"Give it a definite literary flavour": Humphry House's Experiments with the Pamphlet as Genre

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Introduction

In October 1937, a twenty-four-page pamphlet titled *I Spy with My Little Eye* was self-published by Humphry House in Calcutta. *I Spy* is a satirical take on the system of "spyarchy" (House's coinage) that had gripped Bengal at the time, threatening to destroy any semblance of civic administration. House had arrived in India the winter of 1936 and joined Presidency College as a Professor of English. After spending a few months there, he had quit and transferred at a fraction of the salary to Ripon College (now Surendranath College), in order to escape the oppressive control maintained by the colonial government over thought and action. The nationalist movement had reached a stage of maturity by this time and communist groups across India were gaining people's trust, working closely with labour unions.

Thus, the late-1930s was a notorious time for law and order in India: the sedition laws were being rampantly abused by the colonial government and the censorship of published and unpublished literature (including personal letters) betrayed their insecurity and paranoia. Humphry House, who had friends both among members of the intelligentsia of Calcutta—in particular the Parichay group—and among communist activists from the United Kingdom, came under suspicion. He was hounded by plain-clothes spies and his radio talks were censored pre-broadcast. The Intelligence Branch believed him to be a communist spy. *I Spy* is a scathing critique of the way in which these measures were implemented on a day-to-day basis by the police with tacit support from the government (Mukherji and Mukherjee 15-28).[1]

The pamphlet begins, like many European modernist works, with a male narrator (presumably House himself) making his way through the city. In this case, he appears to be returning from somewhere north of central Calcutta, first on foot and then by tram, as the evening traffic gets thicker. The evocative description of the crowded tram gives way to our first encounter with one of the informal interrogators who had been set on House's trail to keep tabs on his comings and goings. What follows is a series of encounters—some realistic and some decidedly surreal, where he is questioned for being a communist spy by a shape-shifting Brahmin. Memories from House's colourful months in Calcutta appear as sudden bursts of images and sounds—such as the blonde saxophonist from the Continental Hotel, or a voice on the radio reading excerpts from canonical English texts—as he negotiates the confusing workings of the Bengal police's network of spies and informants.

It is a whimsical text that successfully blends many genres of print to convey the narrators attempt to make sense of colonial bureaucratic logic, filled with literary allusions and tangential references to contemporary events that shaped the late 1930s in Bengal. The pamphlet's target readership was self-consciously restricted to those who were adequately acquainted with political events of the time to recognize the potency and reality of what was being described. Its sense of humour and "literary flavour," on the other hand, were meant to

make it accessible to a wider readership, which shared his cultural context in order to reveal the daily realities in Bengal.

Although its reception in England, based on the few extant references in private correspondence, was almost dismissive, *I Spy* was received enthusiastically in Calcutta, as contemporary reviews in Bangla and English dailies show. A reviewer in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* went so far as to claim that the "Indian Branch of the Civil Liberties Union" ought to have taken responsibility for publishing the pamphlet (Mukherji and Mukherjee 85). However, like most pamphlets, *I Spy* had a short life in public circulation and memory: this important documentation of colonial oppression was remembered in stray references in books and letters. In 2018, Jadavpur University Press published a reprint with introduction and notes by Sajni Mukherji and me, where we tried to make the text accessible a contemporary readership. This article is an attempt to read *I Spy* as an experimental pamphlet and understand the reasons behind its quick disappearance from public memory.

The obvious answer is that it disappeared because that is what pamphlets do: they are ephemeral objects that make timely interventions, address a contextual problem and are forgotten. But a reading of *I Spy* in the context of Humphry House's society and politics reveals that it is too simplistic to read *I Spy* purely as a pamphlet, which I argue can be read both as a form and a genre. *I Spy* transgresses and expands on its generic possibilities even if its status within the market remains true to its form. It slips between the cracks, as it were, of the modernist politics of avant-gardist literary circles and the mass production of political pamphlets legitimizing revolutionary nationalism and propagating communism. I argue that the tension between the need to assert an individual authorial voice ("definite literary flavour") and the expectations of the genre and form which it lays claim to, produces the rich, complex and often confusing work that is *I Spy*.

In the recent past, apart from the reprint of *I Spy*, Supriya Chaudhuri and Deborah Baker have written about the intellectual and social circles House was part of. Chaudhuri (2019) primarily explores the modernist politics of the Parichay group, whose meetings House used to attend, providing a useful framework for studying his local connections. Deborah Baker in her semi-historical *The Last Englishmen* (2018) also explores these transnational communities which came together towards the end of British rule in India. The second section is an exploration of the pamphlet as form and genre, which reflects on its status and nature of operation within its marketplace and discursive field (Halasz 3). It focuses in particular on the pamphlet in the mid-twentieth century, starting with the landmark anthology, *British Pamphleteers* (2 vols. 1948, 1951). In the final section, I will try to locate *I Spy* within local contexts of literary production and political engagement, and delve into its inter-textuality. Self-aware of its position within a tradition of defending free speech, it is densely allusive to cultural texts and contemporary events. This article, then, is an attempt to study *I Spy* as a point of intersection—of human lives, of politics and poetics, and of genres.

Intersections: Humphry House in Calcutta

Humphry House joined Presidency College as Professor of English in 1937. He delivered lectures on a course prescribed for the I.A. and B.A. Examinations with the option of taking post-graduate classes, wrote book reviews and discussed literature on the radio. These were evidently infused with a suitable dose of political commentary, which drew the attention of the censors while greatly endearing him to his students.[2] The close watch on his political

views and actions convinced him to move out of the colonial administration's immediate scrutiny. He took up teaching at Ripon College at a fraction of the salary and made friends with a few members of Calcutta's literary, intellectual and art circles.

House became a part of the Parichay *adda*,[3] a group of writers, political thinkers, historians and painters. The group met at the north Calcutta family residence of Sudhindranath Datta, and occasionally at the south Calcutta apartment of the journal's co-editor, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi. In her essay Chaudhuri points out the "number of fissures and fault-lines"—ideological and aesthetic—that both held this "affective community" together and gave rise to tensions within it. Most of its members were leftist or left-leaning intellectuals, and Datta's editorship, Chaudhuri writes, "trod a difficult course between socialism, nationalism, and high modernist aesthetics" (183). She notes that, "Datta's aesthetic modernism also ran counter to the PWA's socialist commitment, and was expressly repudiated by some Marxists who attended the Parichay *adda*" (Chaudhuri 184).

Apart from House, there were other Englishmen in Calcutta at the time who found themselves in similar situations: serving in the colony in some capacity but strongly critical of colonialism. Michael Carritt was one such. During his second stint in India, he joined the Communist Party and collaborated with the Reverend Michael Scott, whom he had met in Bombay. They were not, however, the first British communists to operate on Indian soil. Suchetana Chattopadhyay notes that the Comintern had been sending members of the Communist Party of Great Britain to "assist the work in India" from 1924 onward (149). Pamphlets were a serious concern for the Comintern, as we learn from the memoirs of Philip Spratt. His duty was to report to the CPGB but a Russian handler, Petrovsky, had told him that his only goal was to "write a pamphlet on China urging India to follow the example of the Kuomintang" (Overstreet and Windmiller 87; Howe 65).

In Calcutta, Carritt found himself at the post of an Under Secretary at the Home Political Department of the Bengal government, which gave him a strategic vantage point. Although he could exercise his direct influence in a limited way, Carritt could observe and forewarn communist activists, with whom he worked closely, of government decisions. The Commissioner of Police could detect traces of a spy's operation in Calcutta but they failed to identify who it was. They suspected House of being this "Moscow Agent," owing to a misleading clue Carritt had planted as an inside joke (Carritt 176-177). In 1941, Carritt wrote a two-penny pamphlet titled *India* for the Communist Policy Series, which questioned the role of the international communist movement in India's fight for independence. It is important to understand House's affiliations to the different social circles in order to appreciate his individuality as reflected in *I Spy*, which carves out its own discursive field between the modernist, avant-gardist aesthetics of the Parichay group and the communist commitments of the Carritt-Auden-Scott circle.

Michael Scott, who was part of the Sunday beer-drinking sessions which included House, Carritt and John Bicknell Auden (brother of poet W.H. Auden), had arrived in India in 1935, grappling with his Christian convictions and a desire to affect change in material terms in Europe's colonies. He served first as domestic chaplain to the Bishop of Bombay and later as chaplain to the Bishop of Calcutta, operating as a communist spy. Both Carritt and Scott occupied important positions within the Empire's framework, which meant that their correspondence was relatively immune to scrutiny in those years of extreme censorship. They became "the conduit for messages, policy documents, and a flow of left-wing literature"

(Yates and Chester 27), which meant that they were crucial links between the international communist movement and India.

A relatively understudied figure in connection with House, Carritt and Scott, is Leonard Schiff. He worked as a member of the Christa Seva Sangh in Pune under the supervision of its founder, Father J.C. Winslow, and met Gandhi at Yervada Central Jail. Like Carritt he was conflicted about the role of communism in India's freedom struggle and supposedly maintained the impossibility of "there being a Soviet India until India became a free nation." He was approached by the London publisher, K. Ingram, "to write a book about India and the methods of British rule at the present time," which was to be titled *Bande Mataram*. Unsure of his knowledge of the Indian polity, he reached out to Humphry House in January 1938 who he felt had more to say about Bengal, as was evident in *I Spy* (Home Political, NA).[4] The book he wrote eventually, *The Present Condition of India*, carried a foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru.

In his lectures and radio talks House resisted the commodification of English culture—a sanitized and de-politicized product—that was exported to India under the guise of a liberal education. The Intelligence Bureau had made a note of the potential danger in his politically informed literary discussions as early as September 1936, when he was "reported by more than one agent as interesting himself in communism and as mixing with undesirable Indians." The officers had warned that "his talks should be carefully examined by the Bengal Government" (Home Political, NA) which implied that House had to submit his scripts for review before they were broadcast. The Parichay *adda* was infiltrated by a silent observer, who came to be known among the circle as the "He Sahib." He sat without active participation and had once tried to extract information about House from Hiron Sanyal, a regular at the *adda* (Mukherji 149-150).

The colonial government's methods for checking freedom of thought and expression were varied. The Sea Customs Act checked the import of foreign literature, which meant that ideologies opposed to imperialism had to find alternative routes. The General Communist Notification, which had its internal reviewing mechanism, listed books that were to be withheld by authorities and the Post Office Act could also be deployed to prevent circulation of literature labelled communist. Emboldened by the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act (1930) and the Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act (1932), which were passed in the aftermath of the Chittagong armoury raid (Ghosh 144), the spread of revolutionary nationalist literature was closely surveilled. As we have seen time and again, the implementation of these laws under totalitarian governance goes well beyond legally acceptable means. Messy strategies are deployed deliberately to create a sense of paranoia among citizens and, additionally, it often allows the state to perpetrate and facilitate violence without directly taking responsibility for it. While a large number of books came under the official notifications and acts, the immediate threat was posed by the seemingly uncontrollable explosion of pamphlet literature during this period—the "literature of the instant," as Shukla Sanyal terms it (13).

It would be a mistake to regard the pamphlet as synonymous with dissent since it has been appropriated and effectively used for propaganda by those in power. When deployed by the state, a pamphlet may be regarded as a strategy to appropriate a form (with its ideological underpinnings) to further the dominant group's agenda. The pamphlet in the hands of the dissenter does not usually represent the voice of the most abject sections of society, since they

make claims on the symbolic capital of the oppressor through subversion. Nor do they usually come from organizations, which can ill afford to trust its opinions to a public sense of humour. Satirical pamphlets, therefore, are usually products of individuality, which aim to create a public consciousness against a social or political evil through the moving power of humour. It is important to historicize not just the form but also the genre, in order to situate *I Spy* within the tradition of pamphleteering and the contemporary market (production and circulation) for pamphlets in Calcutta.

The Pamphlet as Form and Genre

In January 1943, George Orwell attempted to write a review of fifteen pamphlets hand-picked from his enormous private archive (totalling over 2700 items). Orwell was never convinced of the intrinsic value of the objects: "Looking through my collection," he declared, "I find that it is practically all trash, interesting to bibliophiles" (Orwell, "Pamphlet Literature"). According to Orwell, despite political passions running high and ever-increasing regulations on the free flow of ideas within Britain—two significant pre-conditions for pamphleteering—none of the pamphlets produced around the time was of any "real value." They were being written and published in large numbers across the political spectrum and even the several hundred that Orwell possessed did not, in his estimate, constitute any more than ten per cent of the total number printed in Britain alone after 1936. He saw nine trends or categories emerging from his collection: (i) anti-left and crypto-Fascist, (ii) conservative, (iii) social democrat, (iv) communist, (v) Trotskyist and anarchist, (vi) non-party radical, (vii) religious, (viii) lunatic, and (ix) pacifist. It was baffling to him that writers were not realizing the potential of the pamphlet to be "*the* literary form of an age like our own" (Orwell, "Pamphlet Literature").

Five years later, when he introduced the first of the two-volume *British Pamphleteers* (1948), Orwell echoed similar sentiments but explained at greater length his disappointment with the contemporary pamphlet. He attributed its decline, in part, to political parties who in his view had appropriated the form. The pamphlet served the critical and unique ability to "act as a sort of foot note or marginal comment on official history" (Orwell 1948, 15), but in order for the form to flourish, he believed that its "prestige" had to be restored so that the public could appreciate its potential for influencing opinion. Orwell's attempt to define pamphlets bears quoting at length:

> A pamphlet is a short piece of polemical writing, printed in the form of a booklet and aimed at a large public…Probably a true pamphlet will always be somewhere between five hundred and ten thousand words, and it will always be unbound and obtainable for a few pence. A pamphlet is never written primarily to give entertainment or to make money. It is written because there is something that one wants to say *now*, and because one believes there is no other way of getting a hearing. Pamphlets may turn on points of ethics or theology, but they always have a clear political implication (Orwell 1948, 7-8).

This definition considers parameters relating to physical form (length, quality of print etc.), content and intent. Interestingly, however, there is a slippage in the quoted passage, which seems to suggest that the primary character of a pamphlet is definable independent of its published form: it is "a short piece of polemical *writing*, printed in the form of a booklet" (emphasis mine). One wonders if this is where the fault-line between pamphlet as genre and

pamphlet as a form lies. In the digital age, for instance, can we think of pamphlets that are published without the physical attributes described here?

The two-volume anthology, self-conscious of its responsibility in canon formation, was unabashedly biased in favour of an individual authorial voice. In the introduction to the second volume, A.J.P. Taylor was more overtly liberal (in a limiting sense) than Orwell in his definition of a pamphlet's value: "perhaps it would be truer to say that the pamphlet becomes literature only when it is written by a remarkable individual. The ordinary pamphlet does not merit resurrection. It is designed to be read quickly and to be thrown away" (7). While their apparent inability to appreciate the transformative political potential of the non-"literary" pamphlets may be attributed in part to the title of the project they had undertaken—it was, after all, British "pamphleteers" and not "pamphlets"—both Orwell and Taylor posit their definitions of "literary" pamphlets as the yardstick against which all pamphlets must measure. It betrays a resistance to ideologies whose representational aesthetics are not recognized by the liberal humanist tradition.

There are a few other aspects that emerge out of these attempts at definition, clustered around the most significant premise of a pamphlet: the presence of an immediate (real or imagined) audience. This means that the pamphlet fundamentally is an attempt to persuade. Irrespective of their origin—Taylor thinks pamphlets may have originated as "reprinted sermons" (8)—pamphlets share a long and dialogic relationship with speeches. It is not surprising, then, that several useful methodologies for analysing pamphlets emerge out of the field of rhetorical studies. Surveying the field, Ralph S. Pomeroy summed up the conclusions: "'traditional kind of rhetoric' producing an 'openly polemical form;'" that pamphlets are "well-worth studying from a non- or extra-literary perspective," and that there is a "rhetoric of pamphleteering—an organized, consistent, practical discourse that seeks to inform, evaluate or persuade" (372-373). Following Herbert A. Wichelns, he problematizes any attempt at direct transposition of the study of rhetoric to the study of pamphlets by asking, "When a discourse is originally delivered as a speech and subsequently published, with minimal or no changes, as a pamphlet, is it still a speech?" If the answer is "yes," then it implies that what the pamphlet adds as a publishing form is negligible; and begs the question as to what might constitute substantive changes that justify a different methodology. If the answer is "no," then is the difference to be understood "simply as a shift from orality to print?" (Pomeroy 368).

Apart from suggesting rhetoric as one of the methods of studying pamphlets, the initial premise, i.e. the presence of an audience, determines two other aspects of the form. First, pamphlets carry a sense of urgency, which arises from its goal to persuade and from its immediate contextual relevance. But the importance of immediate context—both in terms of the pamphlet's origin and the pamphlet's intended audience—also determine its ephemeral nature. Pamphlets often allude to people, events, texts or comments (here orality makes a re-entry), which make it more relatable to the present moment but also inscribe its inevitable ephemerality. Most of these references may not be remembered in the broad-strokes of history, and as we learnt while annotating *I Spy* can prove notoriously difficult to track down. Pamphlets, therefore, have the power to mobilize a reading public by forging an "imagined community" (Anderson 46) not across spaces necessarily but at a particular moment, delimiting the historic event with a shared symbolic code. At its satiric best, a pamphlet can be an inside joke at a specific moment in time, often protective of its own historic exclusivity with the use of contextual references. The word "ephemeral" is frequently used to describe

pamphlets (indeed, they are often seen as a subset of the broader category, "ephemera"), but it captures only their transience. Encapsulating both the qualities, I suggest the word 'momentary' is better suited to describe the pamphlet both as form and genre.

However, in order for a pamphlet to be recognized as such, it must embody elements of either its form and/or its genre. In order to achieve this, it can claim lineage in terms of form, style and content by creating a dialogue with predecessors: as Mikhael Bakhtin wrote, to live in the present but remember its past (Bakhtin 106). Orwell had claimed in his introduction that the pamphlet as a form "has persisted without radical change for hundreds of years, thought it has had good periods and its bad ones" (Orwell 1948, 7). While the memory of the form, to use Bakhtin's intuitive phrase, is present in pamphlets through their publishing history, generic memory is often asserted as a deliberate and strategic move. Pamphlets, should their authors choose to, can be momentary (ephemeral and contextual) and traditional (claiming lineage to earlier publications) at the same time. Again, as Geoff R. Webb writes, it is Bakhtin's theorisation which provides the "solution to the opposition between synchronic and diachronic poetics" (37). This conflict is particularly acute in the case of the "pamphlet," which functions, as Halasz writes, "as a floating signifier in the heterogeneity that characterizes the opportunities made available by print." Instead of defining the pamphlet from a literary point of view, Halasz offers a more nuanced, unfetishized description:

> The pamphlets' ephemerality associates them with the orality of gossip, their printedness with the authoritative texts that they materially resemble. It is their printedness that allows them to circulate like gossip. Thus equivocally positioned, pamphlets are an anomaly (Halasz 3).

While they looked for literary merit in the contemporary pamphlet, Orwell and Taylor may have overlooked a critical shift in its role as an agent of public opinion formation. Individuality had taken a backseat and the political pamphlet, which fearlessly competed in a frantic marketplace with contesting ideologies, relied more than ever on the authorial organization's distribution networks. In Bengal, which provides the immediate context for *I Spy*, the pamphlets, which were suppressed most proactively by government, were either communist or revolutionary nationalist (what the British called "terrorist"). Sanyal has written about the "effectiveness of the pamphlet press in educating public opinion about the political aims and methods of the revolutionary militants" (1). Although her work focuses on Bengal, she notes that it was part of a wider network of propaganda encompassing the United Provinces, Punjab, Bihar, Orissa and Delhi Province, which was preparing the groundwork for an armed revolutionary outburst (Sanyal 45). The communist and nationalist pamphlets drew on different rhetorical traditions and symbolisms but shared a common struggle to operate within the colonial policing system. Efforts to "stamp out the underground pamphlet press" proved futile, as they continued to flourish, mocking "all government efforts at detection and suppression" (Sanyal 41).

I Spy does not fit into any of these categories, nor is it an immediate call to action. It serves as a commentary on the decreasing space of the freedom of thought and speech in Bengal and takes a more distant view of its present moment than is usual for a pamphlet. It appears to have been printed at House's own personal expense—he paid Rs. 104 and 6 *anna* to the Modern Art Press for a thousand copies ("India Box"). We do not know of any reprint. The Bharati Bhavan Press, which is identified as the publisher in the title page, was situated

on College Street, not far from where House used to teach. It was, by all appearance, a niche publishing house that does not appear frequently in publisher catalogues. And yet, *I Spy* featured in a six-page "List of publications brought to the notice of the Intelligence Branch during the year 1937." A total of 169 titles were categorized under three heads in this list: Terrorist (25), Communist (99), and Otherwise Objectionable (45) ("List of publications," WBSA). In the following section, I try to understand the reasons behind *I Spy*'s local success but eventual erasure from popular memory in terms of how it performs its genre.

I Spy with My Little Eye

This section tries to situate *I Spy* within a liberal ideological framework, which it self-consciously gestures towards, before going on analyse its engagement with different genres. Isaiah Berlin, who knew House from his Oxford days, wrote a dismissive letter to Stephen Spender on 5 January 1938 after receiving the pamphlet:

> A very odd and frightening pamphlet has been written by Humphry House called "I spy with my little eye"…it is wildly paranoiac, asserts its kinship with Milton, which is remote…I tremble to think, what, with his natural rankness of mind and tendency to outgrow with long, dark dank creepers, must have happened to him in the congenial company of a lot of inferior Mulk Anands (Berlin, Kindle).

Berlin's confusion regarding *I Spy*, on the one hand, is understandable. His dismissal, on the other hand, is too lazy. The pamphlet begins with the narrator's journey through central Calcutta, where after a humid day's work, people are making their way to a football match with periscopes and umbrellas. Policemen stand at the Bowbazar crossing, signalling to each other across the chaos. The narrator makes his way through the China Town, "a narrow baffling street, full of gambling and carpentry and fake antiques, that leads to the Nanking Restaurant" (House 37) *en route* to Dalhousie Square, where he waits for the crowd on the trams to thin. On the tram the first of the "Questioners" appears—one among many amateur spies, who were employed casually by the police to shadow suspected individuals. There are a number of references to John Milton, more so than to any other single author, and predictably the pamphlet quotes a large chunk from the latter half of *Areopagitica* (1644), where Milton says: "the shop of warre hath not there more anvils and hammers waking…then there be pens and heads there…revolving new notions and ideas…trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement" (House 42). The lines immediately preceding (left out by House) refer to a "vast City; a City of refuge, the mansion house of liberty" (Milton 31). Does the omission indicate a subtle suggestion of Calcutta being that city, or does it, more literally, deny any similarity?

The epigraph of *I Spy* is also borrowed from Milton and once again, it is a passage on liberty from Sonnet 12: "I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs/ By the known rules of ancient liberty,/ When straight a barbarous noise environs me/ Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes and dogs" (ll. 1-4). There are significant quotations from *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671) as well, but what is worth pointing out here is the liberal tradition which House hearkens back to through his reading of Milton. Following traditional criticism of Milton, John Leonard sees this as the poet's response to hostile critics, but he acknowledges the possible attempt to distance himself from radical supporters. It is difficult to conclusively tell what interpretation of Milton House had in mind when he made a claim on his ideological lineage. *Areopagitica* was repeatedly cited as a key founding document of

Western liberal traditions. Sophia Dobson Collet in *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* compared his memorial against the Press Ordinance, which sought to restrict the freedom of newspapers by imposing licenses, to *Areopagitica*. In a 1944 symposium on *Areopagitica,* Mulk Raj Anand had claimed that the text was more important to India than to Britain as it could "help us preserve our civil lilberties" (Anand 148-49). It is unclear if, like Anand, House saw *Areopagitica* as a founding text of liberalism, or whether, given his own political commitments, he appreciated the value of restrictions upon freedom of speech, as Stanley Fish has pointed out with reference to Milton (187-188). As Berlin observed, House does indeed trace the pamphlet's lineage back to Milton. It is a defence of basic liberties but it remains to be seen how they are problematized and what generic conventions House plays within the process.

Considering its formal affinity to orality and the public speech, the pamphlet as a genre is not expected to contain heteroglossia, which Bakhtin identified as a useful analytic tool for the novel. House had probably realized that given his precarious position in Calcutta, he simply did not have an authoritative voice with which to denounce the colonizer's methods of suppression. But it is evident from the playful nature of the text, that the chosen genre was not simply a case of a forced hand owing to his complex identity in the given political context. *I Spy*'s initial mode of narration takes the form of a typically European modernist journey through the city. The review of the pamphlet which appeared in *The Hindu*, picked up on this and remarked, "Like Leopold Bloom, the author wanders through the city from morn to mid-night with his eyes open and his intelligent mind ticking busily" (Mukherji and Mukherjee 86). Despite its similarities in narrative structure and selection of details ("Now as I got hot with walking and my shirt stuck between the shoulder-blades" [House 37], "Four rows of men sitting in white Punjabis turned the Black Hole Corner and then the tram's head-lamp lit the grass between the lines" [House 38]), its affinity to the most obvious examples of perambulating male narrators, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) or James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is far-fetched. For one thing, the journey in *I Spy* is fundamentally different from its European counterparts owing to the constant sense of being surveilled as a political, historical subject. The plain-clothed questioner on the tram, a bizarre scene where the personal effects of one Mr. Zed are searched (House 43-46), and the shape-shifting Brahmin's interrogation of the narrator (House 61-65) enforce the idea of being under scrutiny.

Movements and changes in course are dictated by external factors which threaten the security of the narrator—such as the appearance of a Questioner. These informal informants were the subject of a debate that took place in the pages of *The Statesman* regarding their legality. It is injustice to read *I Spy* as House's attempt at imitating the canonical texts of European modernism. Even if the mode of narration carries echoes, the experiences are deeply rooted. Muzaffar Ahmed recalled almost identical experiences during his time in Calcutta in February 1923, which he published years later in his personal memoirs. They retrospectively lend credibility to the allegations House was making, although at the time they may have seemed "wildly paranoiac":

> My days were passing with this band of police-agents…One late afternoon, I decided to take a walk and went and sat down on the grass at Wellington Square. The watchers too settled themselves at a distance. Suddenly, I was possessed by a

> whim. Central Calcutta is a web of lanes and by-lanes. I thought it would be a worthwhile attempt to get rid of the watchers (quoted in Chattopadhyay 257).

I Spy bears a few other superficial similarities with *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses* in its use of multiple types of medium strung together by a narrative. This is uncommon in the traditional pamphlet, which is structured like a speech. There are lengthy quotes from newspapers—printed as a narrow newspaper column in the original, an absurdist interrogation, a dream sequence with a radio interlude; excerpts of poetry, an interview with a shape-shifting holy man, a radio broadcast, a public speech (where *I Spy* comes closest to the pamphlet form, if only by absorbing it as one of several elements), and even a university level question paper. House's method of stringing them together can seem forced at times: at one point the narrator simply starts telling himself "Two Tales of Questioners," whereas at a later point a dream sequence takes him to the Continental Hotel ("the brightest spot in Calcutta"), where Ilsa, the blonde saxophonist "from the northern shores" (House 50) reminds him of the Sibylline prophet. An explanation for these abrupt shifts may be found in House's direct reference to an article by Salvadore Dali that had appeared in *Le Surrealisme: Au Service de la Revolution* in May 1933 (House 45). The pamphlet can be analysed in Bakhtinian terms, as displaying a tendency for heteroglossia instead of the more traditional single speech act. It may also be seen as a surrealist dream sequence with abrupt juxtapositions dictated both by the narrator's interiority and by external circumstances.

The pamphlet closes with a rousing but unsuccessful speech by the narrator. He addresses the various ranks of spies—starting with "Readers, Librarians, Keepers of Manuscripts"—right down to a shadowy group of "anonymous unidentifiable thousands" who "swarmed into the dim background" (House 66). The speech hearkens back to the golden age of spydom when the Austrian Empire was under Metternich's influence and urges the local spies to observe the indignity under which they have to work. The watchers, after all, have no work hours to speak of since they must be perpetually alert but their working conditions reveal their merely instrumental position in the eyes of their commanders. In an ironic twist, which looks back at communist speeches, he proposes the formation of an "Amalgamated Union of Spies, Watchers and Informers," who could represent their demands and pave the way for "universal and confident spyarchy in this country." Society, the narrator argues, is "divided into two opposed classes—the Spies and the Spy-nots," but the ideal society which he foresees, will only have spies (House 66-69). A demography that is plunged into absolute surveillance and paranoia—a mode of discipline that is more insidious, however absurd it may have sounded at the time, than the monolithic gaze of the Big Brother. It is in this passage of the text, that it borrows most heavily from its generic traditions: within the broad framework of a pamphlet directed against "spyarchy," it introduces a public speech, which is satirized through a deliberately anarchic cross-reference to communist manifestos. The self-deprecating voice of the narrator fails yet again as the hazy mass of spies reaffirms the permanence of spyarchy in Calcutta, maintained by "a political power prepared to despise while using them, the traditional habits and psychology of the spies themselves" (House 69).

Conclusion

The House-Auden-Scott-Carritt circle problematize the Gramscian category of the "traditional intellectual." Even though neither qualifies as an "organic intellectual," who according to Chattopadhyay become "linked with the proletariat through the emerging communist organization," being outsiders they do not also have direct stakes in preserving the

"embourgeoisement," that helps them "tide over the colonial system which confined them to land and professions" (Chattopadhyay 3). Their discursive fields of operation are more complex than the distinction can immediately accommodate, given that they find themselves at the intersections of different axes of political identity and power. Even though Carritt is not physically present among the foot-soldiers of the communist movement in India in the 1930s, his presence within the ranks of the colonial bureaucracy—a position where an Indian would have faced greater scrutiny—gives him a vantage point that is otherwise inaccessible to the "organic" leaders of the movement, such as S.S. Mirajkar and P.C. Joshi. House, likewise, through first and second-hand accounts obtains a perspective on the operations of censorship of thought, writing and action, which may have been unavailable to Indian members of the Parichay group. His need to expand the generic definitions of the satirical pamphlet stems partly out of this: if he must assume the single authoritative voice that is typical of such pamphlets, he must reveal the sources of information from which he derives authority. The form he uses allows him to "do the police in many voices"[5] without compromising the people in sensitive positions who provide him with pieces of the jigsaw. *I Spy* is a work that is not only intensely political but is shaped, in terms of its generic complexities, in the most fundamental way by the political positioning of its author.

The question, then, is can *I Spy* be considered a pamphlet at all? So far as its physical form and status within the market-place of print literature are concerned, there seems to be no doubt: it fits in with Orwell's prescriptions in terms of length, quality of print, price. It is polemical in nature, turns on a point of ethics, and addresses a specific problem in its historical moment of production. It cannot, however, claim generic familiality with other pamphlets that were produced at the time in its geopolitical context, such as the revolutionary nationalist or communist publications. Its generic lineage to its closest kin, the satiric pamphlet, is also problematized by its refusal to rehearse the single speech-act with an identifiable authorial presence. The "literary pamphlet," whose apparent demise was lamented by Orwell and Taylor, spoke and added to an existing tradition in terms of generic features and the modes of analysis that could be deployed to decode them are consistent.

Even though *I Spy* is heavily allusive to its tradition, its heteroglossia and scrapbook nature, calls for a different and more diverse set of tools to interpret it than is required for the traditional pamphlet. It addresses "the opposition between synchronic and diachronic poetics" (Webb 37) by, on the one hand, asserting its position in a tradition of satirical pamphleteering, and, on the other, infusing the text with allusions to events and persons in its geographical and temporal locality. The former allows it to transcend the ephemerality of the pamphlet as a form, while the latter anchors it to its context, helping it escape allegations of being a purely self-indulgent exercise in literary gymnastics. There is an additional angle to House's citations to canonical authors: his argument is supported by his illustration of the "seditious" potential in the works of poets, novelists, dramatists and essayists, whose sanitized and commodified abridgements are imported into the colonies in order to promote a liberal ideology through partial (mis)readings. This has been dealt with at length in a forthcoming article.

Notes

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circle in Calcutta and for her archival work, which discovered the allusion to Salvador Dali. Rachel Thurley allowed us access to Humphry House's "India Box," without which none of this research would have been possible. Citations to the edition edited by Sajni Mukherji and Sujaan Mukherjee are given by the editors' names where the reference is to paratextual material, by the author where the reference is to the original text.

[2] For his dynamic with students, see Ashok Mitra, *Tin kuri dosh: Prathham chabbish bachhar, 1917-1940* [Seventy years: the first twenty-four, 1917-1940]. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 1990, 119.

[3] *Adda* is a Bengali word for an informal but socially coded gathering, usually of male members of the middle or upper-middle classes, involving discussions on art, culture, politics.

[4] Archival sources used include National Archives of India (NA), West Bengal State Archives (WBSA), and Humphry House's "India Box" from the personal archive of Rachel Thurley, digitized by the School of Cultural Texts and Records.

[5] T.S. Eliot's original title for *The Wasteland* (1922). See T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: a facsimile and transcript*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

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