in 1970. While these examples, and indeed his expertise, are purely in the realm of the United States, the same sort of changes and assaults are present within late 1960s Britain. This connection between change and nostalgia and, even more important, traumatic collective experience and nostalgia is central to understanding the mindsets portrayed in Davies’s music.

Space is, again, central to the twentieth century predilection towards nostalgia. Davis writes that

Increasingly, and at an almost frenetic pace, by the mid-twentieth century, this constant movement in socio-geographic space has begun to dislodge man’s psychological attachment to a specific house, in a specific locality, in a specific region, which over the centuries had been fostered by the more settled and protracted arrangement of a primarily agricultural and small town society . . . home is no longer where the hearth is.  

It other words, transportation and technology have allowed travel, either purposeful or forced, between the places we have lived and new, different, places. The result is a kind of traumatic severance between the space we knew and current environments. At the British national level, the appeal of small-town life and stately homes, as exhibited by Village Green and Arthur, became important hallmarks in nostalgic grasps for identity. Social Historian Raymond Williams claims this kind of nostalgia, in particular for rural life in Britain, somewhat obscured the way that industrial alienation has affected British life. In a period of rapid change, these monolithic and, seemingly unchanged relics of past British lives become important in defining not only who they were, but also who they are. The problem becomes, if we expect British

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48 Ibid, 106
49 Ibid, 6.
50 Ibid, 99/see also Raymond Williams. The Country and the City (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974)
homes to look a certain way, what happens when, via either technological innovation or industrialization, our homes no longer look the part?

**Preservation and Decay**

Thus far I have sought to define what I mean by nostalgia. Now I will show how the dueling concepts of nostalgia and preservation play in the music of Ray Davies. *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society* artfully intertwines naturalist impulses and idealized pasts with spatial markers for Englishness with veiled critiques towards preservation and nostalgia. Because of this, it is common in scholarship about The Kinks to link *Village Green* with the Romantic tradition in English poetry of the early nineteenth century. In his work “The Greatest Rock Star of the Nineteenth Century,” Michael Kraus links Davies’s “Wordsworthian” use of language, writing about underdogs and outcasts and, most important to this work, the infusion of pastoral images into his music. Kraus concludes, “Romantic principles of authenticity, coming with nature and even rustic lodgings, are preserved extremely well.” The importance of “preservation” can be taken literally as *Village Green* seeks from its first song to “preserve” the physical localities of Englishness while in turn preserving the Romantic traditions within the medium of a rock song.

Essential to preservation, as with nostalgic longing, is an emphasis on the deterioration and decrepitude associated with time itself. After all, preservation is only possible if there is decay, and is, ultimately, based upon an idea of the past as diametrically opposed to the present and future, relying, somewhat, upon the faulty resources of memory (which itself is prone to decay). It is then easy to see, as Kinks historian Thomas Kitts points out, an “acute awareness of time” within this particular album (and, as I’ll show, others); in which characters and situations

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51 Ibid, 202, 203, 204
52 Ibid
move from past to present, age and decay, attempt to stop or slow time and, perhaps, escape the bounds of time altogether, all the while being constantly aware of and battling with time itself.\textsuperscript{53} Time is Ray Davies’s enemy in these songs; it is something that destroys rather than cultivates. Things do not grow in this world; they decay and need to be preserved, as the title of the album seems to suggest.

Recall that Davis understands nostalgia to deal with a decayed present as much as an idealized past. Through its themes, \textit{Village Green} fosters commonality across generational and temporal boundaries. Part of this theme of decay comes from the history of British imperial domination as the preceding decades of the twentieth century brought nothing but war, depression, and decline after years of growth. This thematic exploration of decay bridges the gaps between time and space (and perhaps even generations) as the theme of decline is one easily assessable by all modern people. While the situations and localities are reminiscent of real places they do not, or may not have realistically existed. Nonetheless there is power in the pastoral and vintage imagery constructed in The Kinks’s music.

The themes and subjects of \textit{Village Green} foster a shared experiential and emotional appeal and this is Davies’s objective. He writes in his autobiography (from point of view of the fictional journalist) “that’s when I heard something in his music [in particular the narrator is listening to the song “Last of the Steam Powered Trains” on \textit{Village Green}] that made me think of the family I had never known . . . I decided to track down Raymond Douglas Davies through his songs which in a strange way provided me with a link to my own past.”\textsuperscript{54} The unnamed and apparently orphaned narrator, talking again from a dystopian and authoritarian future, finds commonality between his own life and the lives imagined in Ray Davies’s songs (undoubtedly

\textsuperscript{53} Kitts, \textit{Ray Davies}, 117
\textsuperscript{54} Davies, Ray, 5
this is how Davies feels people should react to his music). These themes even garnered The Kinks support across the Pacific, as Japanese rock 'n rollers could understand the themes of decline, decay, and cultural reconstruction in common with their own culture even if they didn’t understand the British world. The result is a crosscutting and understandable narrative of decline, common perhaps to all who experience the abrupt changes cultivated under modernity.

Take as example the lyrics from the song “Village Green” on the Kink’s The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society:

“Village Green” by Ray Davies

Out in the country far from all the soot and noise of the city
There's a village green, it's been a long time
Since I last set eyes on the church with the steeple
Down by the village Green

'Twas there I met a girl called Daisy
And kissed her by the old oak tree
Although I loved my Daisy, I sought fame
And so I left the village green

I miss the village green and all the simple people
I miss the village green
The church, the clock, the steeple
I miss the morning dew, fresh air and Sunday school

And now all the houses are rare antiquities
American tourists flock to see the village green
They snap their photographs and say
"Gawd darn it, isn't it a pretty scene?"
And Daisy's married Tom the grocer boy
And now he owns a grocery

I miss the village green and all the simple people
I miss the village green
The church, the clock, the steeple

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I miss the morning dew, fresh air and Sunday school
And I will return there and I'll see Daisy
And we'll sip tea, laugh
And talk about the village green
We will laugh and talk about the village green

The village green within the psychology of contemporary Britons is a pastoral symbol for the timelessness of the English village itself. What is a village green? A village green is just that, a collective green space usually in the middle of towns serving as a shared place. While it is common in English rural villages to have village greens, industrialization and urbanization have caused these communal structures to become endangered. This has prompted a real life “preservation society” called the “Commons Preservation Society,” founded in 1865, (now known as the “Open Spaces Society”). Their mission states “Town and Village greens are the essence of rural England and Wales. Storybook images of village greens tend to be an expanse of grass in the centre of a village complete with oak tree and seat, or a carefully manicured recreation ground just outside the village...” The appeal to “storybook images,” when defining village greens is an important clue to the real psychological power associated with these open spaces as they are intertwined within the collective imagination. Preserving these localities is a way that contemporary Britons save their metaphorical (and perhaps literal) childhoods, their pre-modern, pre-loss selves. As shown in the lyrics of the song “Village Green,” green spaces are not only diametrically opposed to the grime of the city and the modern landscape, in general, but they exist out of time altogether in some realm in the far mythical past. Nothing is perhaps more modern and fleeting than time itself, of which this album is in constant battle.

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There is a distinct link, particularly within this song, between landscapes, in particular pastoral landscapes, and the faculties of collective memory and cultural heritage. Important here is that Ray Davies does not actively remember this village green, neither has he neither met nor kissed the character of Daisy. Nonetheless these symbols are defining for someone of Davies’s upbringing. These symbols are important within British material collective culture, as they are hallmarks outside of the real experience of being British. In her essay entitled “Of England, Home and Duty” J.S. Bratton investigates how the idyllic symbols exploited within Edwardian and Victorian juvenile fiction created an imagined England, how “the interconnection of the enjoyment and beauty of the countryside with its rootedness in history is the essential link in turning the merely idyllic into the inspirational.”59 This “rootedness in history” shows how the emotional responses to these landscapes stem from its deep incorporation into the cultural heritage of Britain.

These books and themes undoubtedly would have influenced Davies. This includes those by noted Imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling, whose works contributed to “bringing to bear the emotional force of the child’s devotion to home, love of family and a dawning sense of his place in time and history as both the reward and the motive for the assumption of the white man’s burden.”60 England not only was the land of these imperialists’ birth, it was associated with the most idealized and emotionally powerful aspects of life: family, safety, and loyalty. This connection between family and history is fostered by literature in creating a common and superior English heritage deeply tied to the green spaces, forests and lands of England.61

60 Ibid
61 There is, of course, an important racial component to these discussions of “English” heritage and landscape, especially with these juvenile novels expressing a nostalgia for the lost realms of old and
spirit of “Village Green” comes, in part, from this heritage of the countryside as well as a strong Romantic tradition emphasized by Michael Kraus, which draws the listener into a nostalgic feeling about the loss of first loves and moving away from hometowns.

Appealing to children’s literature is but one way “Village Green” is connected to the nostalgias of childhood. Childhood is central to understanding the longing in “Village Green.” Not only does this connection exist within the emotional centers of family in the understandings of Imperial propaganda but “Village Green” is memorializing the loss of the village green and the loss of innocence and childhood. On this connection between nostalgia and childhood, Fred Davis writes that “just as the phasing of the life cycle periodically entails status transitions that in their perceived discontinuity and attendant anxiety evoke nostalgic reactions from individuals, so do untoward major historic events and abrupt social changes pose a similar threat and evoke a similar response from people in the aggregate.” Change, not only in the world (which prompts the overarching nostalgic response and longing for the past) but also within the lifecycle that prompts this particular longing, thrives upon anxiety.

This particular nostalgia in “Village Green” cannot be dismissed just as a song of a man returning to the localities associated with his childhood. The singer is dealing with societal and technological changes that both give him the ability to leave while allowing his return. This loss is only possible when given the modern means of transportation, as before the arrival of railroads and automobiles one’s birthplace would most likely be their death place. Our singer travels between the village and his new home in the city. “Village Green” is a story of the end of an emotional love affair between boy and girl, and, more importantly, of man and home.

chivalric heritages of feudal Britain. Landscape, especially when mixed with heritage, is used to repel foreign “invaders.” See above, David Lowenthal’s quote separating British landscape and English landscape, where England is defined by the walls created to keep out the Welsh and Scots.

62 Davis, 101-2
Lost love is, of course, a common theme in poetry and popular music; and while, the love for Daisy is an important aspect of the longing shown in “Village Green,” it is the rural lifestyle that acts as the lost love with the largest affect upon the singer. In possibly his most important verse from his *The Flowers of Evil (Les Fleurs du Mal)*, “To a Woman Passing By” Charles Baudelaire deals with the modern experience of fleeting love within the crowed urban masses.

“To a Woman Passing By” by Charles Baudelaire 63
Around me roared the nearly deafening street.
Tall, slim, in mourning, in majestic grief,
A woman passed me, with a splendid hand
Lifting and swinging her festoon and hem;

Nimble and stately, statuesque of leg.
I, shaking like an addict, from her eye,
Black sky, spawner of hurricanes, drank in
Sweetness that fascinates, pleasure that kills.

One lightning flash . . . then night! Sweet fugitive
Whose glance has made me suddenly reborn,
Will we not meet again this side of death?
Far from this place! too late! never perhaps!
Neither one knowing where the other goes,
O you I might have loved, as well you know!

In his essays connecting Charles Baudelaire and the trauma of modernity, Walter Benjamin makes an often-quoted response to this particular lyrical poem. He writes that “What this sonnet conveys is simply this: far from experiencing the crowd as an opposing, antagonistic element, the city dweller discovers in the crowd what fascinates him. The delight of the urban poet is love--not at first sight, but at last sight. It is an eternal farewell, which coincides in the poem with the moment of enchantment.”64 The foci of “Village Green” is that of a last rural love, but its poet or singer is undoubtedly urban; he sings that “he left the village green” and makes

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experiential and observational differences between his present environment and that of his past and fleeting home in the village. What then does “To a Woman Passing By” tell us about “Village Green?” Modernity allows for these kinds of encounters. The singer of “Village Green” seeks fame (most likely a contemporary drive) and through the innovations of modern transportation technology, he is able to leave his hometown. He is almost certainly a modern man, living in modern times. Curiously, the shock associated with the urban environment allowed him to see much more clearly the enchantment and the beauty of the rural landscape and the girl he left behind. He feels love at last sight not only for the girl but also for his past and his lost home. The appearance of beauty is all the more shocking and powerful when captured fleetingly. The village green itself is enchanting because it is lost, just like the past to a nostalgic. If “Village Green” is a love letter to its namesake, it is one that is not at first sight but at last sight for both the village and the girl it represents.

Home and Away

In the previous section I was interested in how the village green plays into British cultural heritage and how the severance between the Briton and his old home leads to this “love at last sight.” Now I want to explore how the division between home and away, as well as present and past play into this nostalgia. Whether intentional or not, the song “Village Green” anticipates the past as a source of tourism. Svetlana Boym links pastoral landscapes and modern longing when she writes that modern peoples long “for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition.” With the houses becoming “rare antiquities” filled with

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65 I was having difficulty deciding between outside or away for the opposite of what I mean by home. A clearer comparison would be home and not-home. It is not public versus private, because as we saw in the icon of the village green, public spaces and outside spaces can still possess homeness. Foreign is as close as I've come but it has the trappings, especially when confronting Empire, of racial or national otherness that I do not intend.

“American tourists,” it no longer is the refuge from the city but the shrink-wrapped tourist display of “Englishness” for outside and prying gazes. Its appeal, both to the tourists and to our singer is its representation as a source of kitschy nostalgia. He feels nostalgic for his hometown and upon his return the hometown is unchanged (except for the girl he left behind getting married) The eternal nature of the village in “Village Green,” is the idealization of an idealization; to put it into other words, it is eternal purity unchanged by modernization. Not only does this village green not exist as a real place in our world, it could not exist in any place but in art. It is pure unadulterated nostalgia.

The nostalgia here is only possible because of the journey involved in getting to the site, and its distance from the “modern world.” We know already that it is in a different spot than the city to which our singer left for “fame.” The tourist and the journey, then, becomes the defining factor for modern understandings of home and away. In her work connecting tourism and contemporary art, Lucy Lippard remarks, “The tourist experience is a kind of art form . . . its own way of organizing landscape and our sense of it.” With Lippard’s understanding in mind, it seems as though the singer of “village green” is a tourist in his own village. Even in his initial lived experiences in the village, in which he finds attraction in the very ways that the village differs from the experiences of the city, which, ironically perhaps, attracts the tourists that ultimately destroy the landscape. “The local is defined,” writes Lippard “by its unfamiliar counterparts. A peculiar tension exists between around here and out there, regional and national, home and others’ home, present and past, outsiders and insiders.” This tension, in part, gives home its “homeness” and the away its “awayness;” just as there is no need for preservation without decay, there is no home without the outside. Lippard concludes this section with “being

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here and being there, being home and being away, are more alike than we often think. Even as we learn them, our places change, because no place is static, and no resident remains the same as s/he likes and changes with the experiences life and place provide."\textsuperscript{69} The only way that places become static is through the nostalgic idealization and the transformation of these spaces into “storybooks”. For example, the “storybook” promoted by preservation societies, later satirized by The Kinks.

While the images associated with home and landscape within \textit{Arthur} appeal to the same kinds of “storybook” imagery, they exist in a much more contemporaneous context whilst keeping the emotional affects underneath the surface. We have here a continuous story told chronologically through the life of the character Arthur. He, like the characters and preservers in \textit{Village Green}, feels nostalgic for past times. In songs like “Victoria” (See Chapter 2 for additional information) he feels nostalgic for the love and affection of Queen Victoria. It is no coincidence that preservation organizations like the Open Spaces Society started in the Victorian era. In the song “Shangri-La,” the title itself alludes to the “out of time” and “faraway” motifs common in Oriental fantasies of British Imperial literature, but with the same hint of decay present as above.

\textbf{“Shangri-La” By Ray Davies\textsuperscript{70}}

Now that you’ve found your paradise  
This is your kingdom to command  
You can go outside and polish your car  
Or sit by the fire in your Shangri-La  
Here is your reward for working so hard  
Gone are the lavatories in the back yard  
Gone are the days when you dreamed of that car  
You just want to sit in your Shangri-La

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{70} “Shangri-La” Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire). Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.
Put on your slippers and sit by the fire
You’ve reached your top and you just can’t get any higher
You’re in your place and you know where you are
In your Shangri-La
Sit back in your old rocking chair
You need not worry, you need not care
You can’t go anywhere
Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La

The little man who gets the train
Got a mortgage hanging over his head
But he’s too scared to complain
Cos he’s conditioned that way
Time goes by and he pays off his debts
Got a TV set and a radio
For seven shillings a week
Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La, Shangri-La

And all the houses in the street have got a name
Cos all the houses in the street they look the same
Same chimney pots, same little cars, same windowpanes
The neighbors call to tell you things that you should know
They say their lines, they drink their tea, and then they go
They tell your business in another Shangri-La
The gas bills and the water rates, and payments on the car
Too scared to think about how insecure you are
Life ain’t so happy in your little Shangri-La
Shangri-La, Shangri-La la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la

While constructing an ideal home, one that the character Arthur is proud of, the song “Shangri-La” builds upon the familiar territory of the historical aristocracy. Not only does “Shangri-La” allow Arthur to survey an exotic paradise with its nominal appeal to Imperial domination, the allusions to “kingdoms to command” connect Arthur with the ancient aristocratic mythos. Even by the postwar era, and within the aforementioned juvenile British fiction from the turn of the twentieth century, the symbol of home as the “kingdom” for the middle class “ruler” was central to defining “Englishness” as something brave, noble, and romantic. “Home and heritage conjures symbols surrounding the chivalric romances of old
England which” writes J.S. Bratton, “includes the ideas of honour, bravery, nobility, the mores of the aristomilitary caste reinforced by associations with ‘the heritage’ [and] the literature of romance.”71 While Bratton’s work is focused on children’s literature of Empire, Davies’s Arthur has absorbed the same elements of propagandistic and jingoistic mentalities. Added to this is the semiotic power of Arthur’s name, which conjures images of Camelot and ancient aristocratic heritages. He is the lord of his castle just as he was the knight fighting for England on the fields of France. While, we know that Arthur sees his “Shangri-La” as his reward for service is based almost entirely upon an idealized and historical system and shows a further obsession on the part of Ray Davies with the cultural past.

The Britain in “Shangri-La” is likelier much closer, temporally and economically, to the lived experience of the listeners of The Kinks music than that represented in “Village Green,” and yet the past plays a role in its creation. The king metaphor above shows the way that Davies plays with past idealizations in the irony of this song. It fosters homely imagery complete with “old rocking chairs” and “put on your slippers and sit by the fire,” setting it in the ideal past but with modern innovations, including cars, indoor lavatories, television sets and radios, the hallmarks of the materialist suburbanite. Arthur’s portrayal here borders on the delusional. The sad irony here is thick, as with most of the imaginings of the ideal in Davies’s music. While the song unfolds, the cracks in his ideal home begin to show and this irony becomes clearer.

If Village Green anticipates decay, Arthur lives in it. “I knew that Village Green was about the decline of a certain innocence in England,” says Ray Davies, “and when I suggest that I go the whole way and write about the decline and fall of the British Empire everyone, without exception, thought that it was the perfect subject matter.”72 Perhaps it is through Arthur that

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71 Bratton, 90
72 Davies, Ray, 363.
Davies is showing Britain as it truly is, without the veneer of innocence to cloud or hide imperfections and discontinuities still present in the world of *Village Green*. In the world of *Arthur*, the listener is confronted with an England that has long since passed the innocence of villages and rural life and is completely and utterly confronted with the devastation caused by modernity. And yet Arthur’s pride is still stuck in the past.

This connection between Arthur’s pride and space is predictably problematic. A repeated line emphasizes the darker side of this sort of obsession with spatial identity and the crushing hand of class distinction. Thomas Kitts remarks “Again, Davies reminds us of England’s transformation from the ‘land of hope and gloria’ to the ‘land of the living dead’ as he would term it [in his later work].”\(^7^3\) The narrator in “Shangri-La” sings that while “You’ve reached your top and you just can’t get any higher; you’re in your place and you know where you are” and “you need not worry, you need not care; you can’t go anywhere.” The metaphor of the kingdom here takes on another side. The space becomes a controlling and limiting factor as opposed to an empowering one. The modern and real world has class distinctions that are perhaps lacking in the imagined past but still hold down characters like Arthur, icons like the village green. In addition these homes hold heavy class overtones; village greens and manors exist only really in upper class situations. The illusion of freedom and agency, intertwined with the power to rule over his domain fades when the constraints of the class system weigh down on Arthur. King Arthur rules over his “Shangri-La,” but what exactly exists under his rule? It is a house filled with modern appliances, but clouded by debt; it is a house with a lofty name, but all the others on the street hold the same generic “uniqueness” of what Arthur is so pathetically proud. The critique on society here is that living in the past or in the idealizations chronicled in

\(^7^3\) Kitts, *Ray Davies*, 138.
*Village Green* is deluded. We see the ideal and the reality and ultimately feel sorry for Arthur and his community.

This type of critique fell, at least at first, to choruses of scorn. Dave Davies, Ray’s guitar playing brother, writes “much to our surprise it was greeted with derision and negative criticism. For some reason the media, critics, people in general, had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. They thought it was purely a put-down of certain social attitudes and behaviors of the time, when in fact there was an underlying sympathy for the role played by middle-class Britain.”74 As Dave Davies suggests there is an important commonality drawn within the middle-class as imagined in “Shangri-La.” If Arthur were to see the “sameness” between his “Shangri-La” and his neighbor’s “Shangri-La” he’d see it as a negative. The listener, through the view given to us by the narrator, can see that Davies intends no condemnation. This empathetic drive encourages a kind of identification between listener, musician and character.

**The Land of Hope and Gloria**

Ray Davies’s commentary in *Village Green* and on the home sung about in “Shangri-La” exhibit a fascination with the idealized distinction between home and outside on a personal level. But these distinctions show that imbedded within these conceptions of home and village greens is the deep seeded patriotic appeal of “Britain.” The Kinks’ music is rife with allusions to longstanding traditional themes within English poetry, especially in imagining “England” as a National ideal. While English writers at the end of the Empire “struggled with a disconcertingly pervasive sense of posteriority-postwar flatness, post-imperial diminutions of power and

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74 Davies, Dave, 118-9
influence, and the sense of the grand narratives now losing their force as never before  

Ray Davies grew up in an England where the grand narratives of the Imperial superiority encouraged him to defend his homeland. By 1969, Davies, the other members of The Kinks and the majority of The Kinks’s audience are defined by this national culture and the anxiety of its untimely end. The appeals within Village Green and Arthur fit into this understanding. It is perhaps not that Ray Davies, or his characters, long for the simplicity of grand national narratives; it is that they know no other way to recognize their standing upon the world stage. Not only does modernity destroy the natural landscapes, as mourned in “Village Green” and “Shangri-La,” but in the wake of the atrocities of the Second World War, also the grand narratives that make up British identity and England hallow are seen as complacent in the birth of fascism.

Even in their most iconoclastic moments it is impossible to think of The Kinks’s own standing and identity without imagining England. What existed before fascism, an unadulterated and unabashed jingoist love of the land and the people of England, could not exist afterwards in the same way, even if the creators of cultural institutions were sired in years where these ideals were not only accepted but the norm. The result is mourning, not only by the older character of Arthur but also by the supposedly radical and youthful Davies. Nowhere is there a rejection of the overarching themes of this kind of racialized and landscape-based identity politics. Indeed, Ray Davies does not seem to emphasize the whiteness of Arthur as a qualification for Englishness, as would be the platform of National Front politics dominating British political culture at the time; it is rather the loss of the defining factor (perhaps any defining factor at this

point) that is mourned rather than the differences defined. These characters, and Davies, feel the void left by the departure of the idealized Britain.

Davies did not shed his love for the land of England. Take for example Eliza Cook’s “The Englishman.” Despite this poem’s age, its message connects well with the beliefs exposed in *Arthur*.

**The Englishman (1851) Eliza Cook**

There’s a land that bears a world-known name,
Though it is but a little spot;
To say ‘tis first on the scroll of fame,
and who shall aver it is not.
Of the deathless ones who shine and live
In arms, in arts, or song,
The brightest the whole wide world can give
to that little land belong;
‘tis the star of earth, deny it who can,
The island home of an Englishman

<....>

The Briton may traverse the pole of the zone
And boldly claim his right
For he calls such a vast domain his own,
That the sun never sets on his might.
Let the haughty stranger seek to know
The place of his home and birth;
And a flush will pour from cheek to brow
While he tells his native earth.
For a glorious charter, deny it, who can,
Is breathed in the words “I’m an Englishman” 76

Cook’s poem fashions a Victorian ideal England, exhibiting the political and cultural power of Imperial Britain in geographical context. There’s a certain irony as the immense power comes from, as she writes, “but a little spot” and “The brightest the whole wide world can give

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to that little land belong; ‘tis the star of earth, deny it who can, the island home of an
Englishman.” The smallness of the island mirrors the uniqueness valued by Arthur in his
“Shangri-La.” Of course, there is also pride in this power coming from a small island, but when
the power fades; the island becomes an impotent prison. The lyrics of “Shangri-La” expound the
glories of the Empire and the pride and love that true Englishmen feel for their island and their
home. Like the appeals to home, this nationalistic imagery is steeped in emotions.

Cook writes “it nurtures a deep and honest love, the passions of father and pride, and
yearns with the fondness of a dove, to the life of its own fireside; ‘Tis a rich rough gem, deny it
who can; And this is the heart of an Englishman.” The appeal to the hearts of Englishmen, as
well as the familial (which we will see is common in these constructions) furthers the natural and
bodily expressions of love between man and country. Contributing to this is the evocation of the
familial so familiar to nationalistic imagery with the “passions of the father and pride” and
finally separating the local and the foreign, doubting the stranger will understand this kind of
love. Family and blood is common in British expressions of national pride. In defining
Britishness, nationalist politicians make definitions “replete with references to ‘kith and kin,
‘blood,’ ‘British stock,’ and ‘family’” and even emigrants, like Arthur’s son, and Britons were
considered “part of a single family.” 77 Compare this to Ray Davies’s “Victoria” the opening
track to the Kink’s Arthur.

“Victoria” by Ray Davies78

Long ago life was clean
Sex was bad and obscene
And the rich were so mean

Stately homes for the lords
Croquet lawns, village greens
Victoria was my queen
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, toria

I was born, lucky me
In a land that I love
Though I am poor, I am free
When I grow I shall fight
For this land I shall die
Let her sun never set
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, toria
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, toria

Land of hope and gloria
Land of my Victoria
Land of hope and gloria
Land of my Victoria
Victoria, toria
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, toria

Canada to India
Australia to Cornwall
Singapore to Hong Kong
From the West to the East
From the rich to the poor
Victoria loved them all
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria, toria
Victoria, Victoria, Victoria

The past tense of “long ago” shows that this song is firmly placed within the present, looking back fondly on the past. While the song is critical, at least to contemporary ears, there is a particular fondness expressed for the “land of hope and gloria.” The song is sung presumably by Arthur as he looks back fondly at the nascence of his life. The first verse nourishes the longstanding notions of the ideal Victorian homestead and a particularly wealthy one at that. It is hard to imagine that a working class Englishman, like Arthur, would dream of the past’s croquet lawns, village greens, and stately homes. But those define England, even for those who cannot afford them.
The song “Victoria” deals primarily with idealizations. Dan Shoemaker writes that this community is not “yearning for an actual past” but rather “an articulation of an ideal world” one where Victoria loves all of her Imperial children and there exists the freedom to die for her. The glory of Waterloo is gone and all that is left is the twilight before the darkness of Britain’s fall. The image of the older Arthur singing this song brings an almost mourning realization to the mix; the idealized world is lost forever in the wake of the tragic events that form the album’s narrative. The second verse personalizes the past for Arthur, when he sings “I was born, lucky me, in a land that I love; though I’m poor, I am free. When I grow, I shall fight. For this land, I shall die. Let her sun never set.” While continuing the clichéd iconography equating sun and empire, the glory of the British Empire will be maintained on the field of battle by people like Arthur for the gain of people filling those stately homes. As long as those idealizations fill Arthur with pride, all seems well. The inevitability of death for Imperial gain is not something decried nor shied away from, in fact, Arthur considers himself “lucky” a sentiment not shared, perhaps, by members of The Kinks’s generation.

Dan Shoemaker continues, in “Victoria” the “fabled Kinks sarcasm is at work here; the narrator of this song is a poor sap who believes he is free even while believing it’s his fate to die for England. And yet, listening to this song one may have the sense that he could really believe

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79 Recurring Images like the sun in these songs play an important role within Davies’s work and the referential poetry. Besides the mention in “Victoria” shown above, the sun plays a role in three other songs each dealing with pain of the present and the pride of the past. In the maudlin “Some Mother’s Son,” a soldier in the trenches of The Great War peers up at the sun “and dreams of games he played when he was young” resulting in his peering too far over the wall of the trench and his death by bullet from a German gun. The songs “Drivin’” and “Australia,” use the symbol of the sun in similar ways, as an escape from the horrors of the present. “Drivin’” reminds it listeners that the sun is shining so they should go driving cars to forget about the upcoming Second World War, and “Australia” paints a bright, warm and sunshiny alternative to the cold and dark winters of Britain, referring to a “sunny Christmas Day” in Sydney, Australia. The sun, in each of these examples including the example above in “Victoria,” allows for a return to the carefree attitudes of the past.
that Victoria loved them all, ‘from rich to the poor.’”\textsuperscript{80} This true-believer status is important. By the end of the album (as well shall see) the poor-sap, despite the generational difference, find commonality between himself and Davies. In his memoirs Davies writes that “I wanted to centre the whole story around an ordinary man like myself, who had been a small cog in the empire and had watched it pass him by.”\textsuperscript{81} The “love” felt by Arthur is the same that connects all Britons as “kin” by nationalist politicians. It would be easy to say that Ray like the character Arthur, and thousands of working class Britons, were duped by a government that didn’t care about their interests through the use of familial propagandistic icons. The mourning is deeper, which further illuminates the intersection between spatial identity and national pride, or mourning, felt in Davies’s works.

**Dealing with Loss**

Up to this point I’ve written almost exclusively about the lyrics of Davies and British National identity. I think it is also important to draw a comparison to the geographic loss of landscape in modern poetry. In the previous section I have made it clear that in “Victoria” and “The Englishman” it is the island of Britain that reinforces British National identity, now it is my goal to show how the loss of these symbols through the changes in the decades after world conflicts impacts the fragile senses of self. Ulrich Baer finds similar motifs within Baudelaire’s work. He writes “a horizon of experience is no longer a given. Neither social context . . . material surroundings…nor sensory perception (of sight) furnish a coherent frame with which to turn events into experience and the surroundings into world.”\textsuperscript{82} The loss of horizon that Baer is referring to in his analysis of a series of poems by Baudelaire, about a poet living in a tower

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\textsuperscript{80} Shoemaker, 180.
\textsuperscript{81} Davies, Ray, 363.
\textsuperscript{82} Baer, Ulrich. *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan*. (Stanford, California: Stanford University, 2000), 169.
overlooking his city, is both literal and figurative. For Arthur and for the poetic Englishman, the horizon of experience that grounds them is an existence based on the service to the monarch and the Empire and the emotional symbols of home and landscape. When, in the modern age, these grounding effects are gone, the true pains of existence replace them. While Baudelaire is talking about crowds and the loss of more abstract grounding elements, what happens when there is a true and unrelenting loss as in the case of Jewish poet Paul Celan and the losses of World War II?

Paul Celan lost everything in the Second World War. He lost his family and nearly his life to the concentration camps. He lost his identity along with his homeland and place in the world. It is hard not to trivialize the losses felt by Celan by bringing them into comparison with popular music, but I think that there is some commonality to be explored between the feelings of loss for the mythical homeland within Celan’s poetry and that of Ray Davies’s lost England.

Baer writes that

The landscape from which Celan comes to us lies not only on the periphery of the history commonly termed ‘European’ but also constitutes the origins of a highly fragile and fragmented biography. It is an area where the Holocaust catastrophically eclipsed a community and culture and near terminated Celan’s life, which had hardly begun.\(^{83}\)

Despite this profound loss, Celan continues to address place within his work.\(^{84}\)

In the speech “The Meridian” he searches for his “place of origin,” writing:

I am looking for all this with my imprecise, because nervous, finger on a map- a child’s map, I must admit. None of these places can be found. They do not exist. But I know where they ought to exist especially now, and...I find something else. Ladies and gentlemen, I find something, which consoles me a bit for having walked this impossible road in your presence, this road of the impossible. I find the connective, which, like the poem, leads to encounters. I find something as immaterial as language, yet earthly,

\(^{83}\) Ibid, 211.
\(^{84}\) Ibid, 212
terrestrial, in the shape of a circle which via both poles, rejoins itself and on the way serenely crosses even the tropics; I find . . . a meridian.\textsuperscript{85}

On this passage Baer writes that “The place with which to identify, the native region from which Celan comes to us in his work and via his biography, the locus from which a life unfolds on a path from childhood to maturity, seems to exist only under erasure.”\textsuperscript{86} This finds commonality with the previous quotation from Fred Davis linking nostalgia to the “life cycle” of birth, life and death, but finds an even more striking commonality with the contemporary notions trumpeted by Svetlana Boym in her understanding of the impossibility of the mythic return. Simply, we cannot go back to our own childhoods as Paul Celan cannot go back to his home destroyed by the Nazis; furthermore any conception of homeland or birthplace exist within the context of erasure. In other words, just as in the objects of nostalgic fascination, the regions of our memory and our pasts only exist at the moment when they are fleeting.

While Celan’s experience is fragmented by the Holocaust and war, it is the rhetorical reliance of fascist governments (and as we saw with the Eliza Cook poem above) upon the importance of home and place that perhaps makes his task of creating a home from his poetry all the more difficult. Recall the previous section where I investigated the role that the pre-modern “grand narratives” of nation, homeland, and empire played in the creation of Arthur’s mindset in the opening songs of the album. For Celan, and many others like him, the words “fatherland” and “motherland” were irrevocably damaged at the end of the Second World War, as they were instrumental in the appeals of fascist propagandists. “Both terms motherland and fatherland,”

\textsuperscript{85} Celan, Paul “The Meridian” \textit{Collected Prose}. Translated by Rosemarie Waldo (New York: Routledge, 2003), 54-55
\textsuperscript{86} Baer, 213.
writes Baer, “were employed by Germans to displace Celan and with him all of European Jewry from the places of their origins and to annihilate his family.”

With the icons of motherhood and fatherhood as well as the tropes of home and origins usurped for the literal destruction of Celan’s parents and home, it is easy to see the kind of semiotic crises exiled deep within his psyche. These constant rhetorical reminders of family, landscape, and other loaded terminologies like home and homeland (not to mention the inclusion of father into fatherland) continue to rewind the already unhealed wounds in the wake of tragedies. That being said, the importance of home here has more to do with its cultural and material importance rather than some essentialist drive. If place, as we have seen, is central to discovering one’s true identity, what happens if that place is used to destroy you and no longer exists as a welcoming place?

For Celan, and others, the goal was to create his own ideal homeland within his poetry. According to Baer, the “word ‘home’ for Celan can serve as a shibboleth that divides those native to a place from those who are not permitted to belong.” This division between home and away, outsider and insider which served the purposes of defining the art of the tourist for Lucy Lippard serves the purpose of expelling Celan’s family. But by using the word “home” he is creating for himself and the displaced millions a homeland within words. Celan’s work attempts to find a place not only where he belongs but one from which he can draw continued significance and find identity. Celan’s work draws upon a fallen tradition of landscape poetry to capture the erased landscape of his lost homeland.

Baer writes “The poetic invocation of an actual or imaginary place may be necessary to present experiences that exceed even the symbolic and metaphoric ‘frames of reference’ of the

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87 Ibid, 214
88 Ibid, 214
89 Ibid, 217
sciences of the mind.”90 Place is singular to understanding Celan’s loss, grounding and presenting these frames allows us access to his pain and his experiences. On the other hand, it may be traumatic to be given an experience without the necessarily groundings to place it into our understandings. Walter Benjamin understands this as unresolved experience.91 Celan’s loss of home following the Holocaust is obviously a traumatic and unresolved experience, for Davies and Arthur the psychological effects of geopolitical decline are for more subtle but still important. The loss felt by Celan, and the way that his landscape poetry creates an imaginary homeland for him, is like the lost England within Ray Davies’s work. Certainly, Village Green and Arthur tell the stories of imaginary Englishmen and imaginary landscapes that are longed for as if they were real. Baer continues that:

“Real or imagined travel, and even losing one’s way in a landscape are privileged and pervasive metaphors for humankind’s passage through historical time. Without the possibility of placing oneself in reference to the surrounding landscape, the actual capacity of historical self-understanding and experience itself withers away.”92

This feeling of being lost definitely and conclusively felt by Ray Davies as he uses Arthur and his passage through time as a metaphor for Davies’s own search for meaning. The end of Empire leaves Arthur and Davies without a home, standing against the currents of history having no idea how to deal with or how they fit into the world at large.

The pain of this loss aside for the moment, is there a possibility for some kind of return to ones homeland? Baer writes that:

If the German language ‘remained unlost’ for Celan even after the catastrophe that had been planned and executed in that language, his work may constitute something like a secular version of the Torah, which [Heinrich] Heine had called “das portative Vaterland” “the portable fatherland”. . . the Fatherland from which one could not be deported.93

90 Ibid
91 Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 177
92 Baer, 218.
93 Ibid, 213
The landscapes painted by Celan share with the landscapes and homes created in Davies’s work a homeland that will not be lost to the machinations of modernity, be it war or industry. The words and songs of Davies will last, are portable but cannot be taken away from the cultural in which they were spawned. That is the true reason for the creation of Davies’s landscape. Recall that his autobiography anticipates a post-apocalyptic future totalitarian state; even in this future world, where expression is limited, and the fields and houses imagined by Davies are even further removed the songs, narratives, characters and places created in Davies’s works still endure.

It is through *Arthur* and *Village Green* we get a “portable” England. He allows for the possibilities of some kind of healing of the wounds that exist from the end of the Empire. By the end of *Arthur* the listener gets the feeling that there is no possibility in returning to the innocence of *Village Green*, but there is no hope in an England that is like Celan’s portable home where no real ability to return exists. This is of course a modern position. Believing in no return to simpler times, Davies is not showing us the world that we could have or ever did have. Instead, Davies’s songs reject the whole entire notion that the past ever really existed in the ways that are exploited and memorialized within nationalist narratives.

The end of empire shows the resurgence of these preservative and nostalgic drives, Davies’s use of these tools shows both a fascination and a potential resistance. The songs I will address in the final section, “Nothing to Say” and “Young and Innocent Days,” especially show and highlight the disconnect between reality and national myth. At first in “Nothing to Say”, the listener feels cheated, but by the end the cultural hegemonic control mechanisms of nostalgia (at least in the mind of Arthur) are lost. But the sympathy portrayed between the dialoguing characters and between Davies and his characters show not only compassion but also a hope for
some kind of rhetorical understanding and cure for the nostalgic blues. The self-critical and self-referential tone personalizes and creates a realistic glimpse into the mindsets of Briton in this period of decline. But it is not to say that these are unimportant to understanding British identity. Davies’s imagined Britain is one where the past is celebrated for what it is, a construction, and as important to him as his British family.

**Innocent Days and Mythical Returns**

These finals songs counter the prideful nostalgic return presented early in “Victoria” by showing the inability to return to the past. If the album is to be taken chronologically, as suggested by the narrative song order, these songs come closest to the feelings at the contemporaneous moment; they are the final verdicts perhaps decrying the imagined past.

**“Young and Innocent Days” by Ray Davies**

I look back at the way I used to look at life  
Soft, white dreams with sugar coated outside  
It was great, so great  
Young and innocent days

I wish my eyes could only see  
Everything, exactly as it used to be  
It’s too late, so late  
Young and innocent days

I see the lines across your face  
Time has gone and nothing ever can replace  
Those great, so great  
Young and innocent days

**“Nothing to Say” by Ray Davies**

Remember walking with you by my side  
You were my Papa and I was your pride

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94 “Young and Innocent Days” The Kinks, Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire). Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.

95 “Nothing to Say” The Kinks, Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire). Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.
Now I've got children and I'm going grey
No time for talking I got nothin' to say

Those Sunday dinners that we had at home
Now I've got a house and I've got friends of my own
We can't do tomorrow what we did yesterday
It's best that we're going our separate ways, OK

How is your rheumatism (nothing to say)
How are your chilblains (nothing to say)
How's Aunty Mabel (nothing to say)
So far Papa, I got nothin' to say, OK

Those happy days we spent together
We thought our world would never change
How the days go by
And things will never be the same

You keep pretending that everything's fine
So you make small talk to help pass the time
But all the words that you spit from your face
Add up to nothin' you got nothin' to say

The sadness in the lyrics of these two songs shows the inherent melancholy associated with the nostalgic experience; sitting in your house and wishing you could do it again can make one depressed. After retracing his steps through his history from his early age—military service and the departure of his family near the end of his life—there is nothing left but the unresolved remainder left after nostalgic impulses failed to cure his sadness. Arthur symbolizes the previous generation of Britons for whom poems like “The Englishman” defined how they possibly comprehended themselves. These two songs are the culmination of the reflective day looking in the past for solutions to the problems of the present. What at once was ironic brings deep mourning to audiences.

Intergenerational conflict is central to these two songs, as the son derides the father for nostalgic relapses. But Davies makes the listener ponder exactly who is being nostalgic?
Presumably, the character that is singing these two songs is the older Arthur himself and the response from his angry son. One is from the point of view of Arthur and the other from the departing son Derek. He sings that “I look back at the way I used to look at life; Soft, white dreams with sugar coated outside.” In times of relatively good health and good cheer, life is sweet and metaphorically sugar coated when he was “innocent” as the title suggests. On the other hand, in “Nothing to Say,” in response to the intransigent Arthur, Derek’s mocking tone and imminent move to Australia to build a better life shows the restorative nostalgic drive within the young emigrant. Derek sings “Those Sunday dinners that we had at home; Now I’ve got a house and I’ve got friends of my own; We can’t do tomorrow what we did yesterday; It’s best that we’re going our separate ways, ok?” Derek doesn’t believe he is being nostalgic here, and yet he speaks of yesterday and being a child, he is looking towards the future, not necessarily reconstructing the mythical English home in Australia, but is looking to recapture or restore the pride and happiness associated with the past.

Recall the quote before when Ray Davies explains that Village Green is about England’s loss of innocence, the carefree and innocent days lack this sort of melancholic, nostalgic underpinning because there is no need for it. No need to worry, no need to pine when one is innocently blind to the destructive and traumatic experiences of modern life, having experienced not only periodic trauma but coming to terms with death and decline, perhaps politically, socially and biologically at the end of his life. The start of “Nothing to Say” sums this point up succinctly, “Now I’ve got children and I’m going grey; No time for talking I got nothin’ to say.” There is a frantic longing for a “mythical return” to the innocence and carefree days of youth, which are impossible to attain. In The Future of Nostalgia, Svetlana Boym writes that “modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return for the loss of an enchanted

96 Kitts, 142-3
world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. Because nostalgia exists at the moment of erasure and comments longingly about the ruins of the past, an essential part is the inability to return, because, after all, if one could go back home why would they mourn it as lost? Given the work that Paul Celan has done to recapture his homeland in verse, is a mythical return possible in this context?

This is not only a nation feeling the crunch of decline but it is a nation whose entire identity is wrapped into its pastoral and Imperial past while its power stems from an industrial present. The portable fatherland created by Davies is more a chronicling of how England was and is imagined. For the imagined community of England these symbols and icons (the home, the village green and the power of the island itself) are identifying essential characteristics of the ideal Britain. In other words, like Celan, Davies sees no going back, but through his work has created a new symbolic order to drawn upon that reconstructs the landscapes as remembered. The portable fatherland and the portable England provide what the lost land cannot, a sense of place, self, order to the world, it provides the boundaries and the groundings that are lost when these landscapes are destroyed, but without pretending that these versions can truly stand in for what is lost. What this leads us to is that important is the power of loss itself, and the experience and emotions of mourning. These two poets, Davies and Celan, mourn through creation and memorialization like those of the present day and past conflicts will with monuments, poems,

97 Boym, 8. Boym’s use of the phrase “mythical return” alludes to the origin of the nostos part of nostalgia within Homer’s Odyssey. She writes that “The Greek nostos, the return home and the song of the return home, was part of a mythical ritual. As Gregory Nagy has demonstrated, Greek nostos is connected to the Indo-European root nes, meaning return to light and life. “There are in fact two aspects of nostos in the Odyssey; one is of course the hero’s return from Troy, and the other, just as important, is his return from Hades...” See also Gregory Nagy. Greek Mythology and Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 219.
and art. It idealizes and memorializes to remember what was lost and provide groundings that the lack of landscape-based heritage eliminates. In the end, whether or not the mythical return is possible is irrelevant here, because what Davies understands about his own community is how essential these myths of the return are.

While he is writing satirically about the preservation-class and about the people who latch on to the past, there is an important sympathy created between himself and the hopeless few in the generation before him. As the last songs above show, he shares with these individuals the fact that they come from the same culture. He understands that Britain is not only defined by its landscape and history but, most importantly to the rest of this thesis, also that it is defined by trauma. The trauma here is not necessarily the result of warfare or depression or industrialization specifically but it is the traumatic experience of severance of personal memories from tradition. For Britons like Davies, when their own experience does not mesh with the expected collective ideal there is pain. This pain culminates in the longings explored here. The next chapter will explore the politics of experience in the British mindset. At its furthest extent, Davies is chronicling the way that England refuses to exist as he expects it should. If this is correct, Arthur and his created brethren are not “sad saps” but are pain-filled compatriots of Davies longing for constructed realities that no longer and perhaps never existed.
Chapter Two:  
Detachment and Trauma: Davies’s Poetic Exploration of Crowds, Trenches and the Blitz

As shown in the first chapter, Davies plays around with retrospection and nostalgia in much of his work of this period. The albums of Village Green and Arthur re-imagine British history; Village Green telling the story of preservation and Arthur, through its liner note shell story shows the act of retrospection as an old man flashes his entire political and national life before his eyes. Each of the songs referenced above and below create an imagined repetitive past, in a similar way, while showing an obsession with the unresolved British history. But this is not nostalgia. The repetitive retrospective gaze, which goes through a chronological retelling of the past half century of British life, not only allows a look deep within the psyche of the British traumatic, but suggests a ritual that Davies’s temporal trip is his own dealing with mourning and sadness. We have here trauma, not fully enclosed or comprehended by the consciousness and thus repeated, compulsively.

“I don’t feel safe in this world no more,” sings Ray Davies as his confused urbanite in 1970’s “Apeman.” This prospective apeman’s sense of safety is compromised by the dangers of the modern world, including (but not limited to) nuclear war, inflation, mass starvation and crazy politicians. This leads the subject to seek shelter in the trees just like his imagined “apeman.” Underneath the witticisms and the sarcasm, “Apeman,” like other Davies songs, shows a narrator shocked by the world in which he lives. It is through the dehumanizing and alienating experiences that populate the modern British world that the detachment and abjection argued in songs like “Apeman” become viable sonic alternatives. While the first chapter explored memory and nostalgia within the context of loss of tangible (albeit constructed) landscapes, this second
chapter is interested in the anxiety, seen as foundational in British culture at the end of the Empire, that causes a willful detachment from the histories and traumas of the British past.

In the case of these songs, the retrospective gaze is resulting from the traumatic experience itself, as is building upon the Freudian compulsion to repeat. Furthermore, I am drawing a connection between the works of Davies and Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Postcolonial Melancholia.” In short this is a feeling of deep mourning and sadness accompanying the end of Empire within the dominant hegemonic British community. Gilroy writes that this results in “a complex ailment with multiple symptoms that build upon and divert earlier patterns of imperial melancholy from which they make a decisive break.”\(^98\) With these earlier bouts of Romantic landscape based nostalgia and sadness explored in chapter one.

Again, it is Davies’s role as the arbiter of modern poetics that allows him to better understand the interplay of psychological detachment and collective trauma. It is my goal here to connect Davies’s definition of British post-war experience with that of Baudelaire and Benjamin and their understanding of the intransmissability of modern life. Through this we can contend that Britishness, for Davies, is defined in this era by anxiety and a certain irresolvability in much the same way that Baudelaire’s challenge of the crowd forced him to find dueling conceptions of attachment and detachment for his artistic heroes. Davies’s work comments on the present, mindful of the past while anticipating the future; he is, above all, attempting to lyrically understand and resolve unresolvable pasts. Our apeman sees detachment as an option and the result of the modern experience of pain. We see soldiers and mothers mourning losses and we see a community defining itself through its traumas.

How does this detachment manifest? While the losses felt in Davies’s songs surrounding home and landscape are tangible and spatially constructed; the loss here is opaque. Scholarship

\(^{98}\) Gilroy, 90
like Gilroy’s shows an internalization of the loss of geopolitical status coinciding with a Britain in decline. It is not just that the decline causes the self-reflection explored by Gilroy, but that the inherent traumas of modern life manifest in the absence of the grand narratives of Imperialism. Commodification and alienation once hidden by the patriotic drive are at once thrust upon the national scene in the 1960s. The traumatic characteristics of the indicators of geopolitical and societal decline--warfare, urban squalor, and changing social patterns--become the symptoms, rather than causes, of this greater kind of melancholy.

As we’ve seen above, the characters of Davies’s Britain are more than happy to die in the trenches of the Great War, as long as they are dying for something. When that something is gone, after decades of decline, the shocking nature of these experiences become apparent. Unlike the individual traumas exhibited for the most part in the stories of warfare, the pain and anxiety chronicled by Davies is collective. It tells individualized stories in order to show the greater cultural occupation with the traumas of the past. The result here is a collective neurosis that in many ways leads to Gilroy’s “Postcolonial Melancholia.” By defining the poetics and the psychology of shock, I will show that Davies’s songs are giving a window into the traumatic experience of collective Britishness outlined by Gilroy.

**Detachment and Shock**

If collective British life at the end of the Empire is defined through trauma, it is best to understand how trauma exists within poetry and experience. Baudelaire’s poetic modernity, according to scholar Ulrich Baer, is defined through experiences that are “only partially available.”99 These experiences of partial availability range from the ephemeral qualities of modernity, encompassing chance and change as both key influences of the modern artist to, at their darkest, visions of modern warfare and loss on grand scales, driven on the backs of

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99 Baer, 2-3
technological and mechanical innovation. While this chapter explores some of the darker and more traumatic periods of British history, the shocking nature of modernity surpasses the mere cacophony of warfare or physical violence. In short, it becomes any inability to rectify, comprehend or internalize actions or experiences prompted by change.

Recall that Walter Benjamin writes:

Baudelaire placed shock experience at the very center of his art, and with it the self-conscious artist as its purveyor. Baudelaire’s writings tell of ‘poet heroes,’ culminating in his creation of the ideal artist ‘the flâneur’ or the urban wanderer, whose goal is to seek out modernity and shock at their sources.\textsuperscript{100} The self-conscious approach and bringing true self-experience into the work of art is the only way to “defend,” if you will, against, or fully embrace, the shocks of modern life. Davies assumes this place, taking on an active role in the absorption and creation of self-reflexive art, as his work attempts to find the authentic British worldview.

How is authenticity poetically imagined? Critic Marshall Berman’s work on modernity explains this linking, stating that “the lesson for Baudelaire . . . is that modern life has a distinctive and authentic beauty, which, however, is inseparable from its innate misery and anxiety” or, as he envisions them, the “bills that modern man has to pay.”\textsuperscript{101} How do we understand modernity? In his own words, Baudelaire states that “by modernity, I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is eternal and immutable....this transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of abstract and indeterminate beauty...”\textsuperscript{102} At its core, the beauty of the modern world is the ephemeral, ever changing nature of progress and urban movement as well as the engulfing and beautiful terror associated with them. It is highly subjective and highly emotional. The

\textsuperscript{100} Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 178.
\textsuperscript{102} Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” pg. 12
remarkable eye that Davies uses to explore his own existence becomes an example of this belief. He shares this ideal and, as we’ll see, he weaves together images of squalor with those of the magnificent beauty of the busy, urban environment. While Baudelaire’s understanding of shock is clearly positive and refreshing, reflecting his own contemporary positive view of modernity in the post-war world the anxieties of modernity chronicled by Davies take on whole new meanings.

Writing within the shadow of world conflict, Walter Benjamin, citing French Philosopher Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (*Maître et Memoire*) marries experience to the faculties of memory. The shock experience results from modernity’s interruption of the way that experience is internalized. He writes, “it regards the structure of memory [Gedchtnis] as decisive for the philosophical structure of experience [Erfahrung]. Experience is indeed a matter of tradition, in collective existence as well as private life. It is the product, less of facts firmly anchored in memory, than of accumulated and frequently unconscious data that flow together in memory.”\(^{103}\) Tradition here is curious; it is both the collective and the personal memories recalled to understand or internalize experiences. Experience exists when “contents of the individual past combine in memory with that material from the collective past.”\(^{104}\) The traumatic nature of modernity causes a kind of fracture between the tradition of the collective and the memory of the personal, and results in pasts that cannot be fully assimilated into experience.

This severance between the personal and the collective, as well as the individual and the traditional past is what post-colonial Britons feel. (This grounding will be important later on in regard to Baudelaire’s poetics) This conception of experience creates a sort of poetic give and take across temporal lines, allowing for understanding of the present to be based in reclaimable

\(^{103}\) Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 172

\(^{104}\) Ibid, 174
past experiences. Trauma, with its inability to form lasting and reclaimable memories cannot fully be internalized as experience, and it is through the art of poetry that one can fully resolve such traumas.\textsuperscript{105}

**Retrospective, Repetition, and Retreat**

We cannot talk about collective pasts and memories without conjuring images of collective nostalgia. Very simply, it is a specific kind of memory, not for the positive aspects of the past like in the nostalgic trips of *Village Green* but the negative experiences and traumas coming to the surface after retrospection. Partly this is the nature of trauma itself, culminating in decades long “duels” with the flashbacks and the “compulsion to repeat,” as Freud would term it.\textsuperscript{106} But this here is not nostalgia; in fact it is the opposite. The retrospections here are not fond and are, at least partly, unavailable for real remembrance. Traumatic experiences are unresolved and repressed in the memories of individuals and the collective.

The past plays a central role in our understanding of trauma and the mind, both poetically and psychologically. In his study of “traumatic neurosis,” stemming primarily from studying survivors of the Great War Sigmund Freud writes that “now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright.”\textsuperscript{107} This “compulsion to repeat,” as Freud names it later, leads to the obligation to flashback and to “repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as a physician would

\textsuperscript{105} Benjamin, "On Some Motifs" 177

\textsuperscript{106} Benjamin’s reading of Freud links psychoanalysis with literary theory: “‘That the shock is thus cushioned, parried by conscious, would lend the incident that occasions it the character of an isolated experience (Erlebenis), in the strict sense. If it were incorporated directly in the register of conscious memory, it would sterilize this incident for poetic experience (Erfung).’” pg. 177

prefer to see, remembering it as something belonging to the past.\textsuperscript{108} This detachment is clear in Davies’s work, as I will outline below. We can clearly see the contemporization in Arthur’s case as his moments of retrospection coincide with the departure of his son’s family happening in the present. Central to this is the reaction of fright, which Freud writes is easily overlooked.\textsuperscript{109} For Freud, emotive responses like fear and anxiety exist to prevent traumatic experience from happening, as the apprehension allows the consciousness to be spared from the traumatic impact.\textsuperscript{110} Baudelaire’s “dueling artist,” recoils in fear at the prospect of his beating, but still bears the scars of his apprehension or anxiety.

What happens to the psyche in a traumatic experience? Freud offers a definition:

We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield [of the sub conscious]. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure.\textsuperscript{111}

These experiences exhibit the violences of mechanical traumas without the necessary marks or scars of physical violence.\textsuperscript{112} It is this defensive measure that results in both the compulsion to repeat and the traumatic neurosis as a whole, because the experience of the trauma is never fully understood and internalized despite the will of the psyche to do so. It doesn’t engage with Benjamin’s idea of “tradition.” Davies’s work\textsuperscript{113} attempts to capture the traumatic at the moment

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid 602.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 598
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 607.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 598
\textsuperscript{113} If for Davies, as I have been arguing, the rupture with the past exists at the end of the Empire, then why is it not fully the subject of these songs? The album Arthur’s full title includes “(or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire),” which is indeed curious because the album has little or no real connection (other than a few mere proud moments) to the Imperial dream. It shows two separate things. First, that the impact of the end of the Empire was subtle on the working class masses in England. Second, that it is possible that the end of Empire is felt through the traumas previously existing. What I believe is happening here, and hope to show, is that Davies’s own understanding of the “decline and fall of the
of experiential recognition, the moments where the trauma is fully absorbed into experience and memory.

As much as Davies’s work is about the present it is curious, though, that his work here is decidedly stuck in the past and, strangely, explores trauma to which he has no real experiential knowledge. While Davies never experienced the traumas of The Great War, his experiences of change and of loss in his own time allow him privileged access to an emotional connection cross generationally. The following will show a connection between Davies’s poetic constructions of British modern experiences with that of Baudelaire’s ideas of detachment and shock, exhibiting the commonality between Davies’s experiences and that of his ancestors. As this chapter progresses it will become clearer how Davies is interested in the ways that trauma has infiltrated his community as a whole.

“Walking ‘Round like Flies, Man”

I am choosing to start this exploration by delving into Davies’s work on masses, urbanization, and crowds. It illuminates the feelings of alienation associated with the growth of British cities as well as showing the first signs of real unresolved experience within his work. The songs, “Waterloo Sunset,” (1967) and “Apeman” (1970) show two sides of the same proverbial coin, each capturing the churning urban crowd and the alienated artist attempting to capture its essence. Again, the songs themselves institute a sort of repetition as they deal with situations from the collective tradition. “Waterloo Sunset” is extremely Baudelaire-esque, finds beauty and love within the crowds and smoke of the urban sprawl, while “Apeman” exhibits primitivist lust for the outside world, condemning the same sort of masses for the destructive and traumatic instances of the world. The first tells the tale of two young lovers set against the
smoky, dirty urban industrial backdrop of London and the second tells the story of the fed-up artist choosing to leave the city for the jungle in order to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city

“Waterloo Sunset” by Ray Davies

Dirty old river, must you keep rolling
Flowing into the night
People so busy, makes me feel dizzy
Taxi light shines so bright
But I don't need no friends
As long as I gaze on waterloo sunset
I am in paradise

Every day I look at the world from my window
But chilly, chilly is the evening time
Waterloo sunsets fine

Terry meets Julie, Waterloo station
Every Friday night
But I am so lazy, don't want to wander
I stay at home at night
But I don't feel afraid
As long as I gaze on Waterloo sunset
I am in paradise

Every day I look at the world from my window
But chilly, chilly is the evening time
Waterloo sunsets fine

Millions of people swarming like flies round waterloo underground
But Terry and Julie cross over the river
Where they feel safe and sound
And they don't need no friends
As long as they gaze on Waterloo sunset
They are in paradise

Waterloo sunsets fine

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114 “Waterloo Sunset” The Kinks, *Something Else by The Kinks* Ray Davies, Pye 7N 17321. 33 1/3 rpm record, 1967
“Apeman” by Ray Davies

I think I'm sophisticated 'cos I'm living my life like a good Homosapien,
But all around me everybody's multiplying and they're walking round like flies, man,
So I'm no better than the animals sitting in their cages in the zoo, man,
'Cos compared to the flowers and the birds and the trees I am an apeman.
I think I'm so educated and I'm so civilized 'cos I'm a strict vegetarian,
But with the over-population and inflation and starvation and the crazy politicians,
I don't feel safe in this world no more,
I don't want to die in a nuclear war,
I want to sail away to a distant shore and make like an ape man.
I'm an apeman, I'm an ape, apeman,
Oh, I'm an apeman,
I'm a King Kong man, I'm a voodoo man, oh I'm an apeman.
'Cos compared to the sun that sits in the sky,
Compared to the clouds as they roll by,
Compared to the bugs and the spiders and flies,
I am an apeman.

(spooken)
In man's evolution he has created the city and
The motor traffic rumbles, but give me half a chance
And I'd be taking off my clothes and living in the jungle.
'Cos the only time that I feel at ease,
Is swinging up and down in a coconut tree,
Oh, what a life of luxury, to be like an apeman.
I'm an apeman, I'm an ape, apeman, Oh, I'm an apeman,
I'm a King Kong man, I'm a voodoo man,
I am an ape man.
I look out the window, but I can't see the sky,
'Cos the air pollution is fogging up my eyes,
I want to get out of this city alive,
And make like an ape man.

Come and love me, be my apeman girl,
And we'd be so happy in my apeman world.
I'm an apeman, I'm an ape, apeman, Oh, I'm an apeman,
I'm a King Kong man, I'm a voodoo man, Oh, I'm an apeman.
I'll be your Tarzan, you'll be my Jane,
I'll keep you warm and you'll keep me sane,
And we'll sit in the trees and eat bananas all day,
Just like an apeman.

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“Waterloos Sunset” is about transcendence as well as the culture of limit. Thomas Kitts writes that in his opinion “Waterloo Sunset,” “achieves a Romantic transcendence” continuing that the “singer is a fragile, perhaps lonely personality who has overcome despair through a romantic concept: he turns to nature. He places himself in a privileged position, overlooking, literally and figuratively, the bustling London scene beneath him, with ‘dirty old river’ bright taxi lights...”\(^{116}\) The privileged position allows the singer to overlook the scene and fully grasp the actions below, but it sets the artist apart from those upon which are being gazed. In experiencing the urban landscape the singer is removed from the action, his gaze is the only interaction between himself and his subjects. This detachment links with Baudelaire’s “artist in the garret” that famously marks his lyrical views of Paris.

Two of Baudelaire’s poems, in particular “The Stranger” and “Landscape,” feature this detached urban artist. Ulrich Baer writes, “In ‘the Stranger,’ Baudelaire’s poet-hero celebrates his detachment from almost all worldly affairs by fastening his eyes on the clouds. The stranger may be considered ‘strange’ because he is free from existing social and symbolic orders. For freedom to be thought, it must remain strange, apart, separated from all possible determinations.”\(^{117}\) A similar detached artist appears in Baudelaire’s poem “Landscape” in which Baudelaire writes that “Next to the sky, and here in reverie the hymns; Of all the neighboring belfries, carried on the wind. My two hands to my chin, up in my attic room, I’ll see the atelier singing a babbled tune; the chimney-pipes, the steeples, all the city’s masts, the great, inspiring skies, magnificent and vast.”\(^{118}\) The same kind of detachment exists in this poem as in the “Stranger,” with a lone view seeing both the sky and the cityscape much like in “Waterloo

\(^{116}\) Kitts, Ray Davies, 88.
\(^{117}\) Baer, 31.
Sunset.” Baer writes “‘Landscape’ rests on and institutes the figure of the garret-dwelling poet to launch his ‘chaste’ and ‘childlike’ musings. The garret studio is a common image for the mental position of the unfettered and free poetic creator high above the concerns and contrivances of city dwellers.” Yet, free expression allows the poet a better view and deeper look into the city despite the height just as the romantic atmosphere (literally and thematically) fosters emotional closeness between the singer in “Waterloo Sunset” and his two loves, despite his physical distance.

While the crowded urban imagery of “Waterloo Sunset” illuminates the beauty amongst the sooty streets, “Apeman,” while using similar imagery, is the opposite side. The artist in “Waterloo Sunset” is not only an urbanite himself, but also finds happiness and pride in the observation of his urban home (albeit from the safety of the tower). The singer of “Apeman” is fed up with the alienation and inhumanity within the modern urban environment. Here the singer is envisioning a life away from the city, while being a creature of the city himself. What at first glance seems to be purely rejective and primitivist reaction to the urban world later finds a person whose objection to urbanism is urbane itself. This escapist plan can only understand the jungle within the modern symbolic order of the urban environment itself. The singer is then trying to understand his world and his rejection of it in the terms of the modern environment. He sings that he’s no better “than the animals sitting in the zoo;” he wants the female character to be Jane to his Tarzan. Within the rest of the piece are references to evolution, air pollution and nuclear war. The irony of these connections is impossible not to notice.

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119 Interestingly, Kinks biographer Thomas Kitts writes that “Waterloo Sunset” was partially inspired by a childhood hospital trip in the Waterloo area, with Davies recalling that “I couldn’t speak because of the operation. Two nurses wheeled me out on to the balcony, where I could see the River Thames. It was just a very poetic moment for me.” Kitts, Ray Davies. 89

120 Baer 72.
Is this apeman dehumanized? As ironic as it seems, Kitts writes “the problem for the singer is not that the contemporary world has dehumanized him but rather that it has humanized him. He wants to run away from the honking horns, inflation and the threat of nuclear war to distant shores where he and his Jane can take off their clothes, live in the jungle, and ‘sit in a tree and eat bananas all day.’”121 What he thinks is dehumanizing makes him a modern day human. The irony is not necessarily the way in which this singer understands resistance to modernity, but rather that the defining aspects of humanity and of civilization are farther from human than the natural landscapes of the “apeman.” In other words, it is not that the singer is fleeing from humanity or inhumanity, but that the world in which he lives has completely separated the natural from humanity and that overcompensating, sitting in the trees (something humankind is thousands of years removed from) is preferable to tearing down the repressive system. This is the romantic back to nature, hyperbolized.

When can detachment be a good thing? In the first chapter I showed that home, the symbol of the Sun, served a nostalgic purpose linking the individual nostalgic experience with that of the collective, national narrative. The same celestial symbols are present in these two different Davies lyrical songs. Not only is there the connection apparent in the title of “Waterloo Sunset,” added to the jingoistic ruins of naming a subway station after a great battle site in British history, but adding the dueling proposition of the warmth of the sun and the decline of the Empire (as the warm sun goes down). Natural and celestial symbols allow for some semblance of freedom from the ruins of the modern world. As stated above, detachment can be as free as it is painful.

“The Stranger” by Charles Baudelaire

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121 Kitts, 96.
“Tell me, enigmatical man, whom do you love best, your father, your mother, your sister, or your brother?
I have neither father, nor mother, nor sister, nor brother.
Your friends?
Now you use a word whose meaning I have never known.
Your country?
I do not know in what latitude it lies.
Beauty?
I could indeed love her, Goddess and Immortal.
Gold?
I hate it as you hate God
Then, what do you love, extraordinary stranger?
I love the clouds...the clouds that pass...up there...up there...the wonderful clouds!”

This poem comes from the collection entitled “The Paris Spleen” and it is an adventure, much like The Kinks’ songs, within the masses in the Parisian urban environment. The “stranger” questioned by the poet is completely separated from all the groundings of experience: family, friends, faith, money and, most shockingly perhaps, nation. This disconnected soul can only stare at the ever moving, changing, and ephemeral clouds above him, which can represent the more positive aspects of modernity. For Baer, these clouds exhibit the experience of freedom. He writes that “when ‘the clouds’ are understood as placeholders for something unbounded by prior experience and existing systems of thought, the love of clouds may be understood as the type of freedom that Kant defined as the experience we have in the contemplation of an aesthetic object.” Contemplation, a separation, defines this stranger.

Davies’s apeman has a complicated relationship with the clouds. While “the stranger” can only look up at the clouds finding full freedom, in “Apeman,” Davies’s singer finds his own existence in opposition to the clouds, singing that “compared to the clouds as they roll by, compared to the bugs and the spiders and flies, I am an Apeman.” This is no accident; the clouds (as well as the other instances of comparison) are the eternal symbols of the natural environment.

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123 Baer, 59.
Clouds are changing but steady and in infinite separation from man and earth. While the singer feels “no better than the animals sitting in their cages at the zoo, man” he is showing an extreme feeling of “un-freedom” and strain by modern life, with the clouds and the boundless natural environment of the jungle the only outlets. This is a song that supposes the possibility of the experience of freedom, one that is perhaps unlikely in our own time. In this way the category “apeman” is restricting; within the urban environment, and as an apeman he must search for his own contemplative tower outside of the city’s walls apparently in the jungle. In the end, the apeman uses nature to sever himself from the humanizing effects of the symbolic orders or the attachments of his community.

The question becomes who is the modern human: the stranger who is detached or the prospective apeman who longs for detachment? Does Baudelaire favor the detached subject? The attached man, with his ties to communities and nation feels the collective trauma brought about by the modern experience. He is envious of the freedom that the jungle allows, Baudelaire’s stranger extolls, and lovers in “Waterloo Sunset” illuminate. Happiness here is possible in separation. Baudelaire’s beauty of the modern exists in this potential, but what I am finding here a feeling of impossibility, that, like in the case of mythical returns, we cannot fully break ourselves from our modern circumstances.

But there is potential for some kind of separation. The tower and the window, which are both means that separate our two singers, metaphorize the separation between experience and memory or experience and grounding elements. Baer reads Baudelaire’s “Landscape” as his “inaugural” exploration of “modernity to trace the peculiar relation between position and experience.”\(^{124}\) This leads to poems that show “a horizon of experience is no longer a given” and the surroundings that are given cannot “furnish a coherent frame with which to turn events into

\(^{124}\) Ibid, 70
experience and the surroundings into world.”\textsuperscript{125} Recall Benjamin’s linking of experience to the combination of memory and events to tradition and collective existence fostering understanding and resolution. Baudelaire’s artist and the singer of both “Waterloo Sunset” and “Apeman,” are separated from their groundings in their towers. They feel a disconnect between their personal experience and that of the collective or the traditional. This detachment in Baudelaire, for Baer, is a symptom and example of Modernity’s ephemeral status; for Davies, these experiences in the towers show the reaction to the loss of grounding political collective principles.

It is not an accident that both of these songs include the metaphor of “crowd as flies.” The singer in the tower finds distance not between the couple that he is intimately viewing but from the rest of the urban environment and the masses. The crowd becomes a metaphor for the detachment from the world or from grounding in the age of “postcolonial melancholia.” In both “Waterloo Sunset” and “Apeman,” we have two distinct views of the human condition against modernity, and distance created between the artist and the modern environment (one in a tower and the other in the jungle). Besides this common thematic link, the phrasing and symbol of flies, standing in for the masses, stand out. In “Waterloo Sunset” Davies sings that “millions of people, swarming like flies round Waterloo Station” and in “Apeman” he sings “But all around me everyone is multiplying and they’re walking round like flies man.” What if the singers of these two songs are the same person, one from the past and the other from the present?

Let’s suppose that this is true. Aside from the metaphorical similarities, thematic and lyric connections could very well suggest that the singer of these songs is one and the same; an artist whose age and further experience in the modern community has led to further detachment. Both are dehumanized and alienated from the world community. They are both insiders and outsiders while being at once detached and attached. (One is in the tower separated from the

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, 169.
crowd, the other plans a getaway to the jungle.) And yet, their reactions to the urban environment are opposed. Both are disgusted enough with the populace to conceive of them as “flies,” but willing to find examples of outliers. They are both products of the modern age; relying on material culture and an investment into the symbolic order to ground their position in the world. If they are the same, we are seeing the Freudian repetition result in growing desperation of the neurotic. He is singing the same song, about the same problems, repeating the same complaints and wishing for a “change” of scenery. This is a character that moves from positivity about mass society (while keeping distance and mistrust) towards complete detachment. If detachment is the goal, what is going on in contemporary society to make this an alternative?

The Great War and the Maudlin Anxiety

If the previous section was interested in the detached subject, the following section is interested in the opposite: the attached modern traumatic British subject. As alluded to previously, the true traumatic collective stems from the emotions of supposed geopolitical decline. Of course, British historians have long written books anticipating and reacting to decline over the better part of the last century. Books like *The Decline and Fall of British Empire* by Elliot Mills, written in 1905, anticipated the fall and massive decline of Britain in a dystopian projection of 2005. Historian Simon Featherstone sums up the book as anticipating and reacting to an “apocalyptic mix of economic decline, military incompetence, masculine crisis, and miscegenation” which became a “vivid concentration of national unease with a vision of imperial collapse.”126 This book is written a full sixty years before The Kinks music, which still finds decline as a central topic. Romantic urges propelled paramilitary organizations like the boy scouts to fight against “urban life and a consequent decline in physical and psychological

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toughness” which in their opinion “resulted in a young male population ill-equipped to respond to any future crisis.”\textsuperscript{127} In other words, years disconnected from the virility of the outdoor environment and feeling the constraints and tortures of the urban environment cultivated Britons who would be psychologically damaged and weak prior to world conflict. The resulting traumas challenge the views of Britons of the grand narratives, the triumphs of the past and further solidified the cultural sunset over the urban squalor.

These impotencies towards future world conflict anticipate the same emotions in the post-war era. Impactful upon the psyche of the British people, the two World Wars, in particular, take significant amount of space in Davies’s nostalgic rendering of his characters in 1969’s \textit{Arthur}. Within this album, in particular, we have two modes of war experience; the first from the soldier and those directly affected by the traumas and the other, the British community as a whole. Davies’s Arthur Morgan is a textbook war neurotic and it seems, through Davies’s work, that the war affects all Britons even those not on the front-lines. These feelings of both shared sacrifice and pain are not fully unique to this time and these people. If these were not traumatic enough to the British psyche, the experiences relayed from the trenches of the Great War significantly accelerated the specter of modernity with the traumatic experiences of decline.

The character Arthur is at the middle of this flux. He is at once patriotic but at the end mashed up and nearly dead after the Great War. His war experience is investigated by two of Davies’s more poignant tunes. “Yes Sir, No Sir,” shows the dehumanizing consequences of modern boot camps and class warfare, and the overtly maudlin “Some Mother’s Son,” is a nostalgic take on a son and mother as one dies while the other receives word. These songs attempt to capture Freud’s war neuroses from the perspective of someone who experienced it; it simulates the sounds, destruction, and dehumanizing effects of the modern battlefield and the

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, 29.
modern home front while showing the impact upon the community as a whole. It serves as a mimetic retrospection, and given their place in the overall frame story it is likely that these are aesthetic interpretations of war flashbacks.

“Yes Sir, No Sir” by Ray Davies

Yes Sir, no Sir
Where do I go Sir?
What do I do Sir?
What do I say?

Yes Sir, no Sir
Where do I go Sir?
What do I do Sir?
How do I behave?

Yes Sir, no Sir
Permission to speak Sir
Permission to breathe Sir
What do I say, how do I behave, what do I say?

So you think that you've got ambition
Stop your dreaming and your idle wishing
You're outside and there ain't no admission
To our play
Pack up your ambition in your old kit bag
Soon you'll be happy with a packet of fags
Chest out stomach in
Do what I say, do what I say
Yes right away

Yes Sir, no Sir
Where do I go Sir?
What do I do Sir?
What do I say?

Yes Sir, no Sir
Permission to speak Sir
Permission to breathe Sir

---

What do I say, how do I behave, what do I say?

Doesn't matter who you are
You're there and there you are
Everything is in its place
Authority must be maintained
And then we know exactly where we are
Let them feel that they're important to the cause
But let them know that they are fighting for their homes
Just be sure that they're contributing their all
Give the scum a gun and make the bugger fight
And be sure to have deserters shot on sight
If he dies we'll send a medal to his wife (ha ha)

Yes Sir, no Sir
Please let me die Sir
I think this life is affecting my brain
Yes Sir, no Sir
Three bags full Sir
What do I do Sir, what do I say?
What do I say, how do I behave, what do I say?

“Some Mother’s Son” by Ray Davies

Some mother’s son lies in a field
Someone has killed some mother’s son today
Head blown up by some soldiers gun
While all the mothers stand and wait
Some mother’s son ain’t coming home today
Some mother’s son ain’t got no grave

Two soldiers fighting in a trench
One soldier glances up to see the sun
And dreams of games he played when he was young
And then his friend calls out his name
It stops his dream and as he turns his head
A second later he is dead

Some mother’s son lies in a field
Back home they put his picture in a frame
But all dead soldiers look the same
While all the parents stand and wait

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129 “Some Mother’s Son” The Kinks, Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire). Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.
To meet their children coming home from school
Some mother’s son is lying dead

Somewhere someone is crying
Someone is trying to be so brave
But still the world keeps turning
Though all the children have gone away

Some mother’s son lies in a field
But in his mother’s eyes he looks the same
As on the day he went away

They put his picture on the wall
They put flowers in the picture frame
Some mother’s memory remains

To start off, these two songs (back to back on the album’s track listing) show the different responses to the dehumanizing effects of warfare. Their chief differences, however, stem from the gendered reactions to war stimuli, exhibiting both their statuses, ages and perhaps role in the war machine. Part of this has to do with continuing definitions and spatial delineations between home and work and, more specifically, home front and battlefield. The invocation of the “mother,” as well, harkens back to the nationalistic ideals of the “motherland” or “fatherland,” connecting warm feelings surrounding home and family to the cause of the nation. Davies does nothing to temper these kinds of gendered separations other than comment on the maudlin lyrical manifestations of mourning and the, somewhat unspoken, horrors of war away from the battlefield.

Nearer to the battlefield, there is strong indication of class strata in the lyrics of the boot camp experiences of “Yes Sir, No Sir.” The listener knows that the foot-soldier is Arthur and is certainly working class; the officers, presumably upper class, (voiced by another singer) refers in derision to his lowly compatriot, using the words “bugger” and “scum.” The usurpation of nationalist symbols, not only the symbol of the family but the use of the symbol of home, as in
“let them know that they are fighting for their homes,” exhibits the same kind of irony-laden critique of patriotic imagery, as discussed in the first chapter. But this is not just the importance of space and place in identity creation; the critique here is that the infiltration of the class structure within the ranks of the Queen’s Army shows decay amongst the whole of the patriotic order. The final line of the upper class officer “and be sure to have deserters shot on sight; If he dies we’ll send a medal to his wife” is followed by a snide, yet not at all unexpected, laugh. The song best captures the literal dehumanization of recruits by the war machine; the constant, and panicked questioning of “what do I say,” and “what do I do?” show how far the machinations of war remove the human qualities from its cogs.

Recall that Davies’s intention of using his brother-in-law Arthur’s story was that he sought to “centre the whole story around an ordinary man like myself, who had been a small cog in the empire and had watched it pass him by.” The metaphor of machinery is prevalent in this section, while, again, the dueling concepts of attachment and detachment are plentiful in these songs. We have the complete dehumanized subject, added to the machinery of the empire. “Yes Sir, No Sir” deals with, in the words of Kinks’ biographer Neville Martens, “the mindless acquiescence of the general soldier . . .” This kind of dehumanization and exposure to the machinery of modernity culminates the complete loss of faculties of thought and speech. This could be seen as creating the necessary detachment for the realizations Arthur feels near the end, but the separation felt at this moment, from the cause and the world, does not exactly foster the experience of freedom felt in “The Stranger” or “Waterloo Sunset.”

It is clear that for Arthur, and indeed other working class soldiers, the experience of boot camp or that of the battlefield is not unlike the experience of modern industrial work. But this is

130 Davies, Ray. 176
131 Martens, 101
present in poetical interpretations of the modern experience as well. Benjamin astutely connected
the shock experiences in Baudelaire to that of the “isolated experiences of the worker at his
machine.” 132 Benjamin concedes that Baudelaire didn’t have the faintest idea of industrialized
labor, “he was, however, captivated by a process in which the reflexive mechanism that the
machine triggers in the workman can be studied closely, as in a mirror, in the idler.” 133 The
reflexive mechanism here leads to the mindless repetitions of the broken down soldiers, but it
could also stand in for the violence against all subjects in this community.

Sonically, the listener, subjected to the droning and marching beat, can easily imagine the
violent imagery of both the factory and the trenches. The violence, through these songs,
becomes commonplace. The words and the sounds are equally jarring. 134 In other words, the
darkness happens with almost no notice. Such is the shocking world, which Davies is attempting
to capture. The casual references to officers joking that they will shoot their own men, or the way
in which the soldier dies in the trenches of France unbeknownst to his mother show the
ephemeral and fleeting nature of life captured by Davies’s lyrics. “Yes Sir, No Sir” reminds the
listener of a march, with droning and constant snare drum cadence; the single voice asking,
almost begging, for some sort of direction helps recall this kind of soundscape. The meditative
atmosphere and the constant drumming and the repetition of “what do I say? / Do?” summons
the Freudian compulsion to repeat while mimetically suggesting the droning and buzzing of
machinery.

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132 Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 192
133 The reflexivity of the urban poet and the “flâneur.” Ibid, 193
134 The maudlin tone of “Some Mother’s Son” is reminiscent of sappy and overtly dramatic ballads
celebrating lost loved ones. The listener is returned to a previous age of sad and mournful Great War
ballads of which there are too many to list. In the overarching frame story we know that this is a memory-
based song, it is based upon experiences trickled down through personal memory. Davies is attempting a
mimetic reproduction stylistically and thematically of past genres of popular song illuminating furthers the
compulsive repetitions shown earlier.
For Freud, there is a significant linkage between “traumatic neurosis” and mechanical shock experiences. Within this he lists “several mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life.”\textsuperscript{135} Freud’s “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” was published in 1920 with The Great War close in the temporal rearview mirror. The Great War overshadows Freud’s assessment of the role of modernity in creating a neurotic civilization. He writes “the terrible war which has just ended gave rise to a great number of illnesses of this kind, but it at least put an end to the temptation to attribute the cause of the disorder to organic lesions of the nervous system brought about by mechanical force.”\textsuperscript{136} Freud illuminates the far reaching emotional impact that war has upon the individual regardless of physical injury or mechanical force, in fostering “war neurosis,” referred today to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and, at the time, shell shock. This is why terminology such as “shell-shocked” for these individuals is incorrect as they might not have been near any shells in the first place. Arthur Morgan’s traumatic experience has nothing to do with physical violence. In “Yes Sir, No Sir,” although anxiety and anticipation for possible violence is ever present, the lyrics suggest that the trauma happens prior to the battlefield, pointing to the dehumanizing aspects of the modern war machine itself. It is this trauma, mixed with the anticipation and fear, which causes the neurotic response.

**Collectively Lost**

What we’re coming upon here is that while there is an understanding that war neurosis does not have to follow mechanical force, Davies is investigating the importance of warfare and trauma on a collective level. “Yes Sir, No Sir” follows the actor as war traumatic, “Some Mother’s Son” brings in something only peripherally explored thus far -- collective mourning. The first chapter explored mourning and loss in regards to spatial change, but this type of

\textsuperscript{135} Freud, 597
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 597
mourning is much more human and central to war-scarred people of the first half of the twentieth century across Europe. Enveloped within the symbols associated with dead loved ones, “Some Mother’s Son” cultivates a highly personalized mourning experience for the listener. Within the context of the album’s plot, this song is not referring to the main character, as Arthur is still living by 1969. Instead it is capturing a moment reminiscent within collective experience of the traumas of war. Ray remembers that “When Robert [Wace- Kinks Manager] read the lyrics . . . he looked at me and exclaimed that I would probably be treated as a serious writer after this album came out; at least he had seen lyrics that showed I was back on form. He even referred to them as poetry.”

The poetry it links to is in reference to and converses with is the wide occurrence of British lyrical poetry in the wake of the Great War as soldiers took to their pens as outlets for the emotional and psychological damage of trench warfare. The poetry creates a lasting and important collectivity wherein this trauma, through poetry and song, is enacted upon the entirety of the culture. Poets who wrote during the wake of the Great War reflected the overall feelings of destruction of civilization while attempting to capture the war experience itself in text.

One of the premiere examples of this kind of poetry, is the poem by Canadian John McRae entitled “In Flanders Fields.”

“In Flanders Fields” by John McRae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
    Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
    The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago

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137 Davies, Ray. 366
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.\textsuperscript{139}

Once again, as with the Davies songs, eternal natural symbols are prevalent. Living is connected
with the warmth of the sun, and the symbol of the poppy, which in turn became a powerful
symbol in Britain for remembrance of war. The poppy is set as the natural foil to the mechanical
gun and grave. The symbol of the sun, again, semiotically suggests a connection to the clichéd
“sun never sets” metaphor, but the jarring juxtaposition between the glorious ever-present sun
and the quick death by a German rifle, illuminates the harshness of modern machine driven life.
It seems common as before to bring these two symbols together as “In Flanders Fields” brings
the natural eternal symbols of the poppies to the fleeting symbols of death. In what must be a
straight reference to McRae’s poem, the last moments of the dying soldier in “Some Mother’s
Son” are spent in reminiscence of days gone connected to the warmth of the sun. This
iconography contrasts with the quick death that follows showing the shortness and cold brutality
of modern life. It also is not a stretch to suppose that the mother’s flowers hung in memory along
the photograph are, while not explicitly stated, poppies. The soundscape paradoxically mixes
uncomfortable imagery with the sappy and loving gaze of a mother upon a picture of the
deceased, exhibiting a disconnect between memory and reality, past and present.
It serves as a reminder, both of the existence of loved ones, and of loss and death. It is a
mnemonic tool, whose existence is both a curse and treat for the mournful mothers and sons.

The point here is not that Davies is attempting to capture the singular personal experience
of mourning and melancholy, rather his work is a response to and symptom of a greater societal
trauma exhibited upon the British collective world. The Great War, as captured in songs

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{139} Richards, Jeffery. \textit{Imperialism and Music: Britain from 1876-1953}. (New York: Manchester UP, 2001), 153}
discussed above, and the struggle against fascism during the Second World War have become popular culture landmarks in Anglo-American society. Even though, as Davies’ reminds us, his “was the first generation not to be called up for National service” the pain of these traumatic experiences leaves a mark upon them, and indeed generations further removed as well.\textsuperscript{140} It is through cultural representations of past traumas, through repeated experiences and rehashing that the psychological wounds of the past remain fresh in the present. After all, Fred Davis reminds us that nostalgia (and retrospections) are both collective and personal experiences, with consequences for society as a whole.\textsuperscript{141}

While its outward appearance seems as though this is simple nostalgia or reminiscence, emotionally there is a significant amount of cultural guilt associated with these traumas. An important work cited by many of these writers is Angus Calder’s controversial \textit{The Myth of the Blitz}, published in 1991. It argued, amongst other things, that the German bombings, which made up the London Blitz, were, perhaps, propagandistically overblown within the minds of the British collective. Nevertheless, the blitz and the war, as whole, became central to defining Britishness in the years, and decades, immediately following the war (even through to the new millennium). Davies attempts, as best he can, to capture the kind of spirit associated with the “people’s war” in Britain, in his song named for the nation’s most central wartime figure Winston Churchill.

\textbf{“Mr. Churchill Says” by Ray Davies\textsuperscript{142}}

Well Mr. Churchill says, Mr. Churchill says
We gotta fight the bloody battle to the very end
Mr. Beaverbrook says we gotta save our tin

\textsuperscript{140}Davies, Ray. 138
\textsuperscript{141}Davis, vii
\textsuperscript{142}“Mr. Churchill Says” The Kinks, \textit{Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)}. Ray Davies. Pye N(S) PL 18317. 33 rpm record, 1969.
And all the garden gates
And empty cans are gonna make us win

<This Section is taken from actual Churchill speeches, spoken by Ray Davies>

We shall defend our island
On the land and on the sea
We shall fight them on the beaches
On the hills and in the fields
We shall fight them in the streets
Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed to so few
'cos they have made our British Empire
A better place for me and you
And this was their finest hour

<switches tempo/with sounds mimetic of an air raid>
Did you hear that plane flying overhead
There's a house a fire and there's someone lying dead
We gotta clean up the streets
And get me back on my feet
Because we wanna be free
Do your worst and we'll do our best
We're gonna win the way that Mr. Churchill says
Oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! oh! well Mr. Churchill says
We gotta hold up our chins
We gotta show some courage and some discipline
We gotta black up the windows and nail up the doors
And keep right on till the end of the war

The song includes actual Churchill speeches, and near the end (specifically at 1:37) air raid sirens mark an uptick in the tempo of the guitars and drums flowing, into a frenetic paced jam ending the song. At this moment the singer asks “Did you hear that plane flying overhead?
There’s a house a fire and there’s someone lying dead. We gotta clean up the streets and get me back on my feet, because we wanna be free” Recreating the experience, in some sort of mimetic repetition, recreates aesthetically for audiences too young or too foreign to recall it. In perhaps a regrettable move the song moves into cheerleader mode where The Kinks chant the last 5 lines of the song complete with minimal music and handclaps.
These chants serve a purpose as they collectivize the experience beyond the war generation. This song, adds to the wartime tension present in “Yes Sir, No Sir” and “Some Mother’s Son” with the collective experience of detachment found in “Waterloo Sunset” and “Apeman.” It supposes a larger thematic goal, creating connections between the past and present, the soldier and everyday folk, and the individual and the collective. The larger than life character of Churchill is front and center in the song. On this song, Davies is quoted by Kitts, “today TV exposes weaknesses in politicians...But I don’t know about Winston Churchill. He may have been a bit more ruthless than we’ve been led to believe. When the battles over and you’re won, you always look good. But what was achieved by it?”

Davies’s critique notwithstanding, the ownership of the war has always seemed to be the people of Britain, telling stories similar to the ones in the song, picking themselves up and joining together, sacrificing to ultimately beat the Nazi war machine. Always, though, there is reverence for Churchill’s magnanimous leadership. The victory in both World Wars over “arch enemies” cultivated a collective self-satisfaction. The blitz became an integral part of the British political experience.

It is not much of a stretch to suppose the iconography of the blitz still impacts British material culture today. With all the focus on the inclusionary aspects of the wartime era, recollections now exclude those who either were not there, or are not welcomed on national scenes. Paul Gilroy writes “I think that there is something neurotic about Britain’s continued citation of the anti-Nazi war. Making it a privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where the national culture--operating on a more manageable scale of community and social life--was, irrespective of the suffering involved in the conflict, both comprehensible and habitable.”

\footnote{Kitts, 139}
\footnote{Gilroy, 90.}
discounts the suffering of people during wartime (I’ve spent this chapter showing his attempts to capture it), but we can see the ways in which neurosis shows itself.

Davies is, seemingly, aware of the disconnect brewing between real experience and the nostalgic re-imagining of British cultural productions. The simple nature of an “us versus them” environment, as well as the overwrought “good versus evil,” turns the traumas, nightmares, and pain into something manageable. Gilroy uses the recurring obsessions with the “good fights” of the World Wars to illuminate the inward turn of white Britons in the wake of Empire. He writes that it was “a defensive gesture, and it was morally justifiable only when it promoted self-conscious struggle with the historic structures of the tendency to become sad and pensive in the face of the empire’s demanding geopolitical responsibilities.”145 As the world became more complicated, nostalgic worshipping of Churchill and the war generation became better alternatives, showing a further obsession with violence and an unresolved experience.

The inability for Britons of Arthur’s generation to move past this moment is chronicled by their inclusion in a retrospective collection like *Arthur*. While the clichés of the previous songs surrounding nostalgia are juxtaposed with the inconsistencies and disconnections between Imperial fantasy and reality, there doesn’t seem to be the same kind of critique present in “Mr. Churchill Says” other than, say, the ridiculousness of the entire scheme. What is more telling about the psyche of Davies is that the “myth of the blitz” is not challenged by his work. Calder’s myth, for scholars on Englishness like Simon Featherstone, “fills a political and emotional absence that roughly corresponds to the shape of an empire that was lost in rather less idealisable conflicts in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Aden, Oman and Ulster.”146 The hole, left in the psyche of Britons becomes more and more important through the 1960s as dependencies trickle away from

145 Ibid, 91.
the Empire. For Gilroy, these losses mark the occasions when white Britons lose their status as superior and the Myth of the Blitz and the triumphs against the dangers of Fascism give pride and drive to a newly lost and mournful people.

In his personal take, even in our contemporary times, Paul Gilroy states; “Tales of heroism by the brave pilots of the Spitfires and Hurricanes were important to my postwar childhood. [Gilroy being more than a decade younger than Davies] Their anti-Nazi action established one dimension of my moral universe. Yet, when the World War II air-planes thundered overhead during the pageantry that attended the Queen Mother’s burial in 2002, it was impossible not to wonder why that particular mythic moment of national becoming and community has been able to endure and retain such a special grip on Britain's culture and self-understanding.”

And despite the age difference Gilroy still finds commonality between his and the war generations, even if he did not, when he was younger, fully understand why. For Gilroy and for Davies, given the full title of the album on which this particular song lies, the reason is Empire.

**The Decline and Fall of the British Empire**

Davies is helping chronicle an intense emotional connection across generational and temporal boundaries fostering a collective experience of war and trauma, with even those away from the battlefields, a toddler during the waning years of the war, or born in the decades after its conclusion still live within Britain’s symbolic order. It is important at this point to wonder why these instances of trauma are so important in establishing Britishness and the British collective tradition. In the above paragraphs I have shown examples of Davies’s explorations into the alienating, dehumanizing and detachment inducing aspects of British modernity. There are three distinct, yet interconnected, examples of modern British trauma, the exploration of which is a

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147 Gilroy, 87.
result of the feelings of loss wrapped in the end of Empire. From the crowded streets of London to the fields of Flanders, the traumatic experiences of detachment remove the connective tissue binding reality to experience, memory to sensation, and past to present. These songs reestablish the Benjaminian “tradition” central to Benjamin’s understanding of experience. Unlike Baudelaire and Benjamin, who find fault and joy, linking detachment purely to modernity itself, this detachment is fostered through the losses felt by the end of the British Empire. This is where the “postcolonial melancholia” becomes most evident. While the terminologies of postcolonial thought tend to place the postcolonial in the periphery, Gilroy’s take on the end of Empire’s influence on the psyche of white Britons shows that there is something to be said about the former oppressors as well. Davies himself is writing from the point of view of the post-colonial Briton and the emptiness he feels, as is evident in his poetic rehashing seen above, drives him towards this temporal scavenger hunt inside his work. In a detached world, he is trying to find the reason for the season, the reason that today is worse than yesterday. It all hinges on the loss of Empire.

But it is more than that. The Blitz, like the trenches of the Great War and the crowds of urban squalor, serve as reminders for Britons that the world in which they think they live is not quite as it seems. This is clear from the way in which these episodes are dealt with by The Kinks. Davies’s lyrics, which run the gamut of Imperial subjects, lack real and tangible textual reference to the Empire itself. We do not see characters, even in the pre-war years, preparing for foreign service; the only references to empire are fleeting reminders of Victoria’s domain in her namesake song starting off the album that purports chronicling the decline of the British Empire. This presumes that the psychological baggage surrounding this decline is heavy. In the songs explored throughout, there are common Imperial and Romantic imaginative themes, the idyllic
village, the star-crossed lovers, and the primitive call of the jungle but the Empire, the crowing piece in the jewel of British pride, is missing.

Perhaps, it is telling that the characters imagined do not feel pride in their Empire, yet its loss fills them with melancholy. It is not that the Empire didn’t influence everyday life in Britain. Amongst the people, as Gilroy himself addresses in his work, writing that leaves out the complex relationship of Britons to Empire “may salve the national conscience, but…compound the marginality of colonial history, spurn its substantive lessons, and obstruct the development of multiculturalism by making the formative experiences of empire less profound and less potent in shaping the life of colonizing powers than it actually was.” It is a falsity, in Gilroy’s opinion, to think that Britain can be separated or has been separated from its Imperial history. Is the separation of Davies’s work and Arthur’s fictitious experience continuing this kind of falsehood?

I do not think so. The empire is a character in this drama. Nowhere does there seem to be ventures into the wilds of India with Bungalow Bill like The Beatles offer. Rather the Imperial gaze it is still present as a force in Davies’s work. Its influence is that of the specter haunting the moods and the moves of Davies’s characters and Davies the songwriter. The omission of the Empire from Arthur (and Davies) nostalgic recollections of the losses and the traumas in the past is key to understanding its role in collective identity formation at this time. We need to remember that all along this chapter explored Davies’s poetic formulations of British national traumatic experience. Central to this was an understanding of the role that Freudian traumatic exposure plays in identity formation of those who have experienced true traumatic shocks. The inability to reconcile with the Imperial history of the past, which is front and center, again, in an album purported to chronicle the “fall of the British Empire,” allows us to view it as the actual

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148 Gilroy, 2.
149 Ibid.
traumatic experience hidden from the conscience self during the recollection action. The others, including the experience of the shock of the crowd, the urban industrial environment as well as the World Wars, are wrapped into the shock that cannot be named, the shock that created the others. That is, in other words, the loss of Empire, which haunts Davies, Arthur, the poet in the tower and his lovers Terry and Julie. The traumas creep out of the hole in their lives described by Gilroy’s “Postcolonial Melancholia,” and they don’t even know it yet, although, it is clear, Davies is starting to suspect.

This is plausible because part of Freud’s understanding of traumatic repetition is the ability to “not think about the trauma.” He writes, “now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristics of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident . . . I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with not thinking of it.”\textsuperscript{150} The ability to “not think about it,” that interferes with the ability of the psychoanalysis’s ability to help patients suffering from these kinds of recurring traumatic compulsions. He later writes that “we may assume, rather that dreams are here helping to carry out another task, which must be accomplished before the dominance of the pleasure principle can even begin. These dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the \textit{anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis} [emphasis mine].”\textsuperscript{151} Anxiety here is the element of fear that allows for the protection of the body and the consciousness from the traumatic stimuli. For Davies, his lyrics and his characters exist as the ways to cure himself of his national melancholia his inability to fully understand and grasp his own role in the world, his own place in time and on the national stage cultivates guilt, fear, and

\textsuperscript{150} Freud, 598
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 609
remorse for what has happened and mourning for what could have been. The tool of retrospection, in this case for the traumatic events of British history, exists to replace the anxiety not present at the beginning of the events. Davies’s work slyly works with the trauma left by the loss of Empire, through not dealing with Empire itself but with the anxieties and fears leading to the loss. Above all, Davies’s work is both attached but seeking detachment, and seeking to cure himself (and the rest of Britain) of the burden that decline and history place on their shoulders.
Chapter 3:
The Dedicated Wanderer of Fashion: The Traumatic Subjectivity of Ray Davies

I have attempted to show how retrospection, repetition, and nostalgia for landscapes, homes, spaces, place, people, and nations are interconnected with the emotions and traumas of national decline, loss, and accompanying anxiety. My task now is to illuminate the ways that Davies’s exploration of Britishness allows for a kind of resistance rather than true mourning against the dominant cultural paradigms. A lot has been made of Davies’s penchant towards irony and parody I tend to believe they belittle the true resistive and transgressive messages in Davies’s music. Partly, it is the empathic drive to these songs that disarms any kind of parody or irony. Davies makes it clear to us, his listeners, and to his focus, Arthur, Terry and Julie or Britain as a whole, that he feels their pain. This places the personal in Davies’s music ahead of any real political message, while at the same time giving the critiques a certain, unabashed, emotional power. This is possible on two fronts: the first is that Davies himself is a member of this community; he shares their insecurities and neuroses because he is one of them, and second is that his age has allowed him at least a little bit of distance from the aspects of the culture he is writing about while having been young enough to experience in his formative years the waning years of Empire.

In this third chapter, I am seeking to accomplish two things. The first is that I am interested in how Davies’s use of modern poetics contributes to place his own subjectivity and emotions into this work. Davies, I will argue, fulfills the role of Baudelaire’s poetic hero in the ways that he subjectively experiences his world through an expansive roster of first person roles. The second part will investigate what the previous two chapters tell us about Davies’s own conception of Britishness in this era. Simply, he finds it at the combination of nostalgic longing
for lost landscapes and geopolitical power with a troubling emotional burden of past anxieties. His work, then, not only seeks to understand his world, but also is itself an example of the pervasion and permeating traumas of his collective world. Understanding that Davies is subjectively and selfishly invested in this community only strengthens his critiques and empathies.

**The Rock Star as Ethnographer**

There are two interconnected roles that Davies is playing here with his work. One is that he is fulfilling the role of the modern poetic hero, as imagined by both Baudelaire and later by Walter Benjamin. The other is that Davies’s role within his culture reflects a larger turn towards a developing personal relationship between the singer and songwriter and his/her community, leading to what the title of this section suggests: the rock star as ethnographer (an allusion to Art critic Hal Foster’s famous essay). This helps to situate Davies in terms of his relation to his subject matter and how his emotions present in his songs are heavily entrenched within the self. Not only are the vast majority taken from the first person, but they heavily involve the incorporation of personal emotional feeling in his understanding the situations explored. Whether he is playing different “roles” or commenting as himself, the first person narration gives his words emotionally powered authority. Kinks historian Dan Shoemaker reminds us that “I think the point here is that Davies’s critique is structural: he is concerned about the impact of the structure on the individual, and it doesn’t particularly matter whose structure it is. The question is not so much one of ‘right or left’ as it is ‘big or little’ how much breathing room is there for the little man in a big society.”

The biggest little man in this society is clearly Davies himself. Thus far, I’ve explored how Davies understands his people, and while he knows he is a member of said community, I’ve written very little about his own role in this exploration. What

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152 Shoemaker, 173-4
makes his take special is how emotionally invested he is in this aesthetic process. In other words, is it just a coincidence that Davies is a member of the community that he speaks for and of, or is it a deliberate move by Davies to place himself into the space to be able to aesthetically capture the community? Again, we see Davies follow the modern’s lead. Modern critic Marshall Berman writes that Baudelaire believed that “the modern artist should ‘set up his house in the heart of the multitude, midst of the figure and the infinite’ in the midst of the metropolitan world.”\textsuperscript{153} As stated above, Baudelaire’s modern poet “emerges in conflict,” in the effort to capture “authentic” beauty.\textsuperscript{154} Apart from the lyrical examples above of Davies’s “setting up his house” in the heart of the community (see the exploration of “Waterloo Sunset” in chapter two), there is further evidence that rather than explore things other than Englishness, the rhetorical focus of Davies’s literary world is the community surrounding him. His subjects are the urban crowds and the village greens; each are full of the community that he is attempting to capture. He positions himself amongst them, both as the artist, observing and frantically scribbling notes but also as the subject of songs themselves.

Besides “setting up his house” within the community, Davies’s work insists upon thematically exploring heavily emotional topics such as “home.” By using the poetic process, he mirrors the very act of exploration he satirizes in the songs of Village Green, appearing as the tourist. On this topic of tourism Lucy Lippard concludes, “one of the obvious contradictions in tourism concerns what is being escaped from and to. Absence (sometimes) makes the heart grow fonder. If we live away from native ground and then go home to visit, we can see the place anew, with fresh eyes.”\textsuperscript{155} Her monograph explores not the commercialization of the past or of travel but the act of travel itself, especially in regard to how it defined the experience of local versus

\textsuperscript{153} Berman, 145
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid 141, 143. and Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 178
\textsuperscript{155} Lippard. 23
foreign. In the above quote she is investigating the way that the local can experience their homes in the same way as the tourist. Recall that Lippard believes the tourist experience is “an art form” with its “own way of organizing landscape and our sense of it.”

By musically recreating his lost hometowns or creating new ones, Davies is organizing his sense of his own landscape and how he relates to it. This is powerful, even if the hometowns he longs for never existed. The songs tell how home, in particular, is imagined and ordered within the white working class British world. In much the same way that Lippard idealizes the tourist experience, Davies’s sonic landscape are creating new ways of experiencing identity-laden landscapes and pasts either constructed or real.

If Davies is a tourist at home, he is the culmination of both Baudelaire and Lippard’s understandings of space and experience. He is a tourist because he is attempting to chronicle, understand and live in Britain, while capturing it lyrically. Through this process, he is moving into the crowd, the city, the idyllic and the war in order to fully digest and understand them. He does this by revisiting an old home, through the time travel possibilities of British material culture. He is using the vehicle of nostalgia to visit his lost home. He didn’t move away, but it moved from him. Recall the quote in chapter one, where Lippard writes that “being here and being there, being home and being away, are more alike than we often think. Even as we learn them, our places change, because no place is static, and no resident remains the same as s/he likes and changes with the experiences life and place provide.”

His songs play with here and there, past and present, to understand and delineate the absolutes of British identity. By experiencing as the tourist, he is fulfilling the role of the modern artist as understood by Baudelaire.

\[156\] Ibid, 13.
\[157\] Ibid 14
Baudelaire understands this movement as the “flâneur,” French for the urban wanderer. This urban explorer is one that is a “spectator,” and Baudelaire wants this artist to be “away from home and yet to feel [him or herself] everywhere at home, to see the world, to be at the centre of the world and yet to be hidden from the world.” He continues that the flâneur “goes, hurrying, searching. But searching for what? Be very sure that this man, such as I have depicted him- this solitary, gifted with an active imagination, ceaselessly journeying across the great human desert.” Again there is this connection between the journey, home and outside leading to the ability to fully absorb the world around one (be it here or there). Benjamin problematizes this definition writing that “the flâneur . . . demanded elbow room and was unwilling to forgo the life of a gentleman of leisure.” Benjamin, the consummate Marxist, sees the class of the flâneur, not only in the way Baudelaire himself elevates him above the crowd he is supposedly experiencing, but also equating the flâneur with the bourgeois “leisure class,” with the wealth to wander the streets rather than work. Benjamin rightly connects the flâneur with the “roles” of the modern hero, including (as is seemingly suggested above, the “dandy.” I am not at odds here with Benjamin’s economic analysis, but rather how the playing of roles, specifically the dandy, is mirrored in Davies’s musical narratives.

In his 1966 song “Dedicated Follower of Fashion,” he satirizes the urban, clothes shopper. The “dedicated follower” is the consummate urbanite, the dandy, and the mod. He sings

And when he does his little rounds,
Round the boutiques of London town,
Eagerly pursuing all the latest fads and trends,

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158 Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” 9
159 Ibid.
161 Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 188
Cause he's a dedicated follower of fashion.\footnote{163 "Dedicated Follower of Fashion" Ray Davies PYE 7N 17064}

Again, the act of exploration and of experience via movement shows Davies as the experiencer of British society. While this is a contemporary critique, it still tells us a lot about how Davies envisions his satire. The critique here falls in line with Benjamin’s, challenging the “hipness” and the “in-the-know” qualities of the young, urbane wanderer as well as the various roles used to poetically capture experience. True understanding of the situations of British life is lost on the “dedicated follower,” because of his need to be “looked at” and be aesthetically pleasing. Of course, this dedication is intrinsically linked with consumer culture as understood by Davies. This is a character whose only drive and dedication are the all-consuming fluctuations between fads and fashions, but he is someone whose house is set up in the center of town. The placement of the “dedicated follower” at the center of British culture would deem him able to comment on it, but the tinge of class has rendered this impossible. Fashion, in this way, doesn’t necessarily just mean clothes. The dedicated follower is as close as Davies comes to defining Baudelaire’s flâneur in his lyrics. What defines him, in the end, is not his urbanity, nor his youth, but his dedication to fashion. Fashion, as a defining personal feature, connects to Benjamin’s assumption that to be an urban flâneur is to be a person gripped by the chilly breath of the commodity economy.\footnote{164 Benjamin, Walter, 89}

For Baudelaire the dandy is “blasé” but he is the last “spark of heroism amid decadence.”\footnote{165 Baudelaire, “Painter” 26,28} What makes the dandy the hero of modern life? For Benjamin, Baudelaire’s equation of poetry and battle leads to “the hero is the true subject of la modernité. In other words,
it takes a heroic constitution to live modernity.” No one experiences modernity more than Davies’s “dedicated follower.” Benjamin further equates modernity with that of the German *trauerspiel* (tragic drama) and that Baudelaire “assumed ever new forms himself, Flâneur, apache, dandy and rag picker were so many roles to him. For the modern hero is no hero; he is the portrayer of heroes. Heroic modernity turns out to be a Trauerspiel in which the hero’s part is available.” The poet experiencing the world plays the role open to the traumas that unfold as such. In other words, if the experience of modernity is inherently traumatic, then anyone subjecting themselves to its force is playing a tragic part. We can understand this in just the songs explored here. Davies attempts to situate himself, through first person narratives, to show first-hand the experience of trauma. His “dedicated follower,” again, follows not fashion but the changing world itself.

**Traumatic Subjectivity**

In the end, these songs are not really about village greens, Arthur Anning, World Wars, or apemen. Instead they express the collectivity of cultural loss. It really isn’t simply the end of Empire, but the resulting culture of collective trauma that it fosters. It is in this way that the end of the Empire becomes a symbol for the wide sweeping changes at the end of the 1960s. In a popular musical context, the violence of modern warfare is supplanted by civil unrest, as would appear in, say, the Rolling Stones’ “Street Fighting Man” or many of the other protest songs of the decade. Again, what Davies is dealing with, and what The Rolling Stones are commenting upon, is the traumatic collective as a whole. Within this are the themes expressed above: commodification, loss, industrialization, urbanization, warfare, genocide; all of this leads to a collective existences marked by an exposure to the shocking, humiliating, and alienating nature

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166 Benjamin, “On Some Motifs” 178 and Benjamin, ”The Paris of the Second Empire,” 103

of the contemporary world. The end of the Empire, for Davies in particular, marks the tearing of
the wallpaper that covered the cracked walls of the British world. In appealing to these
movements, we are seeing a growing “traumatic subjectivity” in the art of Ray Davies.

To define “traumatic subjectivity,” Hal Foster repeats a well-known Andy Warhol quote
“I want to be a machine” Foster writes “usually this statement is taken to confirm the blankness
of artist and art alike, but it may point less to a blank subject than to be a shocked one, who takes
on the nature of what shocks him as a mimetic defense against this shock: I am a machine too, I
make (or consume) serial product-images too, I give as good (or as bad) as I get.”168 This “I am a
machine” is eerily similar to Davies’s previous statement about Arthur being a small cog in the
great machinery of Empire, a cog “like himself.”169 The stark alienation of the worker at his
machine spreads out to all of contemporary culture; the dehumanizing effects of modernity are
felt throughout Davies’s work. But here included in Foster’s assessment, is Warhol’s work on
trauma (including his famous studies of tragic figures of American popular expression Marilyn
Monroe and Jackie Kennedy), which builds on the compulsion to repeat, in this case, the pop art
image repeated over and over.170 Contrary to the Freudian understanding of the role of traumatic
repetition, Foster writes that in traumatic subjectivity, “Warhol’s repetitions are not restorative in
this way; they are not about a mastery of trauma. More a patient release from the object in
mourning, they suggest an obsessive fixation on the object in melancholy.”171 This fixation takes
on personal significance, as it becomes an object of ritualized fetishized mourning, caused by the
repetition of the traumatic image itself, creating an experience of trauma from viewing the image

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169 Davies, Ray, 363
170 Foster, 131
171 Ibid, 132
in an endless cycle. There is play between viewer and viewed allowing for the personal to be
instilled into the compulsive repetition of a traumatic image.

For Davies, the compulsive repetition seemingly requires him to produce music that
treads over the same traumatic territory; and for each of these images he lyrically creates, there is
a long line of semiotic associations within British culture, fostering more mimetic traumatic
utterances. Again this is commenting on an entire national culture suffering from Benjamin’s
“isolated experience,” or unresolved experience in Freudian terms that is, individual pasts not
fully connected to tradition. While he is chronicling the traumatic experience of British life, his
work contributes and builds upon the repetitions and regurgitates the experiences. It is
mechanical reproduction’s response to Baudelaire’s modern artist, showing the experience of
modern life repeated ad infinitum.

Furthermore, what his medium allows, in dealing with the traumatic mythology of what it
means to be British at this time, contributes to the repetitive element. It is a culture that is defined
in the negative and in the past tense. Through the medium of popular music its past is chronicled
to be experienced by generations in possible perpetuity. By recording on vinyl, the experience of
trauma over the previous decades of the twentieth century, he is in fact continuing it for
generations to come. As an experience, it is repeated and then, possibly, repeated again and again
through the power of mechanical reproduction. The empire itself, even by the time of the
production of these albums was a figment of Davies’s memories. By that time, it wasn’t the ruler
of the seas and the sun did set on the British Empire, it is then that his reproductions allow the
sun to set as many times as it is possible to listen to his record. There is no rejection of the past,
but only a building up of it through the medium of recorded music.
This play with the past is important in the worldview of The Kinks. Recall a Dave Davies quote I used near the beginning: “The revolution, we felt, if indeed there was to be one, could not happen purely by freeing ourselves completely from the ties of our past, our culture. It was obviously a question of integrating that of the old that still worked with the new.”

It summons feelings of pain, in Davies’s music, the past is not a burden and it is not something to be ignored or replaced; it is essential to understanding who the British are and where they are going. The zeitgeist of this age might have been to reject the past and the parent generation and move forward with social change. This counters the popular sentiment amongst youthful contemporaries of The Kinks, who blamed the previous generation for their failings. This is countered clearly with the cross generational commonalities fostered by Ray Davies’s lyrics. Not only does he “love” Arthur, but Davies wants the listener to “understand” Arthur. In other words, the common feelings across these boundaries stem from his ability to see that they are in the same sinking ship’s lifeboat. While the ideas of home, landscape, tradition and pasts have been used to exploit and repress people; there is room for hope in the old histories as Davies has shown us. This is not at all possible without the emotional investment that Davies puts forth in his work.

The Personal and the Political

Above I have explored the way trauma is disseminated in reproducible art. It is my goal here to illuminate the importance placed on emotional involvement in the work of Davies. This is drawing heavily from not the traumatic side of Hal Foster’s concept, but the subjective side. Resulting from this engagement outlined above, is an uncompromising and important personal subjective poetic experience that makes The Kinks’s music of this era surprising. Davies longs, pines and is detached from his past, and his, to borrow Benjamin’s phrase, tradition. This

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172 Davies, Dave. 106.
severance inspires these lyrics. Davies himself never experiences the end of the rural English village or remembered either of the two world wars. He, nonetheless, feels the “pain” of his community. Thus his work is actively engaged in, what Svetlana Boym calls, “diasporic intimacy.” Remember, the story of Arthur revolves around an actual diasporic experience—the movement of Arthur’s family to Australia. Not only does this experience stem from Ray Davies’s own personal family, his sister Rosie left with her family for Australia in the years before these songs, the detachment from the native English home mirrors the psychological detachment felt by collective Britain. After all, the Britain chronicled in both Village Green Preservation Society and Arthur, regardless if it ever really existed, is forever lost, resulting in a community of people detached and lost away from their “homes.”

Home is central to Davies’s understanding of the boundaries of British experience. Boym writes “when we are at home, we don’t need to talk about it...we just know how to say it in our native tongue. To feel at home is to know that things are in their place and so are you; it is a state of mind that doesn’t depend on an actual location.” Davies’s work seems to deal with national abjection more so than real diaspora, but the feelings and emotions seem to be one and the same. What we have in the cases of Davies and his people is homesickness for this state of mind. His “home,” the ideal home, is gone. He finds himself temporally and collectively homeless. I don’t believe that I am overstating this feeling. Again, what makes Davies’s take unique is not only this reliance upon personal affect but also his appeal to the collective. Not only do the English people as a whole take part in his works, any class-oriented critique shows a commonality between members of his community as a whole and, while they are criticized, the elites are involved just as much. This is because, for Davies, the homelessness felt is built on the nation.

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173 I hate to think that Davies is any more clued into the emotions present at this moment. It is possible that he feels it is necessary to fully integrate his own emotions into the subject of loss.  
174 Boym, 251
Community wide, regardless of the disparate backgrounds, access to power, and culture, each Briton shares in this kind of homesickness.

Boym here is using the word nostalgia much more literally than other critics will use it; drawing upon its sourcing in the mythical homecoming of Odysseys, especially when combining the concept with contemporary diasporas. She writes, “In the late twentieth century, millions of people find themselves displaced from their birthplaces living in voluntary or involuntary exile.” This connection between the twentieth century’s diasporic moments is linked, in some ways, to the traumas investigated by Davies, although, it must be stated, Davies is exploring it from an extremely privileged end. Nonetheless, while Boym is writing on literal diasporic situations, it is necessary for my thesis to stretch this out further to encompass those culturally removed from their birthplaces. Her work continues as an exploration, primarily, of post-Soviet Eastern bloc immigrant groups; which begs the question, given the political and cultural transformation, if they would feel the same sort of nostalgia for their birthplaces if they hadn’t moved. “Diasporic intimacy,” continues Boym, “is rooted in the suspicion of a single home, in shared longing without belonging. It thrives on the hope of the possibilities of human understanding and survival, or unpredictable chance encounters...”

This “shared longing” is clear in Davies’s lyrics. It is, perhaps, ironic, though, that I am viewing the suddenly alienated and melancholia British public, but we can see intimacy created between the members of The Kinks and their audience over the remembrance of lost loves (material, personal and spatial). It is possible that this is the condition of post-modern and post-war humanity (I think that the moderns saw this “shared longing” for the quiet idyllic and pre-modern days in their own world). Boym reminds us that diasporic intimacy, “does not promise a

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175 Ibid, 252
176 Ibid, 252-3
comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgic for the lost home and homeland; in this case, the opposite is true. Diasporic intimacy could be seen as the mutual attraction of two immigrants from different parts of the world or the sense of a precarious coziness of a foreign home. This is perhaps why someone like Ray Davies finds commonality across not only generational boundaries but temporal and geographic; he finds a shared experience in the poetry of the turn of the twentieth century to express conflicts in the middle of the century.

What becomes important is that it is Davies’s own personal stories that are incorporated into these songs. After all, the story of Arthur is taken primarily from his experience of abandonment by his sister and her family in the years prior to these songs. The fear of rejection and the emotions of diaspora, are clear in his pieces as they appeal to family and, most importantly, to the past. On *Arthur* Davies writes that “After several meetings I trusted Julian [the ghostwriter on the Arthur television series] enough to mention my brother-in-law Arthur. We both agreed that he would be an excellent choice...we were, however, convinced that our story should be about a family that was being torn apart because some of the children were emigrating to Australia.” It is this experience that peppers Davies’s understanding of the “New” England, the secondary geopolitical power and the crumbling society at home. It is through his music, like the repetition in Warhol’s Pop, that his pain becomes our pain. The very personal emotions wrapped in the making of *Arthur*, in particular, cause Dave Davies to remember singing the songs “with tears in his eyes”. Of course, the majority of the other songs Ray Davies writes come from similar personalized localities, including the mid-1970s album *Muswell Hillbillies* about their hometown, and “Waterloo Sunset,” based around family members

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177 Ibid, 253  
178 Davies, Ray. 366
and a childhood trip to the hospital [See Chapter 2]. Affective pain being a central pillar for The Kinks,’ on Village Green, Dave Davies states “In a sense the Village Green album encapsulated all these feelings. It was an album out of step with the time but in keeping with a broader realization that yearned for social, environmental and political balance.” These personal narratives give Davies’s music not only authority to talk about the British experience but also the emotional gravitas to make personal interpretations and inflections.

For the Davies brothers, it is the loss of their sister Rosie and her family that sets up this crisis in their ideal home. Ray Davies writes in his autobiography, “a part of my family had left possibly forever. Once the emotions started to come out I found that it had snowballed into a frenzy.” These emotions are channeled into the powerful songs at the end of Arthur. When he calms from his frenzy, a sober Davies wonders, “Perhaps his [Arthur’s] reason for leaving England really was because he loved the old country so much he didn’t want to watch it disintegrate.” In part, the emotions of this time period allowed the album’s inspiration, the real life Arthur, to remember “home and the family parties we used to have.” The result is an album and a collection of songs heavily invested into the emotions of its author.

Personal and primal emotions have always been part of the appeal of The Kinks to their fan base. Sean Elder, in Salon magazine, writes “The Kinks did much to add a splash of angst to pop’s soda... and they never lost touch with their anger. When punk’s progenitors began calling for the heads of all ’60s survivors, The Kinks’s names were not on the list. This was partly out of respect for their early records, their grappling with feelings of sexual confusion (“Lola” was the first top-10 song about a transvestite encounter) and their enduring odes to feelings of

179 Davies, Dave. 118
180 Ibid. 106-7
181 Davies, Ray. 137
182 Ibid, 211
183 Ibid
worthlessness and isolation. “Dead End Streets” and “I’m Not Like Everybody Else” sound as fresh and desperate as they did 30 years ago."\(^{184}\) What is not touched on in this quote is the personal touches that this anger takes on, where there is a certain amount of personal story involved in every single Kinks song. Added to this is the willingness to thematize challenging subject matters, leading to transgressive and resistive modes.

The anger of The Kinks is often associated with the working class roots of the songwriter. However, he shares this kind of background with almost every single rock ‘n roll star of the age. While others, during the time, were experimenting with drugs, Ray writes, “while everybody else thought the hip thing to do was to drop acid, do as many drugs as possible and listen to music in a coma, The Kinks were singing songs about lost friends, draught beer, motorbike riders, wicked witches, and flying cats.”\(^{185}\) I do not think that Davies is showing a prudish side here (although he may very well have avoided drugs because of some puritanical stance), rather I see this more as an appeal to capturing real life experiences rather than exploring, to quote contemporaries the Amboy Dukes, the “center of the mind.” Placing “flying cats” and “wicked witches” aside for the moment, the appeals to draught beer, lost loved ones, disappearing country sides and, even, to the point cartoon characters and literary figures [all of these, curiously, listed off in the song “Village Green Preservation Society”] all come from Davies’s real experiences. Criticism in popular music here anticipates a revival of the real and a rejection, stylistically and thematically, of the psychedelic era, placing the rock star at the center of a great ethnographic search.

The combination of personal pain, retrospective and traumatic subjectivity allows Davies access to the affective core of the British world. He knows this because he is one of them. The re-telling of British history and the reconstruction of the cultural spatial landmarks of the British

\(^{185}\) Davies, Ray. 361
imagination fosters lyrics that allow access to the souls of the British people (or at least how Davies feels that they feel.) He is a post-colonial subject, even though his passport is British. He is white and working class, and was on the outside of the Imperial power when it existed as he is at the end of the 1960s. The end of the empire influences his own views of his nationality and identity. The albums and songs explored above never forget what makes his identity important, as both an outsider in terms of class and a new outsider in terms of national identity. Again, it is, perhaps, ironic to wax poetic about the downtrodden British working class; after all, the Empire gave him ideological and social dominion over the othered peoples of the peripheries of the world. I do not buy that Davies feels this way. He is a creation of his own indoctrination, and he longs not for the glorious days of the British empire nor for the pre-modern world; he longs for a time without his own longings, loneliness and pain.
Conclusion: Britain at the End of Empire.

Thus far, I have been interested in how loss, both spatial and political factor into Ray Davies’s artistic representations of the end of the British Empire. We have seen Davies paint audio portraits of lost landscapes, stately irony filled homes, and quaint English villages as well as recreate the Great War’s trench warfare, the rushing crowds at the end of the working day in London’s tube stations, and the falling bombs and crumbling buildings during the Blitz. He draws connection between his contemporary experience and the poetics of loss popular in the Romantic and Modern literary ages. Amongst all of these lyrical examples has been the continued interest on the part of Davies in the faculties and failures of memory and heritage. Within memory and heritage are the two topical explorations in the chapters above, dealing with nostalgia and traumatic repetition. Davies chronicles a community that is obsessed with the loss of its own glorious past. This obsession with loss fosters these two forays into the constructed past, and is ultimately both a target for Davies’s satire and an unwitting and underlying substrate within his work.

Briefly, chapter one explored the investment of British culture into spatial identity, specifically in the ways in which there is a longing for he lost imagined community. The idea of “England,” as a landscape, is fundamental to British identity, and through the changes prompted by industrialization and commodification central to modernity, forever lost. Davies’s music reacts to this longing by playing with the concepts of nostalgia and retrospection, at once critiquing these kinds of maladies and, in the end, cultivating, musically, his own version of England. The second chapter explored the role of trauma and the resulting detachment from the symbolic order and established narratives of Empire. Davies is again playing with retrospection but instead of creating his own past, like in the first chapter, he is reacting to a compulsion to
repeat within British society. Specifically, this is the inability for the national culture to move on past the traumatic events of its past. The result is, again, not a condemnation but an understanding between Davies and his people. The third chapter connected the previous two by coming to a greater understanding of the role that Davies himself plays in his musical reconstructions. He is building upon the “traumatic subjectivity” outlined by Hal Foster and creating commonality across generational lines through Svetlana Boym’s idea of “diasporic intimacy.” Ultimately, Davies himself plays the role of the flâneur, the urban wanderer, who subjectively experiences the beauty, authenticity, and shock of the modern and contemporary British world.

The elephant in the room here is the role that Empire plays in Davies’s understanding of British trauma. There is a problem with saving the old, as in Dave Davies’s quote mantra above, in anticipation of the new, if that system is built upon oppression. Throughout this thesis I have been exploring a community on either the brink or in total decline. Davies’s goal here has been to define what Britain means to him and what he believes Britishness means in this contemporary context. Dan Shoemaker’s definition of Britishness as being one part nostalgia and one part landscape has been, thus far, my inspiration for my own understanding of Davies’s Britishness. But at this point, it hardly encapsulates all that Britain holds for singers like Davies.

There is something powerful about opening up the traumatic subjective through music. Because of this emotional connection, Davies’s estimation of Britain in this period is of two distinctly powerful aesthetic directions, as outlined above. One is the nostalgic longing for the ideal landscape and the other the anxiety in the face of trauma as a defining factor. It is anxiety and the apprehension that dominates the fearful and pained history of the British twentieth
century for white Britons. Their history is told through spitfires and tanks, lost pomp and circumstance, and a hurt sense of pride.

From his own sourcing materials, listeners know that it was always Davies’s goal to find answers to his community’s existential crises. While he tells personal stores, with characters inspired by his family, friends and experiences, he is attempting to tell larger stories capturing the essences of a certain kind of nostalgic Britishness. Always the showman, he tells Thomas Kitts, “I wanted to be Walt Disney … Village Green meant nothing to me except in my fantasy. It was my ideal place, a protective place. It’s a fantasy world that I can retreat to…”¹⁸⁶ While Davies views himself and his role in terms of creating a fantasy world, he has collected enough material, national culture in this park to define for himself what he believes the past in Britain looked like, and how he wants it to look like now.

This is troublesome, especially at the end of the Empire, because what is lacking is any amount of contribution ofBritons of color into this conversation. Memory, especially memory coming from the minds of dominant groups, serves as a burden for members of this community. Paul Gilroy expands his “Postcolonial Melancholia” to incorporate a massive amount of guilt he feels is defining of white British collective memory. He writes “Britain’s inability to mourn its loss of Empire and accommodate the empire’s consequences developed slowly. Its unfolding revealed an extensively fragmented national collective [this is what we’ve explored all along] that has not so far been able to meet the elemental challenges represented by the social, cultural, and political transition with which the presence of post-colonial and other sanctuary-seeking peoples has been unwittingly bound up.”¹⁸⁷ In other words, at the end of the 1960s, the mere presence of Britons of color serve as a reminder of the pain caused by the British military and

¹⁸⁶ Kitts, 117
¹⁸⁷ Gilroy, 102.
government in continuation of the Empire’s geopolitical goals. The inability to deal with the changes associated with these sanctuary peoples, leads to people, like Davies and his family, to seek sanctuary in their memories or in new places.

This is why comments like Davies’s on the reason for Arthur’s leaving could be insidious, insofar as he blames the “disintegration” of England as the pure reason behind the moved. While I do not want to paint Davies as an imperialist or a racist, there is a certain amount of racism by omission present in his work. It is not hard to imagine that Davies’s Disneyland analogy is unabashedly white; the way that he remembers his Britain is entirely white. It may deal with class distinction, but nowhere does it deal with what was already becoming an important political issue in British politics. As Gilroy explores above, it is not that Davies is racist and wants to, in the words of the National Front, “keep England white,” but that he is suffering from the guilt of Empire itself. The final trauma here is that the Empire has forced him, and his people, to deal with the violences perpetrated in their names. I cannot believe, upon listening and reading his words that he is wishing a return to the Empire.

Why then is he writing? He cannot separate his own hegemonic cultural role in Empire making as much as his work does not separate his characters from their class identifications, but there is transgression here in an Imperial sense. The Empire for Davies exemplifies guilt and while he does not get into racial politics, it is clear that its violence haunts him. He uses nostalgia in order to counter act this guilt and this specific violence. The satirical wit with which he imagines Britain is one that is free of the pain and the guilt of the geopolitical hegemonic rule of the British Empire. His work being about both the loss of Empire and hiding the Empire, contends that if it weren’t for the Empire and for the changes associated with its end, Britain would be a better place. Perhaps, this is why, only briefly do characters imagine the Orient and
the Empire. It is not the power that Davies lusts for; it is the calm and the singularity that the post-Imperial world and the pre-Imperial world hold in common for which he is longing. The goal is, as Dave Davies writes, to remember the past while looking for revolution.
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