# Visions Of A New Jerusalem:
## *Predictive Fiction In The Second World War*

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the
University of Leicester

by

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October 2002

Abstract

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The Second World War has become central to British political culture. Narratives about the Blitz and the "New Jerusalem" sought by the 1945 Labour administration are frequently evoked to justify and contextualise contemporary political action. Increasingly, however, the nature of these narratives has been called into question by historians of the period.

This thesis contextualises the imaginative fictions of the Second World War within relevant political and historiographical traditions. Focusing on fictions that imagined future or alternative societies, it is argued that there were a number of hidden discourses that called into question values that are assumed to have been dominant. The thesis goes on to examine the implications of these alternative discourses for both the historiography and literature of the period.

A number of linked genres are identified that deal with possible futures or alternatives to British society. Fears about impending catastrophe and invasion are examined alongside imaginative presentations of fascist and communist societies. Finally the dystopian and utopian fiction of the period is examined and compared with non-literary fears and hopes about the post-war world.

Through close engagement with the culture of the Second World War this study asks fundamental questions about the relationship between past, present and future. Examining how politics and culture interact, it aims to contribute to rethinking the way in which literature is studied and to argue for a reassessment of the historiography of the Second World War.

# Contents

## Illustrations and Charts

## Introduction: Searching for Jerusalem

> The future was uncertain, indeed, bound up with all kinds of decisions that might be taken, not in London or Manchester, but in Berlin and Leipzig; but it was not the habit of Englishmen to peer far into the future.[1]

This study will re-examine the predictions, speculations, dreams and wonderings that took place during the Second World War. In particular it will look at predictive, imaginative and fantastical writing and ask how this engaged with the dominant political and cultural discourses of the period. A large, and little known, body of British wartime texts have been uncovered which can be grouped generically as predictive fiction. These predictive fictions and attempts at political persuasion offer a vital and unique contribution to the historiography of the period. The novels draw on a number of different literary traditions and are motivated by a variety of political perspectives. What they share with each other and with large sections of the British wartime populace is a concern with and excitement about what the future may hold.

Wartime created a situation in which people found the future even more difficult to predict than ever. It did not, however, stop people from wondering what would happen after the war. Dreams of the New Jerusalems that could be built after the end of the conflict mingled with fears of being crushed under the Nazi jackboot. Utopian thoughts of "bluebirds over the white cliffs of dover" competed with Churchill's dystopian "new dark age" of "perverted science".[2] The future, despite, or perhaps because of its uncertainty, remained as a powerful ideological and symbolic battleground throughout the war.

The battle for the future was conducted in a multiplicity of arenas. This study will be visiting many of the military, political and personal terrains through which the search for the wartime future was played out. It  contends that a particularly valuable source for the study of the wartime conception of the future can be found in literature that explicitly imagined what form this future would take. A large range of fictional and non-fictional literature produced during the Second World War will be examined and interrogated to expose a series of wartime concerns. It will be argued that this source material contributes a unique and challenging perspective to studies of the period and

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[1] Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell, *Loss of Eden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p.97.

that its examination contributes significantly to the historiography of the Second World War.

**Debating Jerusalem**

Hearing about the impending Labour election victory in early July 1945, young Fabian Tom Meldrum rushed to tell his girlfriend. She was overjoyed, throwing her arms around Tom and shouting, "oh marvellous". "I had never known her to be so excited," recalled Tom. "She felt heaven had opened at last and now we were going to do something to put the country back on its feet."[3] For Tom and his partner the New Jerusalem had finally arrived, and as Austin Mitchell goes on to demonstrate in his anthology of recollections, *Election '45*, for him at least, and even for Tony Blair who provided the foreword for the book, the euphoric attachment to the institutions and achievements of the first majority Labour administration has endured.

Conversely for Correlli Barnett and other Thatcherites, whether in the ivory towers or Westminster, the war and the post-war government plunged Britain into socialist mismanagement and resulted in the destruction of the empire. Indeed for Barnett it was the very affirmation of this kind of progressive utopian optimism, which he labels "New Jerusalemism" which was responsible for Britain's decline.[4] Barnett portrays the New Jerusalemers as irresponsible romantic dreamers who failed to take account of what he portrays as absolute "economic realities" on the basis that "sense must bend to feeling, and facts to faith."[5] Despite this, or indeed because of this, for many left leaning people the 1945 election victory and the administration that followed it have taken on a totemic importance. To the extent that even Tony Blair, who is partial to dismissing so much Labour movement history, still felt it worthwhile to pay homage to the Attlee government in a book produced by that most unashamed of Old Labour figures, Austin Mitchell.

Full employment, the creation of the National Health Service, council housing and access to decent schooling made up the revolution that Attlee's government oversaw. Surely, this was indeed the New Jerusalem that had been promised in the Labour

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[2] Flower and Reeves, *The War: 1939-1945* (London: Cassell, 1960), p.124.
[3] Austin Mitchell, *Election '45: Reflections On The Revolution In Britain* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1995), p.92.
[4] Correlli Barnett, *The Audit Of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain As A Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.11.

manifesto of 1945, which had been given the suitably utopian title of *Let Us Face The Future*. Throughout the war this change had been heralded by figures across the public sphere. *Tribune* called for a "people's war", Orwell smelt "changes that will surprise the idiots who have no foresight", and *Picture Post* produced an edition in 1941 filled with pictures of the progressive, modern "new Britain" which was "the country we are fighting for."[6] JB Priestley claimed that the number two topic of conversation in the canteens and mess halls of Britain (after "the state of the war") was "the New World" and what could be done "to bring our economic and social system nearer to justice and security and decency?"[7]

However, the centre-left cannot claim the memory of the Second World War in its entirety. KO Morgan describes effectively how the Second World War has been used as a convenient reference point by commentators across the political spectrum.[8] While Mrs Thatcher would frequently call on the spirit of Churchill, Michael Foot remembered the war "as a crucible of revolution".[9] Yet, if the public memory and meaning of the Second World War have remained fluid, historians have also been unable to able to reach much consensus about the period. Although the history of Second World War studies is still relatively brief, it has managed to spawn countless orthodoxies, revisionisms and re-revisisionisms.

In 1969 it was still possible for Angus Calder to argue that *The People's War* "fills a gap".[10] The way that it filled that gap was not only through saying something new but also by producing a social history of Britain throughout the war at all. While Calder is generous in acknowledging the books he drew on in the construction of the study it is clear that the period in which this book was published was the beginning of the serious academic study of the Second World War. While Calder's book had been preceded by various official histories and Mass Observation collections, it was only at

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[5] Ibid, p.37.

[6] *Tribune* quoted in Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.142; George Orwell, "My Country right or left", *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), p.41; *Picture Post* quoted in Barnett, p.24.

[7] Quoted in Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, Random, 1994), p.162.

[8] KO Morgan, *The People's Peace: British History Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.3-5.

[9] Ibid, p.4.

[10] Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939-45* (1969; London: Pimlico, 1992), p.15.

the end of the 1960s that the social and political history of the war began to be discussed in detail. AJP Taylor's *English History 1914-1945* (1965) was followed by Arthur Marwick's *Britain in the Century of Total War* (1968) but Calder was the first social or political historian to focus exclusively on the Second World War.[11]

The history books of the late 1960s and early 1970s picked up on wartime utopian optimism in their commentaries on the war and the period that followed it. For Paul Addison the war functioned as a narrative of progress with the election of the Labour Government as the ultimate and logical destination of that narrative, while of course, for Angus Calder the war was "the people's war". Revisionists have increasingly questioned this utopian depiction of the war as a time of popular democratic radicalism laying the highway to the New Jerusalem. Calder later came to dismiss this depiction as a "myth", Pete Grafton was able to talk about "the people out of step with WWII" and by 1995 the title of Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo's book, *England Arise* could only be read as an ironic joke about the historiography of the period.[12]

This study follows in the wake of these revisionist accounts of the war. The war did not necessarily end in the election of the Labour government. There were all sorts of conflicts, set backs and changes of direction along the way to this New Jerusalem. Furthermore when Jerusalem was finally reached in 1945 it very quickly became jaundiced. The new homes for heroes returning from the war were slow to appear. A coal shortage coincided with an unusually cold British winter in 1947 prompting the Conservatives to adopt the alliterative slogan "shiver with Shinwell and starve with Strachey".[13] Most tellingly that perennial bug bear of Labour governments, the balance of payments crisis, quickly kicked in and led to both a growth in taxation and a cut in public service provision.[14] The slow death of the dream of the New Jerusalem perhaps reached its most dramatic, if slightly absurd, moment on 10th April 1951 when Gaitskell

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[11] The clearest picture of the state of Second World War scholarship before 1969 can probably be found in Calder's bibliography to *The People's War*, pp.624-639.

[12] Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992); Pete Grafton, *You, You and You! The People Out of Step with World War II* (Bristol: Pluto Press, 1981); Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *England Arise: The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[13] Kenneth O Morgan, *Labour In Power 1945-1951* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.332.

[14] Jim Tomlinson, "Reconstructing Britain: Labour In Power 1945-1951", Nick Tiratsoo (ed), *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1998), pp.83-85.

finally introduced charges on spectacles and on dentures supplied under the NHS. Ten days later Aneurin Bevan resigned saying he perceived "the beginning of the destruction of those social services in which Labour has taken a special pride and which were giving to Britain the moral leadership of the world."[15]

Labour undoubtedly had little room for manoeuvre and yet the government could celebrate the very real achievements that led, amongst others, a 1949 CIA report to conclude, "a large measure of democratic socialism has quietly revolutionised the national life of Great Britain".[16] Yet as Peter Hennessy observes much of this was achieved "by running existing plant and machinery and people flat out".[17] It is hardly surprising given these difficult circumstances that the measures the government took generated a degree of opposition from organisations like the British Housewives' League, which argued that Labour liked controls and rationing merely for their own sake.[18] The right, who obviously had a vested interest in painting the Government as socialist scrooges, latched on to this accusation. The accusation of "austerity for austerities sake" was perhaps made most wittily in the Moon cartoon over the page.

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[15] Michael Foot, *Auerin Bevan: A Biography. Volume Two: 1945-1960* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1973), pp.317-332.
[16] Peter Hennessy, "Never Again", Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones, *What Difference Did the War Make?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p.4.
[17] Ibid, p.7.
[18] Tomlinson, p.89.

*Figure 0.1*



Nick Tiratsoo (ed), *The Attlee Years* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), p.ii.

This satirical impression of the priorities of the Labour Party was perhaps further confirmed when the Labour left, led by Barbara Castle and Maurice Webb, went into revolt over Harold Wilson's headline grabbing, but largely peripheral, "bonfire of controls" in 1948.[19]

This is not the place to apportion blame for the failure of the post-war government to preside over a utopian transformation of Britain and to establish "an indestructible social and generational platform for the permanent political ascendancy of the peoples party".[20] The post-war government faced frequent criticisms from both the left and right as it attempted to negotiate the difficult economic problems of chronic manpower shortages and the balance of payments crisis. When US pressure to ensure the convertibility of sterling led to capital outflow and a stock market crash the government

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[19] David Rubinstein, "Socialism And The Labour Party: The Labour Left and Domestic Policy, 1945-1950", David E. Martin and David Rubinstein (ed), *Ideology and the Labour Movement: Essays Presented To John Saville* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p.227.

[20] Morgan, *Labour In Power*, p.300.

was forced to concentrate on avoiding complete bankruptcy rather than following its potentially more utopian urges.[21]

A more radical government may well have reacted differently, but, whether it would have been more successful in extending and developing a hegemonic British Socialism, will have to remain the stuff of counter-factual speculation. It is fair, however, to say that for all of the successes that the post-war government could count, it also faced difficult times that brought it into conflict with sections of the population. James Hinton claims that the "tolerance and long-suffering" of the British people under "the rigours of post-war reconstruction" signified that Labour had been at least partially successful in fostering "responsible citizenship amongst the masses".[22] Yet the world of rationing and austerity failed to match "the glorious future" that, for example, Dennis Healey had promised in his utopian 1945 election address "would make up for this annihilation of the past".[23]

## Wartime dreams

We should not allow the rather gloomy picture of revisionist history to blind us to the hopes and dreams of people in the years running up to 1945. One of the aims of this study is to present contemporary analyses of the war and to use these to contextualise debates about wartime politics and culture. Revisionist accounts of the war have a tendency to reduce the population to a lumpen and inert mass. There is undoubtedly some truth in the idea that much of the population had little interest in mainstream politics or intellectual pursuits. Mass Observation concluded that young women workers were often "so little interested in the war that they do not care whether their work is important or not".[24] While Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo claim that the majority of service women used Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA) sessions to mend their clothes.[25] While merely sewing during an ABCA lecture does not necessarily reveal a complete disengagement, neither does it inspire confidence in the

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[21] Ibid, pp.336-350.

[22] James Hinton, "1945 and the Apathy School", *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (Spring 1997), p.271.

[23] Sarah Benton, "The 1945 'Republic'", *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (Spring 1997), p.253.

[24] Nick Hayes, "Wartime Culture and 'Millions Like Us'", Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill, *'Millions Like Us'? British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p.22.

[25] Fielding et al, p.29.

existence of the idealised citizen/soldier.[26] Nevertheless, the level of interest that the majority of the populace maintained in what they perceived as the political sphere only tells half of the story. As James Hinton has argued in response to Fielding et al (what he refers to as "the apathy school") this analysis fails "to reflect adequately about the elusive and contradictory nature of their primary object of analysis: popular attitudes to politics."[27]

One Mass Observer described the attitude of men in the forces in the following terms: "the foremost characteristic of their outlook is cynicism about everything. They like democracy but they know damn well that all we are fighting for is British capital. Patriotism, the Flag and Empire are a lot of tripe – only they don't say tripe."[28] This cynicism may not have been an overt and coherent challenge to the policies of the coalition government but it does reveal the existence of political responses that were outside the boundaries prescribed by Westminster. Yet where could these responses be registered when the values espoused by Westminster were so widely disseminated? An example of this can be found in James Hinton's suggestion that "the pollster's category of 'don't know' may signify, not an empty head but irony, evasion, the defence of an alternative discourse."[29] We can interpret someone's silence in a number of different ways, it can mean that nothing is being said, that there is nothing to say, that no one wishes to speak to us, that we are being ignored or that we are not listening carefully enough.

Nick Hayes concludes that there is "little evidence that war forged a melding of vital personal and collective priorities; indeed, the process of war perhaps atomised, rather than unified."[30] Tom Harrisson's comments on life in the air-raid shelters support this idea. Harrisson noted that there were "few signs of any urge to share once an immediate threat was past" and observed "as many fresh disputes and frictions as new

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[26] I am thankful to domestic historian (and sewing enthusiast) Dr Lucy Faire for pointing out to me that the service women may have been sewing and listening to ABCA lectures at the same time. A fact which Fielding et al neglect, perhaps revealing their dressmaking inexperience.

[27] Hinton, p.268.

[28] Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan, *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-1949* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1984), p.114.

[29] Hinton, p.268.

[30] Hayes, "Wartime Culture and 'Millions Like Us'", p.23.

fellowships."[31] Harrisson's comments show the difficulties that faced those who were compelled, or given the opportunity, by wartime to engage in more communal forms of living. However, the blitz was primarily "a private, familial experience" which atomised people in exactly the way Nick Hayes suggests.[32] The majority did not experience the difficulties that Harrisson observed in the communal shelters, but, rather sat out the air-raids "at home, in their beds, under the stairs or elsewhere".[33] Many undoubtedly felt conscription into the various elements of the People's War project as a form of intrusive oppression on their ordinary life rather than as liberation from it. Army volunteer Walter Morrison noted that for many, involvement in the war effort was compelled with "little praise for the volunteer."[34]

People's atomisation and alienation, created a barrier to participation in the public sphere. Ideas that were widely held could easily have been omitted from public debates because those who held them were less likely to be in a position to contribute to those debates. This absence begs us to ask further questions about what alternative ideas were circulating during the war. If people were unhappy with big government, capitalism, the flag, planning, conscription and all the other features of both the wartime and post-war governments what would they have been happy with? Was an unwillingness to voluntarily sign up to the People's War project indicative of anything other than a personal and political conservatism? And if not, what was the nature and extent of this conservatism and how did it impact on wider political processes.

It is very difficult to re-assemble alternative ideas and values in part because so much of the public sphere had become co-opted into the mainstream People's War discourse. Hayes notes that "many contemporaries drew optimistic conclusions from the changing borders of wartime cultural lifestyle" and gives the example of an enthusiastic description of communal living in factory hostels that could be found in *The Architectural Review*.[35] Yet, the reality was significantly different. Hostels and the social, educational and cultural life associated with them, were frequently highly unpopular with workers. Indeed, many people expended a great deal of energy in order

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[31] From Harrisson's *Living Through The Blitz* quoted in Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *England Arise: The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.25.
[32] Fielding et al, *England Arise*, p.25.
[33] Ibid, p.25.
[34] Grafton, title page.
[35] Hayes, "Wartime Culture and 'Millions Like Us'", p.24.

to avoid being placed in a hostel.[36] As KO Morgan noted, the "images and slogans conflicted in crucial respects with the social reality".[37] Hayes' example does not simply show a divergence between popular opinions and aspirations and government policy, it also demonstrates how uniform the public sphere was even when it was out of step with ordinary people. The government established the hostels, but they were advocated through both specialist periodicals and the popular film *Millions Like Us*. The state, the professions and the arts both high and low were frequently united in advocating the People's War ideology. In many ways it became unpatriotic to question these wartime values. Yet beneath this hegemonic gloss the country was far less uniform than much of its culture might have suggested.

KO Morgan argues that a People's War "was generating a new people's culture, with clear radical implications".[38] Yet, as Hayes shows, CEMA, the organisation that was largely responsible for disseminating this new "people's culture" was unable to touch anything like the majority of people. The missionary work of CEMA could more accurately be said to have reached "'thousands' than 'millions like us'.[39] Similarly, despite the frequently articulated wartime swing to the left, less than a third of those eligible to vote in 1945 registered a vote for the Labour Party.[40] The dominant culture of the war has been observed and accurately described; yet the extensiveness of the dissemination of People's War values has perhaps been over-estimated. From the perspective of mainstream culture and politics the Britain of the 1940s can look homogenous.

The very extent to which the People's War ideology became culturally and politically hegemonic can make it difficult for us to discover any alternatives to it. In addition to a party political coalition, the Second World War saw the arts and artist brought into the service of the state. This had the effect of making it far more difficult for dissenting opinions to emerge. It also created the space within which a consensus could be forged within a newly enlarged establishment. Those who worked together increasingly discovered that they thought alike. Arthur Koestler worriedly summed this process up in 1944, saying that "during the last two years the intelligentsia has to a large

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[36] Ibid, p.25.
[37] KO Morgan, *The People's Peace*, p.17.
[38] Morgan, *Labour In Power*, p.318.
[39] Nick Hayes, "'Good Culture' and the Workers", Hayes and Hill, pp.233-235.
[40] Fielding et al, p.63.

extent been absorbed as temporary civil servants" while, TS Eliot sarcastically observed that, "converted left-wing speakers have undertaken to help on the Home Front".[41] Neil Stammers has summed up the various processes through which political pluralism was discouraged by arguing that the "government made serious attempts to manipulate public opinion by restrictions on civil liberties, a reliance on secrecy and its own propaganda", concluding that "the political system was, in many respects, a closed one after the formation of the coalition government and came to resemble a one-party state."[42]

While Stammers' description of political culture in Second World War Britain may be somewhat overstated, it is undoubtedly true that any attempt to effectively dissent in a state in which government, political parties, press, trade unionists, major capitalists and the arts are in substantial working agreement, is highly problematic. The growth of idiosyncratic political formations like Common Wealth is one possible response to these conditions.[43] Yet, the forging of entirely new vehicles for political dissent such as Common Wealth was an unusual response to the closing down of the conventional channels of public discourse. Common Wealth was created by energetic, educated, privileged individuals with a great deal of experience of political activity. Furthermore, it operated, for the most part, within the bounds of the ideological consensus of the People's War. Most dissenting responses to the "closed political system" of the Second World War were likely to have been far more fragmentary and embryonic than Common Wealth.

**Where can we find alternatives?**

Any attempt to look at culture beyond parliamentary and industrial politics, the arts and the press - in short the majority of the public sphere - is initially left floundering. Outside of these places, where else is there that dissent could have registered? It is relatively easy to find escapism, the cinema, for example provided generous amounts of this. Yet, in and of itself this hardly points to a significant rejection of People's War values. As in *Brave New World*, state sponsored leisure pursuits were all part of the government's design for the people. However, that the most

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[41] Weight, R, "State, Intelligentsia and the Promotion of National Culture in Britain 1939-1945", *Historical Research* LXIX, 168 (February 1996), pp.93-95.

[42] Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties In Britain During The 2nd World War: A Political Study* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.234.

[43] See Appendix Two for further discussion of Common Wealth.

popular film of the war was *Gone With The Wind* revealed a public appetite for something other than the ideology of the People's War.[44]

*Gone With The Wind* repackaged war as American, romantic Technicolor escapism. It was, however, a form of escapism that sat in marked opposition to British films like, *Fires Were Started* and *Millions Like Us*, which were squarely within the People's War orthodoxy. Tom O'Brien, Secretary of the Theatrical and Kine Employees Union expressed this discomfort with the non-People's War values of American commercial film when he argued in 1943 that, "the irresponsible purveyors of pleasure were not Nazi propagandists but businessmen, possibly American, and especially film-makers."[45] In the midst of widespread official and public concern about Nazi propaganda techniques O'Brien felt moved to warn the Labour movement about the potential ideological power of American cinema. O'Brien, at least, felt that the People's War was not being furthered by exposure to Hollywood. While the romance of a film like *Gone With The Wind* was not incompatible with the People's War ideology, the fact that people flocked to see it in such great numbers perhaps attested to a desire for something to provide relief from the omnipresence People's War rhetoric.

People may not have felt moved to enter into direct opposition to the values the government was espousing. Yet, not all invitations to participate in public celebration of People's War values were embraced. The BBC's Listener Research department, for example, discovered that factory workers frequently parodied attempts to co-opt workers into propaganda in programmes such as *Award for Industry*.[46] The mere fact of the vast apparatus that was developed to construct the People's War culture points to the way in which a national culture had to be actively, even cynically, built. It did not simply emerge naturally. The BBC consciously attempted to "bind the nation together as a community" according to a policy document circulated by Listener Research in 1940.[47] Yet, Vera Lynn remained as one of the radio's stars, a fact which she attributed to "reminding the boys what they were really fighting for, the precious personal things

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[44] James Chapman, "British Cinema and 'The People's War', Hayes and Hill, p.61.
[45] Jeff Hill, "'When Work Is Over': Labour, Leisure and Culture in Wartime Britain", Hayes and Hill, p.247.
[46] Sian Nicholas, "The People's Radio: The BBC and its Audience, 1939-1945, Hayes and Hill, p.75.
[47] Ibid, p.73.

rather than the ideologies and theories."[48] Journalist Hugh Pilcher, writing in *Town and Country Planning* in 1943, observed the prevalence of this attitude in noting that ideas about urban planning often ended "at the garden gate".[49] For Vera then, like many others, the personal triumphed over the political leaving, possibly, no such thing as society only individuals and their families.

Vera Lynn and *Gone With The Wind* were not in opposition to the People's War ideology, but their popularity perhaps illustrates some chinks in the armour of the People's War by showing alternative values that co-existed with the hegemonic discourse. Alone, these provide nothing more than glimmers, but when placed alongside the usual revisionist evidence we start to see a more rounded picture of a country in which the People's War was only one story amongst many.

The People's War story of the blitz, for example, was disseminated through a myriad of official and semi-official sources. The children's novel *Blitz Kids* (1941) is filled with cheery working class endurance and assurances that "if Hitler had known how well we got on, with all his bombings, and how easy it is to move house when you haven't got much to move he would have been mad as a mad dog, I bet."[50] However the official/popular version of the Blitz, which asserted that Britain could take it, is challenged by a Liverpool girl's air raid recollection that "Hitler would have got the better of us – a couple more nights, there was no question about it".[51] Equally myths around evacuation are called into question by a London boy's memory of the malnutrition, scabies and impetigo that he suffered due to the neglect and abuse of the family that he was evacuated to.[52] There is a huge font of these stories, yet they leave us with an absence. They also leave us with a rather negative and depressing view of the British people as simply selfish and unsociable. If Vera Lynn is right, however, and people saw a clear opposition between "the precious personal things" and "the ideologies and theories" we start to form some sort of positive picture of wartime values beyond the People's War ideology.

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[48] John Baxendale, "'You and I – All Us Ordinary People': Renegotiating 'Britishness' in Wartime", Hayes and Hill, p.73.
[49] Tony Mason and Peter Thompson, "'Reflections on a revolution'? The political mood in wartime Britain", Nick Tiratsoo (ed), *The Attlee Years* (London: Pinter, 1991), p.59.
[50] Elinor Mordaunt, *Blitz Kids* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), p.66.
[51] Grafton, p.33.
[52] Ibid, p.14.

A Fabian survey of billeting arrangements in 1939-40 found a key problem of evacuation households to be the "curtailment of privacy in daily living".[53] This can be read as retreat from collective responsibility into selfishness. Alternatively, it is possible to detect a kind of resistance to top-down, state-led, solutions to what people perceived as personal problems. Furthermore, it is not helpful to read wartime behaviour as a reaction to a grand narrative of progress towards greater collectivism. We should understand wartime behaviour as a response to a particular, and often unpleasant, set of social and economic circumstances and political regulations. As Neil Stammers has argued compulsion formed a central part of wartime experience. Giving up privacy because the state demanded it cannot in these circumstances be read as necessarily progressive, especially when the fear of an erosion of privacy was central to concerns about the encroachment of the totalitarian state, as Chapter Six will discuss. People's determination to hang onto their privacy, dignity and humanity in the face of the bureaucratic machinery of the wartime state needs to be considered more sympathetically. There is a need to re-examine what has been written off as apathy and selfishness and to ask whether it actually masks a more positive series of ideas and practices.

In order to move towards a picture of popular attitudes outside the mainstream we need to use a large variety of sources in a creative way. Norman Baker has examined sport in the war; Pete Grafton has used oral history; Pat Kirkham has produced a reading of the politics of wartime fashion; Steven Knight has examined the wartime detective story while John Costello weaves together an array of sources to create a history of sexuality during the war.[54] All of these different approaches to social and cultural history have revealed new pictures of the Second World War. Asking questions of sources other than cabinet papers or elections, strikes or census statistics can offer a valuable qualitative dimension to history. Furthermore, it can trigger new lines of enquiry and force us to ask questions that are more difficult to answer empirically.

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[53] Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *England Arise: The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.22.
[54] Norman Baker, "A More Even Playing Field? Sport During and After the War" Hayes and Hill; Pat Kirkham, "Beauty and Duty: Keeping Up The (Home) Front" and Steven Knight, "Murder in Wartime", Pat Kirkham and David Thoms, *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1995; John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985).

All of these retellings of the story of the war begin from the perspective of asking what did happen. They all search for social and cultural happenings that illustrate the experience of wartime in a new way. This study sets out, however, to discover the things that did not happen, to look for the hopeless dreams and the unachievable desires. The predictive fiction of the war can potentially give us a window into some of the more extreme fanciful and imaginative responses to wartime. Predictive fiction allows us to leapfrog over what actually happened and to speculate on what might have happened and what people wished, or alternatively feared, would happen.

This will not be a "counter-factual" history of the post-war world of the kind popularised by novels such as Philip K Dick's *The Man In The High Castle*, Robert Harris' *Fatherland* or Len Deighton's *SSGB* and used in a more self-consciously serious way by Niall Ferguson, Norman Longmate or Geoffrey Hawthorn [55] It will, however, draw on the counter-factual mode as a way of examining history and historical processes. The argument for looking at possibilities rather than at facts alone has an undeniable logic; how can you examine the significance of what *did* happen unless you look at what *could have* happened? In this sense all historical study employs counter-factual techniques.

The fiction that will be examined in this study is for the most part, not counter-factual in the sense that I outlined above. Novelists writing about future or alternative societies during the Second World War are more accurately described as predictive, imaginative or fantastical writers. Their vision of the future proceeds from an understanding of the contemporary world, yet their studies of the future have no "facts" to write in opposition to. Nevertheless, the idea of the counter-factual has been enormously influential in the way I have approached this study. The novels examined provide a starting point for counter-factual history. They demonstrate some of the alternative possibilities for social development perceived by contemporary observers. These perceived alternatives provide one way in which we can begin to assess the inevitability, successfulness and desirability of what actually occurred.

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[55] Philip K Dick, *The Man In The High Castle* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965); Robert Harris, *Fatherland* (London: Random, 1992); Len Deighton, *SS-GB: Nazi-occupied Britain 1941* (London: Cape, 1978); Niall Ferguson (ed), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Picador, 1997); Norman Longmate, *If Britain had Fallen* (British Broadcasting Corporation and Hutchinson of London, 1972); Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding In History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

**What is predictive fiction?**

The texts, which this study examines, have been chosen on the basis of genre. A complete listing of and introduction to these primary texts is contained in Appendix One. This selection has not been edited on the basis of quality, relevance or political, moral or ideological leanings. The study has identified and categorised a series of Second World War texts that imagined either future or alternative social orders. These texts have been imperfectly labelled as *predictive fiction* although persuasive fiction would in many ways have been a better description as most have little or no interest in actually predicting the future but every interest in contributing to what that future might be.

Under the label predictive fiction, therefore, are conflated various different strands of writing that were being produced during the Second World War. Ten years later these novels would for the most part have all been labelled as science fiction. Yet, as argued in Chapter One, in the 1940s this term was not generally used as a way of describing a body of domestic fiction. There were endless predictive and fantastic fictions produced by British authors, a number of American science fiction magazines available, some British science fiction fans and even a few self-defining British science fiction authors such as the young John Wyndham. Nonetheless, together these elements did not constitute a mutually supportive network with a unified and identifiable constituency of readers.[56]

The predictive fiction that is examined in this study is therefore made up of a diverse series of texts, written throughout the war with clearly disparate audiences in mind. I have found no evidence that the majority of the authors that I discuss were aware of each other's work. However, many make reference to HG Wells and a tiny minority are aware of one or more of the other better-known authors such as Olaf Stapledon. It is a collection of disparate texts grouped loosely by subject matter and an engagement with a tradition of predictive writing stretching back into the nineteenth century. This diversity is one of the most exciting elements of the material that has been uncovered. This is not a study of a lost school whose members all produced variations

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[56] For further information about the growth of Science Fiction and Science Fiction fandom in Britain see Michael Ashley (ed), *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine: Part Two 1936-45* (London: New English Library, 1975) and Harry Warner

on the same literary party line and if it were, the repetitions, overlaps and common ground would be far less significant. The fact that a disparate variety of authors chose to address similar themes using a series of related literary conceits alerts the reader to more fundamental social and cultural trends.

The predictive fiction of the Second World War throws up everything from immediate deliberations on Hitler's coming invasion to discussions about the nature of the afterlife. Utopias and dystopias abound, but so too do novels about invasion and discussions about impending global catastrophes, man-made or otherwise. Some are imaginative and thought-provoking whereas others are dull, lifeless and exceptionally foolish in their social and political prescriptions. Ultimately, as a group they have nothing more in common than the fact that they were produced between the end of the 1930s and the middle of the 1940s and that they all present an alternative to the contemporary world either politically, ideologically, spiritually, temporally or geographically.

## How am I going to do it?

Green economist Victor Anderson notes that "the world is not really separated into subject areas in the same way that university buildings and departments are. There really is no such thing as an economic system separate from a social system or a culture or an ecological system. The more realistic a study of something is, the more interdisciplinary it necessarily has to be."[57] This study is therefore interdisciplinary, drawing on a variety of disciplines and theoretical traditions, because it seeks to explain the world in a meaningful way.

While this study focuses on a corpus of imaginative works of fiction, it reads somewhat differently to more conventional accounts of literature. In particular it frequently moves away from the core texts in order to demonstrate that a wider context exists for texts that could otherwise be dismissed as eccentric oddities. This is not simply a question of providing a historical background on top of which to situate a literary analysis. Rather it is an attempt to show a series of cultural, social and political

Jr, *All our Yesterdays: an informal history of science fiction fandom in the forties* (Chicago: Advent, 1969).
[57] Victor Anderson, "Can there be a Sensible Economics", Molly Scott Cato and Miriam Kennett (eds), *Green Economics: Beyond Supply and Demand To Meeting People's Needs* (Aberystwyth: Green Audit Books, 1999), p.18.

conversations into which these texts tried to make an intervention. It is the first time that many of the texts, which this study focuses upon, have been analysed and certainly the first time that they have been considered together. This is neither a conventional literary study of the forms and inter-relationships of a particular genre, nor a piece of historical analysis grounded in verifiable and indisputable facts, figures and empirical research. It is therefore, an account that draws on inter-disciplinary concerns and makes an intervention into debates about both the literature and the political, social and cultural life of the period.

Many of the political alternatives that British society could have taken during and after the Second World War have vanished forever. The hopes and dreams of the populace dissipate with the passing of time and are gradually displaced by new material and ideological conditions and imaginative responses to them. This study uses an imperfect and idiosyncratic source to try and recover some of those imagined futures and possibilities. Focusing on predictive fiction, novels which imagine future or alternate realities, it exposes new perspectives on the war that challenge both the "people's war" analysis and the various revisions that have been made to it. The marginal discourses of imaginative fiction are charted through the close analysis of a series of neglected fictional and non-fictional literary sources and related to wider public debates and social and cultural forces.

One of the aims of this study is therefore to examine the ideological components of different political positions. It begins by examining the politics of the war using the conventional conceptual tool of the left/right spectrum. Much of the historiography of the period has centred around questions about whether a swing to the left occurred during the war or not. The study charts the political positions of various predictive fictions and pays special attention to representations of the regimes of the far left and right. However, discussion of left and right is frequently shown to be an inadequate way to analyse the political positions of the period. The myriad of different ways of being left and right require the development of a more sophisticated conceptual apparatus. Furthermore, some fictions present visions of the world that are extremely difficult to characterise in left/right terminology. A variety of questions are suggested by close engagement with the predictive fiction of the Second World War: What role is there for the state and how can we avoid it becoming tyrannical? Is there a place for the market or for capitalism? What vision is there of the nature of gender, sex and sexual relations?

Can and should liberty, equality and democracy be guaranteed for all? What role does technology have in bringing about social advancement?

In order to answer these questions adequately we need to be sensitive to the complexity of wartime ideology. Mainstream political debate, for example, often ignored the issue of gender. Morgan and Evans argue that the Beveridge Report and other wartime policy initiatives assumed that the subject was male and that "the contract under negotiation was between men and the state".[58] The absence of women from the mainstream political debates of the war is one factor that leads Penny Summerfield to contend that a Marxian class analysis is an inadequate way of explaining how women's experience changed throughout, and as a result of, the Second World War. Summerfield argues that we should see it rather as a complex interaction of capitalist and patriarchal interests in which "the state, employers, male trade unionists, and husbands" as well, presumably, as the women themselves, combined to create the particularity of wartime experience of gender.[59]

This study is a political examination of its object of study, but where politics is understood in its widest sense. Questions about the dissemination of mainstream party politics throughout the public sphere are considered side by side with issues of gender, domestic life, race and class. An analysis that is pluralistic and catholic in its definition of politics is required by source material that comprises of so many eclectic political responses. The novels reveal debates about modernity, sexuality, technology and spirituality and advocacy of eugenics, theocracy, anarchism and biological engineering. A flexible and open-minded consideration of what comprised the political culture of wartime Britain is therefore essential in producing a meaningful reading of these texts.

This study will show that predictive fiction reflected many of the concerns of the political mainstream in wartime Britain. It will detail the frequent endorsements of the ideas of planning and the regular rejections of what were seen as the continental alternatives of fascism and communism. However, the predictive fiction of the 1940s did not uncritically reproduce the values and politics of the ideological mainstream.

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[58] David Morgan and Mary Evans, The Road to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Orwell and the post-war reconstruction of citizenship", Brivati and Jones, p.55.
[59] Penny Summerfield, "Women and social change in the Second World War", Brivati and Jones, p.70.

Criticisms were voiced, reforms were suggested and ideas were worked through in ambitious thought experiments.

The following chapters will demonstrate that predictive fiction engaged in a serious and sustained engagement with issues of public policy and personal life. The new perspectives that an examination of these fictions can contribute to the understanding of mainstream, wartime politics and culture are extremely valuable. However, perhaps more uniquely predictive fiction can enable us to access some of the alternatives to mainstream hegemonic culture. These alternatives obviously did not come to pass and nor is it the contention of this study that they were serious challengers for power and influence. Yet, predictive fiction gives us access to some of the by-ways that it is all too easy to forget when travelling down the major motorways of history. The possibilities that were forgotten or trampled down, the seeds that never germinated and the fears that were uncomfortable to voice, could all find some space in predictive fiction.

# Chapter One: Writing Jerusalem

> Writers found themselves in a peculiarly difficult position when they attempted to write about the war while it was still going on. Specifically, they had difficulty conceiving endings.[1]

How do you write a story when you do not know how it is going to end? One answer is side step the question of endings altogether as, Alan Munton argues, many of the writers of the Second World War did. Alternatively, you can make up any ending that you want, or, perhaps more interestingly, any ending that you do not want. Yet, if a novel is going to engage its readership, any old made up ending will not suffice. The end needs to follow the beginning and the middle in someway that seems credible to the reader. The predictive fictions that this study will concern itself with suggest ends to the social and political story of the war. However fantastical they may appear at first glance they are forged out of the raw materials of the literature, culture and politics of the Second World War and the years that preceded it. This study asks how predictive fiction interacts with wider social and cultural forces in Second World War Britain. It looks at how literature reflects cultural attitudes, how it engages in political dialogue and what, if any, impact it has on the development of the debates of the wartime public sphere.

Before this is attempted, it is necessary to establish the literary and cultural parameters in which Second World War predictive fiction operates. This chapter will examine alternative forms of literature that are flourishing during the war and give a brief account of the dominant critical understanding of Second World War fiction. It will argue that the existing understanding of what fiction is being produced during the war is too narrow and that to gain a better understanding of the period there is a need to widen the parameters of our survey. The chapter will then go on to look at the ancestry of predictive fiction and demonstrate the existence of a long tradition of, often ignored, British predictive fiction. It will argue that the concerns of Second World War predictive fiction grow out of an interaction between the forms and pre-occupations of twentieth century predictive writing and the particular conditions of wartime Britain.

Underpinning this thesis, then, are two central arguments about the inter-connectedness of literature and history. Firstly, it asserts that a reading of a society's imaginative culture can contribute to an understanding of the wider social, political and

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[1] Alan Munton, *English Fiction of the Second World War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p.2.

cultural processes in that society. Secondly, the argument is made that an understanding of a wider historical context is at least helpful, and possibly essential, in generating a meaningful reading of literature.

The text is formed by society at the same time as it influences the creation and development of that society's history and culture. Furthermore, the society, history and culture with which the text is interacting is often highly diverse. Assorted texts pick up on different cultural and political trends; represent them in multifarious ways and go on to create an array of varied responses. As the Introduction argued, the culture of the Second World War has often been understood through the conceptual framework of the People's War, yet increasingly the diverse, class specific, gendered and geographical experiences of the "millions like us" have been asserted. Mark Rawlinson has emphasised how wartime writing responded to the tension between this diversity and government attempts to impose order on it.

> I have argued that the character of wartime writing was strongly determined by its relations to the discourses with which, in the broadest sense, Britain's war effort was administered. The complexity of those discourses-correlated with the fundamental structure of war but disseminated in the myriad daily communiqués and conversations-does not permit the description of wartime culture in terms either of top-down propaganda or of spontaneous consensus. In consequence it is not plausible to ascribe straightforwardly consensual or oppositional meanings to many wartime texts.[2]

The text is neither outside of history, nor is it a passive reflector of material and ideological conditions. Texts respond to the contemporary world in interesting and challenging ways, sometimes supporting them, often stretching the envelope of the possible and occasionally entering into all-out opposition to hegemonic values. In this sense it is possible to extend Rawlinson's claim that wartime texts are neither "straightforwardly consensual or oppositional" to all texts. Even the most stridently dissident text operates in relation to the hegemony and therefore acknowledges the importance and authority of the dominant discourse. Likewise, the most loyal defence of the status quo invariably exposes contradictions that lie within the social and economic order to the critical reader. An understanding that literature and culture are multi-faceted, complex and inter-dependent is an essential starting point for a study like this which straddles the fields of literary and historical studies.

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[2] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.205.

**The fiction of the Second World War**

Phyllis Lassner opens *British Women Writers of World War II* by quoting Salman Rushdie's comment that "if you think of World War II – American, Germany and Italy all produced extraordinary novels about it; England didn't".[3] Lassner then goes on (like the many other critics specialising in the literature of the Second World War who came before her) to challenge this popular understanding about the paucity of British Second World War fiction. Lassner, however followed this cry for a re-examination of the period by challenging the assumptions of those who had attempted to construct a canon of Second World War fiction. The concentration on combat writing she argued had excluded large swathes of interesting material and, as Lassner noted, women wrote much of this material.

Like the fiction that Lassner identifies, predictive fiction is frequently ideologically and stylistically as odds with what has become understood as the mainstream of Second World War fiction. It offers a very different perspective on the war from the type of fiction that is generally seen as being dominant in the period. Much has been made of the idea that the fiction of the Second World War is essentially documentary in ambition. The problems of wartime, alongside a sharpening of consciousness in the face of possible death are seen as having combined with a leftist political agenda to make the social realist novel or short story characteristic of the period. Alan Munton argues:

> In these circumstances the most characteristic war fiction written during the war was short, limited in scope, intense in feeling, fragmentary in structure and often climaxed or closed off by a known historical event.[4]

There is a tendency to read wartime fiction in an almost sociological fashion and to treat it in much the same way as the Mass Observation surveys of the same period. Alan Munton has been open about this, stating:

> I have also been influenced by his view that war fiction is closely related to autobiography - to such an extent that on occasions I have, perhaps rashly, written as if war fiction and war autobiography differ very little from each other.[5]

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[3] Phyllis Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II* (London: Macmilliam, 1997), p.1.
[4] Munton, p.21.
[5] Ibid, p.2.

This approach has been appropriate for much of the fiction that emerged during the Second World War. Texts like Dan Billany's *The Trap* (1950) or Richard Hillary's *The Last Enemy* (1942) are very clearly and consciously about the experience of the Second World War.[6] It is hardly surprising, then, that critics have chosen to read them in the way Munton outlines. Although it is worth noting that this is not necessarily the only way to read these fictions, *The Last Enemy* for example would lend itself to a very different reading if considered alongside Rex Warner's air force dystopia *The Aerodrome*.[7]

The critical methodology of Munton and others seems particularly appropriate when applied to the many examples of wartime writing that seem to have had serious documentary ambitions. Alexander Baron's *From the City, From the Plough* (1948), although written slightly after the war, provides a powerful example of this genre.[8] Baron's novel dispassionately traces the fortunes of a regiment destined to die in Normandy. The decimation of the regiment with no regard for class, age or personality suggests the ideal of equality of sacrifice that was central to the People's War ideology. The close ties between the People's War and the dominant wartime fictional mode are further shown by other examples from the Second World War canon like Henry Green's story of the Auxiliary Fire Service, *Caught* (1943), JB Priestley's factory story, *Daylight on Saturday* (1944), or the stream of "poems, stories and reportage by previously unknown men and women caught up in the war" that appeared in the pages of *Penguin New Writing*.[9] Indeed, Alan Munton places this relationship between the People's War, and what he argues, was the characteristic literature of the Second World War, at the centre of his *English Fiction of the Second World War*.[10]

The introduction to this study argued that a critique of the People's War and People's War historiography are necessary components of an understanding of the Second World War. Correspondingly, there is a need to look wider than the social

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[6] Dan Billany, *The Trap* (1942; London: Faber and Faber, 1946); Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (London: Macmillian, 1943).

[7] Rex Warner, *The Aerodrome: A Love Story* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1941). *The Aerodrome* will be considered in more detail in Chapters Two, Three and Six.

[8] Alexander Baron, *From the City, From the Plough* (London: Johnathan Cape, 1948).

[9] Henry Green, *Caught* (London: Hogarth, 1943); JB Priestley, *Daylight on Saturday: a novel about an aircraft factory* (London : Heinemann, 1944); Bernard Bergonzi, *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background 1939-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.22.

[10] Munton, p.1.

realist fiction that has so often been associated with the People's War ideology. This study will demonstrate the existence of a series of texts which offered a radical alternative to social realism and which correspondingly required a different kind of reading. The conventional anatomy of wartime fiction was born out of a study of literary magazines that promoted documentary fiction. Yet, *Horizon* and *Penguin New Writing* were following their own aesthetic and political agenda rather than attempting to represent the diversity of fiction being produced in the period. Any survey skewed towards magazines like these is bound to miss writing being produced in other modes. Critics such as Munton, Hewison, Piette and Bergonzi have undoubtedly uncovered large amounts of material that confirm the parameters within which they have described literary form and content during the war.[11] Yet, the appeal of these types of fictions often remained confined to an educated and cultured minority.

Six months after the start of the war the Daily Express commented that ordinary soldiers wanted only thrillers, "the gorier the better".[12] Furthermore, it was James Hadley Chases' decidedly lowbrow, hardboiled thriller, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (1939) that topped the wartime best-sellers list.[13] Orwell noted that *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* enjoyed its greatest popularity during the Battle of Britain and the blitz.[14] This appetite for all things hardboiled was perhaps not what Robert Hewison had in mind when he wrote "war was a stimulus to the appreciation of books, painting and music" in his chapter on the RAF, AFS, and air-raid fiction generated by the blitz.[15] The popularity of *No Orchids* provides a useful context within which we can assess the literary myths of the blitz articulated by Hewison and others. The thought that people did not escape from the problems of war by gaining a love for high art, but rather by escaping, as Orwell says, into "cruelty and sexual perversion" is unsettling.[16] Yet, *No Orchids* no more summarises wartime culture than a People's War text like Robert

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[11] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London 1939-45* (Newton Abbot Readers Union, 1978); Adam Piette, *Imagination at War: British Fiction and Poetry 1939-45* (London: Papermac, 1995).

[12] Steve Chibnall, "Pulp Versus Penguins: Paperbacks Go To War", Pat Kirkham and David Thoms, *War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War Two* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995), p.140.

[13] Nick Hayes, "An 'English War', Wartime Culture and 'Millions Like Us'", Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill, *'Millions Like Us'? British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p.280.

[14] George Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish", Peter Davison, Ian Angus, and Sheila Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.349.

[15] Hewison, p.50.

[16] Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish", p.353.

Greenwood's description of cross-class solidarity in a voluntary ambulance team, *The Squad Goes Out* (1943).[17] Both novels, however, need to be considered as components of a multifaceted wartime experience.

The diversity of wartime writing is further demonstrated by Rachel Anderson study of wartime romantic fiction. She describes the way in which the romantic novel responded to war by offering escapism rather than documenting and realising the reality of total war.

> As the relentless lava [of war] swept over them, the romantic novelists set to work with their pens, as stoutly as the landgirls with their spades, to do their bit for Britain. In wartime their function, to bring some romance and happiness into an otherwise dreary world, became much more apparent, and they flung themselves at their task with great zest and plenty of metaphors. [18]

Ken Worpole rails against "the cultural myopia of English literary criticism" in his *Dockers and Detectives*.[19] His arguments for greater critical attention for popular and working class literatures are powerful and *Dockers and Detectives* reveals a large, popular body of fiction produced in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War which has escaped mainstream critical attention. These two studies demonstrate in different ways that the literature of the Second World War was considerably more heterodox than conventional literary studies have often suggested. Robert Hewison claims that in 1939 alone 4,222 fiction titles were printed and that even in 1945 when the publishing industry was ravaged by the paper ration 1,246 fiction titles appeared.[20] This much reduced, but still significant, number of titles provided sufficient scope for the development and practice of a number of different traditions and genres during the war as well as countless oddities, one-offs and idiosyncratic masterpieces.

This study is no more comprehensive than that of Munton or any other critic of Second World War literature. Different studies and approaches are not in direct competition with each other but reflect the theoretical and political concerns and interests of their authors. The decision to study what are largely self-consciously political texts and to interpret them within the political and cultural framework of the

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[17] See Hewison, pp.45-46 for a discussion of *The Squad Goes Out*.
[18] Rachel Anderson, *The Purple Heart Throbs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p.212.
[19] Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives* (London: Verso, 1983), p.50.
[20] Hewison, p.83.

war establishes the boundaries within which this study will operate. This thesis will not argue for the canonisation of a particular set of wartime texts. Indeed, questions of literary quality or value will be set to one side, except where these notions impact upon the production and consumption of texts. The texts will be approached primarily as a body of new source material that is capable of offering fresh insights about the historiography surrounding the war. Predictive fiction can offer revealing insights about the debates of the political mainstream, but perhaps more interestingly it can expose a host of political and social possibilities that are difficult to access through any other source material.

**A brief history of predictive fiction**

Predictive fiction was not invented during the Second World War, but rather part of a centuries old tradition of imaginative, fantastical and speculative fiction. Increasingly this tradition has been seen primarily as the pre-history of science fiction. Yet, as this chapter will show, science fiction has only become synonymous with predictive fiction relatively recently. In *Billion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss creates a literary heritage for the type of writing he is normally associated with by claiming *Frankenstein* as a point of origin. It is, however, equally possible to make similar claims for a host of other works of fiction from More's *Utopia* to the ancient Sumerian *Epic of the Gilgamesh*.[21] There is, perhaps, a greater degree of semantic accuracy in Sam Delaney's provocative claim that Hugo Gernsback's magazines were the birth of science fiction and that "people who extend SF too much before 1910" are "waffling".[22]

Regardless of what point of origin is assigned it does seem clear that as the late Victorian era moved into the twentieth century a new type of literature gathered pace and established itself as a continuing, if slightly disreputable, tradition. What would eventually become known as science fiction has been given a variety of names (utopias, speculative fiction, scientific romance, romance, romance of the future), but whatever it was called, fiction that predicted and speculated on the future increasingly established itself as part of the literary landscape.

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[21] Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p.3.
[22] Samuel R Delaney, *Silent Interviews on Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics: A collection of written interviews* (London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p.26.

This idea of science fiction as a tradition creates an important context for both the writer and reader of fantastical or predictive texts. The reader of the early twenty-first century who enters a bookshop can easily pick up a brightly jacketed volume from the SF section and expect to find robots, spaceships, lasers and aliens and the various other features that make up the genre. Yet, science fiction only developed this sense of a self-constituted and communally known tradition or industry over the course of the twentieth century. While the OED argues that, the term "science fiction" came into common usage in the 1920s, CS Lewis is still using the older term "scientification" in 1943.[23] Sam Delaney argues that "the set of codes that we recognise today as SF" were not fully formed until the decade after the end of Second World War.[24] In other words, science fiction was not created fully formed, like Frankenstein's monster, but rather, grew, blob like, through eating other more established forms of predictive fiction.

The genre certainly developed in different ways in the UK and US. Use of the term "science fiction" was initially centred on the much-derided pulp magazines associated with Hugo Gernsback and John Campbell.[25] The critic Edward James noted that "the American Pulps may have bequeathed a largely unfortunate heritage to SF in the second half of the twentieth century".[26] "Science fiction" was used in the pre-war period as a term to denote a literature with an actual or perceived unseriousness. Kingsley Amis affectionately describes this pulp science fiction as "gadget fiction, monster fiction, adventure fiction with ray guns, everything played for sensation or, now and then, gross sentimentality." Amis goes on to say that it was " the sort of thing you read in private or enclosed in the covers of some respectable tome to screen it from the eyes of authority and respectability."[27] The fiction that this study discusses is, however, serious and often highly political in intent. Its authors and readers would have been likely to perceive a sharp distinction between these fictions and the popular, low-brow, American, pulp science fiction. This study has not ignored popular or pulp fictions, but in order to contextualise the novels that it uncovers adequately, it is necessary to understand a particularly British tradition of imaginative and predictive fiction.

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[23] Lewis, CS, "Perelandra", *The Cosmic Trilogy* (London: The Bodley Head and Pan Books, 1989), p.217.
[24] Delaney, p.26.
[25] Michael Ashley (ed), *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine: Part One 1926-1935* (London: New English Library, 1974).
[26] Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.69.
[27] Kingsley Amis (ed), *The Golden Age of Science Fiction* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1983), p.19.

**Novels of the Wellsian type**

Brian Aldiss demonstrates the falsity of the view that "regards science fiction as 'beginning with HG Wells'" by outlining a host of Wells' precursors or contemporaries.[28] He traces branches of science fiction's family tree running through Bulwer-Lytton, Samuel Butler and William Morris. Indeed, the Victorian utopias of Vril-ya, Erewhon and of *News from Nowhere* (1890) provide clear models in tone, subject matter and style for many of the predictive fictions of the Second World War. Chapter Seven will discuss novels such as Chalmers Kearney's *Erone* (1943) or JD Beresford's *A Common Enemy* (1942) that clearly draw on this utopian tradition.[29] In contrast, in Second World War predictive fiction, we hear few echoes of the many-tentacled horrors of the Gernsbackian school.

The other Victorian predictive trope that was still being reworked during the Second World War was the future war tradition. From *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) to *The War of the Worlds* (1897) the idea of predicting the shape of future wars endured and remained intriguing.[30] In the midst of total war this genre could have seemed redundant, but, as Chapter Two argues, writers still found it useful to work through possible invasions from Nazi hoards or other perceived enemies. Novels like *Loss of Eden* (1940), *Mariners Of Space* (1944) and *I, James Blunt* (1942) therefore had to explore ways to reinvent some of the bellicosity of *The Battle of Dorking* in ways appropriate to the Second World War.[31]

A British predictive fiction tradition of sorts clearly existed before Wells. Yet, in many ways it is a teleological tradition that can only be assembled once the destination point of Wells and, ultimately, of science fiction has been decided upon. In HG Wells many of these oddities and sub-genres were gathered together into a more clearly definable type of fiction. Brian Stableford goes as far as to argue that Wells was the

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[28] Aldiss, "The Gas-Enlightened Race: Victorian Visions", *Billion Year Spree*.

[29] Chalmers Kearney, *Erone* (Guilford: Bibbles Ltd, 1943); JD Beresford, *A Common Enemy* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1942). For descriptions of these novels see Appendix One. A more complete discussion of them will follow in Chapter Seven.

[30] IF Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp.31,94.

[31] Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell, *Loss of Eden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940); Erroll Collins, *Mariners Of Space*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944); HV Morton, *I, James Blunt*, (London: Methuen and Co, 1942). Again, description of these novels can be found in Appendix One and a more complete discussion of them will follow in Chapter Two.

very "thread which bound British scientific romances together".[32] Unsurprisingly, therefore, Wells looms large, in the discourse of Second World War predictive fiction. His style, politics and fusion of the popular with the serious were reproduced in much of the predictive fiction of the next fifty years and beyond. While the novels that this study will focus on defy an easy categorisation, many of their authors were quite clearly trying to write fiction of the Wellsian type. This was most obviously true of JD Beresford who knew Wells and wrote about him, but, it was also true of Stapledon, Marvell, Todd and even, in his own way, of CS Lewis.[33]

It is difficult to situate Wells in a survey of predictive fiction, in part because he lived and worked long enough to intervene at various stages in the genre's development. Wells was still writing novels during the Second World War that will be considered along with the other predictive fictions of the period in this study. He remained as an imaginative, critical, if occasionally idiosyncratic thinker engaged with the questions of his day for slightly over fifty years. Wells the writer of Victorian scientific romances was obviously an inspiration for much of the writing that followed him, but Wells the Fabian or Wells the technocratic utopianist also created centrally important contexts within which the genre of predictive fiction and, the idea of the future itself, could be understood. While he was, perhaps, no longer at the height of his powers during the 1940s he still produced a number of novels worthy of further study. Yet, by this time writing about the future was only part of his work and he also spent some time making the future by, for example, producing the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which was highly influential on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[34]

Wells was not alone in synthesising the various predictive sub-genres into a fiction capable of dealing with the political and technological concerns of the twentieth century. Aldiss' chapter on "Wells's Coevals" in *Billion Year Spree* demonstrates the extent and diversity of predictive fiction that was produced between the 1890s and 1920s. Aldiss details the predictive fiction of Edwin Lester Arnold, John Jacob Astor, George Griffith, Grant Allen, MP Sheil, Edgar Wallace and many other including

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[32] Brian Stableford, *Scientific Romances in Britain 1890-1950* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p.4.

[33] JD Beresford, *HG Wells* (London: Nisbet and Co, 1915); Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness And The Light* (London: Methuen and Co, 1942); Andrew Marvell, *Three Men Make A World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939); Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943); CS Lewis, *The Cosmic Trilogy* (London: The Bodley Head and Pan Books, 1989).

[34] Aldiss, p.127.

Conan Doyle's more fantastical output. Those that followed Wells therefore built on a series of ideas and stylistic tropes drawn from a rich, if still inexactly defined, seam of fiction.

**The genre divides**

Up until the mid-1920s it is possible to discuss British and American predictive fiction in similar terms. It would, for example, be possible to include Edward Bellamy or Jack London in the discussion of the development of the predictive genre throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It would not, however, be possible to discuss Edgar Rice Burroughs and those who he inspired as part of the same tradition. The sensational and fantastic fiction that Burroughs produced was imitated and responded to in the magazines of Gernsback and Campbell. While these fictions clearly drew on the tradition of Wells, it was also obvious that they were something quite different. The genre had divided in a way that initially appeared to be about geography, but was actually also bound up with class, literacy and the development of new media and publishing practises.

From this point on, the story of science fiction, from its pulp "beginnings", through the Golden Age and the New Wave, onto cyber-punk and whatever else is yet to come, is well documented. However, this story leaves a number of gaps that only Brian Stableford's, *Scientific Romances in Britain 1890-1950* attempts to fill in any kind of systematic way. The key gap is in the development of the Wellsian type of predictive fiction, what Stableford calls "scientific romances", in Britain from the mid-1920s until the point at which it became re-integrated back into mainstream science fiction. When exactly this happened is debatable, possibly during the New Wave, or possibly earlier. This study will build on Stableford's account of a literary genre that he claims developed "quite separately from the American tradition of science fiction", by greatly deepening the awareness and understanding of the genres development through the years of the Second World War.[35] It will demonstrate that throughout the war there was a flourishing strand of intelligent British predictive fiction being produced in the Wellsian mode largely untouched by the sensationalism that characterised the Burroughsian or American pulp tradition.

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[35] Stableford, p.3.

Recognising the distinctions between the different types of predictive fiction that were being produced from the 1920s should not be used to denigrate either type or to deny that cross-pollination between the two was a continuing reality. Indeed, despite his insistence of the separateness of the two national predictive literatures of Britain and the United States, Stableford lists a variety of British texts that seemed to be in what he would identify as the more American mode of writing. G. McLeod Winsor's alien invasion story *Station X* (1919), Bohun Lynch's *Menace from the Moon* (1925) and Francis Grierson's *Heart of the Moon* (1928) are all advanced as the exceptions that prove the rule.[36] Aldiss, perhaps, characterises the difference between the two modes best, when comparing Wells and Burroughs in 1923, as the "choice of company between a fatigued schoolmaster and an inspired anecdotalist."[37] Both forms of predictive fiction have their merits and their failings, but, British predictive fiction after the 1920s has too often been ignored by those such as Kingsley Amis, who claimed that science fiction, after 1914, was as characteristically American as jazz.[38] It is worthwhile therefore re-examining what was going on in Britain while ERB and the weirdies or Gernsback's gadgeteers worked their magic in the Pulps.

Stapleford locates the high-point of British predictive fiction in 1905 with a steady decline taking place after that until the 1930s.[39] So while the American science fiction pulps gradually gathered strength throughout the 1920s British predictive fiction had a rather disappointing decade. Stapleford locates the problem in the disruption of war, changes to the literary marketplace that manifested very differently across the Atlantic and in the radically different political climates that emerged in the two nations after the First World War.[40]

As American industry and society were transformed by Fordism and economic boom a playful type of fiction emerged that celebrated science and progress. Gernsback's magazines fitted the bill perfectly as they "rejoiced in the limitless opportunities of futuristic adventure and looked forward to a plethora of new inventions".[41] British predictive fiction, in the aftermath of the First World War, was a rather more sober affair. IF Clarke reads fictions like Edward Shanks' story of a post-

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[36] Ibid, p.151.
[37] Aldiss, p.158.
[38] Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p.17.
[39] Stableford, p.143.
[40] Ibid, pp.143-153.
[41] Ibid, p.150.

war apocalypse, *People of the Ruins* (1920), or JJ Connington's story of the building of a post-apocalyptic utopia, *Nordenholt's Million* (1923), as symptoms of a country trying to come to terms with the horror of industrial warfare.[42] This kind of working over of the themes of war and disaster defines much British predictive fiction throughout the 1920s. *Theodore Savage* (1922) by Cicely Hamilton, for example, described the complete destruction of civilisation caused by an endless war.[43] This was a theme that was still being powerfully reworked during the Second World War, as Chapter Five will show. As modernity developed a fiction which questioned this development grew up along side it.

**Brave new worlds**

Aldiss has commented that by the 1930s, "the authors who actually contributed anything new had probably never even heard of science fiction".[44] This needs to be qualified as during the 1930s science fiction was still seen as a sub-literary genre that was largely confined to sensationalist magazines. Authors who were attempting to write serious or political fictions would have consciously distanced themselves from "science fiction" as a genre, even if they were aware of its existence. This was particularly true of British authors, whose experience of American science fiction before the Second World War was likely to be minimal and not entirely positive. British author John Beyon Harris, for example, who had had considerable success writing for the American pulps dropped "Harris" from his name when publishing somewhat more serious predictive novels in Britain during the 1930s.[45]

Scholes and Rabkin attempt to characterise the division between European and American predictive fiction in this period as a dichotomy between "a few isolated giants" and a "horde of pygmies".[46] Yet, this underestimates the amount and diversity of what was being produced in Britain during a decade that Brian Stapleford argues heralded a new era of popularity for predictive fictions.[47] So while a great deal of predictive fiction of variable qualities was produced in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s,

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[42] IF Clarke, *The Pattern of Expectation 1644-2001* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), pp.226-230.

[43] Glen Negly, *Utopian Literature: A Bibliography* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), p.63.

[44] Aldiss, p.182.

[45] Stableford, p.152.

[46] Robert Scholes and Eric S Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History-Science-Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.27.

[47] Stableford, p.145.

very little of it can be seen as self-consciously science fiction. While a couple of domestic science fiction magazines in the American mode did develop towards the end of the 1930s these were barely established before the wartime paper ration forced them to close down.[48]

The term science fiction may have been becoming hegemonic as a way to describe predictive fiction, but its influence had not reached Britain in any decisive way before the end of the Second World War. The publisher *World's Work*, for example, began re-issuing American science fiction novels in Britain in 1943, yet they did not label these works as science fiction until after the end of the war.[49] By the 1930s, however, predictive fiction was booming to such an extent that bibliographers had to develop a series of categories in which to place this burgeoning form. Fiction described as "Anticipations; Aviation, future of; Forecasts, social, political, scientific; Future warfare; Utopian, see Forecasts" were all being produced at a sufficient rate to justify the invention of new bibliographical classes.[50] This does not mean that all British predictive fiction had the same level of intellectual ambition as Stapledon's ambitious future history *Last and First Men* (1930) or the political relevance of ILP leader, Fenner Brockway's anti-capitalist satire *Purple Plague.*[51] Nor should the gulf that separated British predictive fiction from the American Pulps be interpreted as a British studiousness and inability to come up with a good story. John Collier's post-apocalyptic tale *Tom's A-Cold* (1933) provides a good example of what CS Lewis calls "a story of heroic action".[52] British predictive fiction was not all about serious political commentary and there were plenty of examples of sensational entertainments, but the sensation was of a different kind to that of the American science fiction novels.

Perhaps the most familiar work of 1930s predictive fiction is Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which was written as a response to the "horror of the Wellsian Utopia".[53] Tom Moylan has argued that "in the twentieth century, utopian writing came upon hard

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[48] Ashley (ed), p.33.
[49] Stableford, p.152.
[50] Clarke, *The Pattern of Expectation 1644-2001*, pp.250-251.
[51] Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men* (London: Millennium, 1999); Andy Croft discusses *Purple Plague* in *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.223.
[52] CS Lewis, "On Science Fiction", *Of This and Other Worlds* (London: Collins, 1982), p.85.
[53] Huxley quoted in David Bradshaw's "Introduction" to Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Flamingo, 1994).

times."[54] This story, however, requires some qualification. It would perhaps be more profitable to see utopia's hard times as originating a decade or so after the start of the century. The litany of twentieth century failures that Moylan lists, "world war, totalitarian rule, genocide, economic depression, nuclear destruction, massive famine, and disease," is usually dated as commencing around 1914. "The 1920s, 1930s and 1940s were," according to Krishan Kumar, "the classic era of the 'utopia in the negative', the anti-utopia."[55]

It is nonsensical to see dystopias as anything new in the period after the First World War as the 1908 publication of Jack London's classic of the genre, *The Iron Heel* shows.[56] Nonetheless, there was a sense that a qualitatively new kind of dystopia or predictive fiction had to be created to deal with the realities of the modernist age. It is perhaps worth noting here that HG Wells published what many consider to be his final scientific romance, *The War in the Air* (1908), in the year that production was begun on the Model T Ford.[57] New fictions were required to explore the possibilities of the modern age. While predictive fiction continued to be produced in a variety of different forms many of the old stories no longer seemed applicable. IF Clarke argues that after 1914 the literature of imaginary warfare changed, "the chief enemy is no longer some foreign power; it is the immense destructiveness of modern weapons."[58] *Brave New World* and novels like it offered a way in which the dystopian possibilities of modernity could be explored that proved to be influential on novels such as *Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942)*, The 1946 MS* (1943) and *The Aerodrome* (1941) during the Second World War.[59]

Yet, at the same time as it is possible to see the Western world as fixated on dystopia in the aftermath of the First World War, the 1930s were supposed to have been

[54] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.8.
[55] Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.224.
[56] Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1911).
[57] HG Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: G. Bell, 1908); Philip Van Doren Stern, *Tin Lizzie: The Story of the Fabulous Model T Ford* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p.15.
[58] Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*, p.162.
[59] Rex Warner, *The Aerodrome: A Love Story* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1941); Robin Maugham, *The 1946 MS* (London: War Facts Press, Nov 1943); Storm Jameson, *Then We Shall Hear Singing: A Fantasy in C Major* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1942).

the era of radical political engagement and hope. Experiments with Fascism and Communism, New Deal and even National Government in Britain, were motivated, in part, by the dream that utopia, however defined, was possible. The decade unsurprisingly produced a great deal of predictive fiction that tried to struggle with political issues in similar ways to *Brave New World*. Andy Croft remarks upon "the sheer volume of novels dealing with the imagined future" during the 1930s and argues that the military, technological and political upheavals that the world faced in that period "stimulated in various part a sudden and diverse imaginative effort to see contemporary events in a long-term perspective."[60]

Croft observes that the outbreak of next-war fiction throughout the 1930s "was not, on the whole, an ideological phenomenon", nor was it particularly socialist for the most part.[61] It is, therefore worth exercising some caution in singling out a particular decade as the period when imaginative writing was engaged with politics in a particular way when, for example, Lyman Tower Sargent notes that a utopian novel was published in every year of the twentieth century.[62] Indeed, one argument of this study is that a politically committed writing flourished throughout the Second World War and that this strand of wartime writing has subsequently been omitted from the story of the literature of the war. The public concerns of the 1930s were, however, reflected in a political fiction typified by anti-Nazi dystopias such as Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night* (1937) and Storm Jameson's *In the Second Year* (1936).[63]

Andy Croft's chapter, "We Have Been Warned: Novels of the Future" lists a large number of leftist predictive fictions of the 1930s.[64] Many of these explicitly attempted to harness the mode for persuasive, even propagandistic, reasons. Anti-fascist dystopias like Andrew Marvell's *Minimum Man* (1938) or Clemence Dane's *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1939) clearly echoed the fears about fascism, both domestic and foreign, felt by sections of left-wing option. However, these novels do not tell the whole story, red-scare novels were also being written throughout the 1930s. Novels such as S Stokes' future war story *Air-Gods Parade* (1935) warned against Soviet expansionism, while J Sterne's *The Secret of the Zodiac* (1933) feared that Bolshevists would unite

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[60] Croft, p.221.
[61] Ibid, p.220.
[62] Moylan, p.9.
[63] Croft, pp. 229-232.
[64] Ibid, pp. 220-242.

with Freemasons to destroy the British Empire.[65] Some authors however were unsure as to which totalitarian regime to attack and opted to take on both Nazism and Communism. SF Wright's, *Four Days War* (1936), for example, sees Russia and Germany putting aside ideological differences and uniting against Britain.[66]

Dystopian fears were clearly manifested in all sorts of different forms in the predictive fiction of the 1930s. Just as the run up to the First World War had seen the production of a spate of future war stories, the anticipation of war in the 1930s encouraged the production of a new generation of descendents of *The Battle of Dorking*. Aldiss argues that the future war novel had to be re-invented in the 1930s after the First World War had put an end to the fevered future war speculation that had raged up until 1914.[67] Predictive war fiction became after the First World War an "argument for peace by the revelation of the terrors to be expected from gas and air attacks on cities."[68] Novels such as *The Gas War of 1940* (1931) or McIlraith and Connolly's *Invasion from the Air* (1934) describe in horrified detail "punishment from a German air-fleet that left alive a mere handful of people".[69]

The fear of ever more destructive future war reached a logical conclusion in the genre of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions. The apocalypse theme was developed throughout the 1930s in fictions like JFW Hannay's story of the collapse of capitalism, *Rebel's Triumph* (1933), JL Mitchell's post-apocalyptic celebrations of the hunter-gather life-style *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934) and CFT Cosier's story of unfolding disaster as a planetoid hits the earth, *The Mighty Millstone* (1938). IF Clarke's contention that the growth of dystopian and apocalypse fiction in the 1920s was symptomatic of an unease with industrial warfare is born out by the way the forms engage with humanity's experience of the first total war. In the 1930s this concern about industrial society and modernity often goes far beyond fear of the power of new weaponry and looks to the wider experiential and social changes caused by the development of advanced capitalist society. This theme continued to be developed and

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[65] IF Clarke, *Tales of the Future* (London: The Library Association, 1972), pp.55-58.
[66] Clarke, *Tales of the Future*, p.60.
[67] Aldiss, p.145.
[68] Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*, pp. 162-163.
[69] Quote from Southwold Miles' *The Gas War of 1940*, Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984*,.p.170.

extended throughout Second World War apocalypse fictions like *A Common Enemy*, *Three Men Make A World*, and *The Last Man* (1940) as Chapter Five will show.[70]

Predictive fiction's engagement with modernity was not, however, monolithic and a number of celebrations of the possibilities of the future were produced throughout the 1930s. The form most beloved of Aldiss' schoolmasters, the utopia, continued to flourish with novels such as Hettinger Johnett's *Our Glorious Future* (1931), H Lewis' step by step blueprint for social improvement *The Way Out* (1933) or J Conquest's vision of a Britain run on Christian principles, *With the Lid Off* (1935).[71] In comparison to the dystopias 1930s utopias can often seem rather uninteresting. Orwell, writing as John Freeman, commented that inhabitants of utopias were "chiefly concerned with avoiding fuss" and noted "Heaven is as great a flop as Utopia - though Hell, it is worth noting, occupies a respectable place in literature, and has often been described most minutely and convincingly".[72]

So, despite claims that utopia was in retreat after the First World War examples of the genre continued to manifest throughout the 1930s. There were even a number of imaginative utopias that attempted to create something other than the "central-heated, air-conditioned, strip-lighted Paradise" described so disparagingly by Orwell.[73] Ellen Warner's *A Woman's Utopia* (1931), published "By a Daughter of Eve", for example, moves away from the gleaming Wellsian utopia to ask a number of interesting questions about gender in a state in which men and women have separate governmental structures.[74] Chapter Seven will demonstrate that despite the stylistic tiredness of many examples of the form, the Second World War also generated a large number of utopias. This included didactic narratives such as *Erone*, *An Unknown Land* (1942) and *Visit to Utopia* (1939) as well as more interesting and innovative texts like *Perelandra* (1943), *Sanity Island* (1941) and *Peace In Nobody's Time* (1944).[75]

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[70] Alfred Noyes, *The Last Man* (London: John Murray, 1940).

[71] Clarke, *Tales of the Future*, pp.52-57.

[72] John Freeman, "Can Socialists Be Happy", Tribune, 24 December 1943, Peter Davison, Ian Angus, Sheila Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.40.

[73] Freeman, "Can Socialists Be Happy", p.42.

[74] Negly, p.147; Laura Quilter, "Other Works of Potential Interest", *Feminist Science Fiction, Fantasy, & Utopia*, http://www.feministsf.org/femsf/othergm.html (7th October 2001).

[75] Viscount Samuel, *An Unknown Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1942); J Howard Whitehouse, *Visit to Utopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939); Adrian

**The future in the 1940s**

The predictive fiction of the Second World War drew on established traditions that had been developing over at least the previous fifty years in Britain. Each of the following chapters will concentrate on a different sub-genre of predictive fiction. Starting with novels that speculated on the possible invasion, the study will then move to examine imaginative presentations of the likely invaders. Chapter Four will look at how Communism and the Communist state are portrayed and ask whether how these fictional states contrast with the Nazi states examined in Chapter Three. Chapter Five will look at apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions arguing that they were a response to a perceived crisis of modernity during the Second World War. This theme of the crisis of modernity was also picked up in the dystopian fiction of the period, which will be dealt with in Chapter Six. Finally, Chapter Seven will examine how effectively the utopian imagination created a response to the myriad of problems outlined in the other chapters. All of these types of fiction draw on pre-existing traditions and models, but as this list shows it is not possible to view the development of the genre as a purely literary history. It would be ludicrous, for example, to argue that *In The Second Year* was a more important factor in the creation of *I, James Blunt* than the Second World War itself. Politics and history was, for the most part, what these novels were about. The fact that during the 1940s entire sub-genres of utopia and dystopia grouped themselves around existing social systems demonstrates the importance of seeing these fictions in their historical context.

The fictions that this study will concentrate on are born out of a tradition of predictive fiction, but not confined by it. Changing political, economic and technological conditions meant that the predictive fiction of the 1940s was very different to that of the 1890s and even substantially different from that of the 1930s. Furthermore predictive fiction did not exist in a vacuum and it was clearly influenced by a variety of other types of fiction including the American pulps. Indeed, it is likely that before the codification of science fiction authors were able to move between writing predictive and realist novels more easily.

The writing of the 1940s was born from a number of different literary, cultural, political and military influences. This study will demonstrate how these influences inter-related to produce a significant body of literature that has, until now, been almost

Alington, *Sanity Island* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941); Borodin, George, *Peace In Nobody's Time* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1944).

entirely ignored. Despite a number of different surveys of the literature of the period, and a larger number of surveys of the genre, the predictive fiction of the 1940s has been overlooked. The casual reader could be forgiven for thinking that the production of predictive fiction ceased like party politics throughout the war. Phyllis Lassner's *British Women Writer of World War II* makes some attempt to address this by including two chapters on predictive fiction. However, despite the book's title Lassner concentrates on the 1930s and only discusses two novels produced during the Second World War.[76] Even Brian Stapleford's, impressive discussion of the genre, moves from three chapters that deal with various elements of the scientific romance "between the wars", to a chapter entitled "After the Holocaust". However, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, this is a significant oversight, as a lively and ongoing tradition existed throughout the Second World War. Ignoring this tradition can distort our understanding of the development of the genre and the nature of the literary culture of wartime.

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[76] Lassner's book deals with the dystopian fiction produced by Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, Vita Sackville-West and Katharine Burdekin. Yet, only Jameson's *Then We Shall Hear Singing* and Sackville-West's *Grand Canyon* were written during the war.

## Chapter Two: Jerusalem Attacked

The dystopian possibility of losing the war played a key role in shaping the politics and culture of the Second World War. The political responses that developed in the shadow of defeat were understandably often very defensive. Yet, what was it that was being defended? Was it political freedom and liberal democracy, the blood and soil of Britain (or as it is more usually defined, England) or something altogether more personal? These concerns were explored in a sub-genre of predictive fiction that imagined invasions of Britain and elsewhere. The invasion fiction of the period demonstrated effectively the way in which the war became a political battleground with both its conduct and its aims being contested on ideological grounds.

Chapter One argued that there was a rich seam of future war fiction that was developed in characteristic ways during the Second World War. IF Clarke's argument that after 1914 future war fiction changed and became an argument for peace rather than a celebration of war is, in places, turned on its head during the Second World War.[1] Novels like Morchard Bishop's *The Star Called Wormwood* continued to rail against war in general asking, "what is the good of it?" and dwelling on, for example, "a particularly revolting picture of six children without a head between them."[2] However, Bishop recognised "that there is only one thing worse than fighting a war, and that is losing it", and was careful to preface his pacifist story of war in 2839 with a rather hypocritical commitment to the current war effort.

The future war genre, then, for the most part enlisted in an anti-Nazi struggle. The exact nature of this struggle, how it would be conducted and what its aims were, was highly variable, but it was clear that some bellicosity was necessary and that pacifism would not get people very far against Hitler. This movement away from pacifism was illustrated most clearly by the political progress of Storm Jameson. Jameson had been a prominent pacifist in the 1930s but by 1940 recognised that she could no longer see war as the worst possibility that the world had to offer. She recanted pacifism in a powerful pamphlet called *The End Of This War.* This pamphlet argued that "a pacifist who says, 'Come let us reason together' is guilty of a deep refusal of honesty." To argue for this

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[1] IF Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.162.

[2] Morchard Bishop, *The Star Called Wormwood: An Investigation of the possible reasons for its Decline and Fall as described in the VIIIth chapter of The Apocalypse* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1941), p.59.

was to submit to "the concentration camp, the death of our humblest with our best and the forcing of our children's minds into an evil mould." Because of this realisation of the nature of the enemy Jameson felt unable to "choose submission" and went on to novelise these concerns in *Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942).[3]

Novels which refused to enlist in this anti-Nazi bellicosity could be seen as suspect: Vita Sackville-West's *Grand Canyon* (1942) attempts to imagine the world after the defeat of Britain.[4] Sackville-West had enormous trouble getting her novel published. John Lehmann described the novel as "profoundly defeatist" and Leonard Woolf refused to publish it at all. She finally got it published by Heinemann once the invasion panic had subsided at the end of 1942.[5] In the novel the Nazis have overrun Britain and Europe and settled on an early peace with the United States. The novel then details a lightning strike by aerial attack and fifth-column sabotage that almost defeats the US military. A massive earthquake that stops the war is the only thing that prevents Nazi global domination. It is perhaps unlikely that a novel of this nature would have reached the public without the muscle of the Sackville-West name and reputation.

Future war fiction responded to the threat of invasion and provided one forum through which fears and aspirations could be expressed. However, as Sackville-West's experience showed there were limits to what could be said comfortably. Where defeat was imagined it had to be placed in a context that made it safe. Neville Shute prefaces *What Happened To The Corbetts* (1939) with warnings that aimed to educate and persuade the novel's readership.[6] Likewise Brown and Serpell open *Loss of Eden* (1940) with the unambiguous: "If such a tale is to have a dedication it can only be to THOSE WHO WILL NOT LET THIS HAPPEN."[7] Anthony Armstrong and the prolific mystery writer Bruce Graeme choose to set their occupation story *When The Bells Rang*

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[3] Storm Jameson, *The End Of This War*, quoted in Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism In Britain 1914-1945: The Defining Of A Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p.214; Storm Jameson, *Then We Shall Hear Singing: A Fantasy in C Major* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1942).
[4] Vita Sackville-West, *Grand Canyon* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1942).
[5] Victoria Glendinning, *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p.318.
[6] Nevil Shute, *What Happened To The Corbetts*, (1939; London: Mandarin, 1993).
[7] Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell, *Loss of Eden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p.9.

(1943) in the past and subtitle it *A Tale of What Might Have Been* so that the readership could not feel that it was defeatist in any way.[8]

Yet, within the boundaries set by censors, publishers, readers' expectations and the author's conscience there was still space for diversity to emerge. During the course of a war as extensive and pervasive as the Second World War the idea of invasion could be used in a number of different contexts. Alongside the novels which imagined the invasion of Britain were those which realised an actual invasion of another place such as Vassili Grossman's *The People Immortal* (1943) and those which created imaginary other places that could be invaded such as Storm Jameson's *Then We Shall Hear Singing*, Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome: A Love Story* (1941) and Errol Collins', *Mariners Of Space* (1944).[9] A key question was therefore was the invasion situated in a British context, or translated to an imaginary place that could serve in someway as a cipher for Britain? The implications of this decision of form are often profoundly political. The impulse to imagine a defence of Britain was frequently more nationalistic, while the defence of an abstracted or imaginary state opens up the possibility for a more overtly ideological anti-fascism.

Storm Jameson's novel *Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942) examines the subjugation of a small country known only as the Protectorate by German Nazis. Jameson's decision to locate the novel in a small, unnamed country in central Europe allows her to engage the hard pacifist elements in the peace movement who were content to allow fascism to run unopposed across Europe. Her decision to locate the novel not in Britain but around what Chamberlain might have called "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing" functioned as a call for a united internationalist opposition to fascism.[10]

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[8] Anthony Armstrong and Bruce Graeme, *When The Bells Rang: A Tale of What Might Have Been* (London: George G. Harrap and Co: 1943). The novel was one of three novels that Graeme produced in 1943. Graeme published around 80 novels between 1926 and 1980 including the popular Blackshirt series. Bonny Brown, "Bruce Graeme", *Stop You're Killing Me,* http://www.stopyourekillingme.com/Bruce-Graeme.html, 31st October 2001.

[9] Vassili Grossman, *The People Immortal* (London: Hutchinson and Co: 1943) This novel is an appreciation of the Red Army and its efforts to halt the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia. Rex Warner, *The Aerodrome: A Love Story* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head:1941); Erroll Collins, *Mariners of Space* (London: Lutterworth Press: 1944).

[10] Larry William Fuchser, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement: A Study In The Politics of History* (London: WW Norton and Company, 1982), p.156.

This attempt to look towards internationalism and to understand what was going on in other countries in the world was an important spur for the production of invasion fiction. This can be seen in novels like the veteran American journalist and author Hendrik Willem van Loon's argument for American intervention in the war in his novel *Invasion* (1941).[11] For similar reasons *Then We Shall Hear Singing* attempts to actualise the attacks on liberty that were being made in occupied countries.

> We were happy, we worked, we planted in our own land, we taught our children good things. But after they came we began to be unhappy, we were tortured, our young men died, our women's bodies were torn, we had no future for our children, we had only fear and patience and anger to teach them. This is the truth. Clever men will forget it.[12]

*Then We Shall Hear Singing* is at first glance a story about the invasion of a small country by a large powerful Nazi state. Yet, it is not just a novel about Austria, Czechoslovakia or Poland, it also forces the reader to consider occupied France and a potential occupation of Britain. The decision not to set the novel in an actual geographical setting offered Jameson the opportunity to draw parallels between circumstances in different occupied countries, and gave her the narrative freedom to push the policies of Nazi occupation to their logical conclusion. Therefore, we do not merely have a documentary reportage of concentration camps, rape and murder of civilians, genocidal policies and all of the other outrages of Nazi occupation that are being tentatively reported on before and throughout the war.[13] To the fictionalisation of actual events Jameson adds the experiments of Dr Hesse who lobotomises the subjects of the Protectorate for the purpose of social control. Jameson's novel shows some of the advantages that a more imaginative fictionalisation of the events of the war offers. The willingness to explore not just what had happened in occupied countries, but also what might happen, is one of the great strengths of predictive fiction.

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[11] Hendrik Willem van Loon, *Invasion* (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1941). "van Loon, Hendrik Willem", *encyclopaedia.com*, http://www.encyclopedia.com/articlesnew/48305.html, 31st October 2001.

[12] Jameson, p.40.

[13] Julian Duncan Scott, *The British Press And The Holocaust 1942-1943* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leicester, 1994); Gabriel Milland, *Some faint hope and courage: the BBC and the final solution, 1942-45* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Leicester, 1998).

As well as the opportunity to change the geographical location of invasions authors could change the temporal location. The manuscript for *Loss of Eden* is supposedly discovered in a post-cataclysmic far future; *When The Bells Rang* is set in a counter-factual past; while *The Star Called Wormwood* replays a satirical version of the Second World War in 2839. Changes in the military and political situation alter the context in which novels are written and read. An invasion fiction written or even read in 1944 clearly operates in a very different political climate from one in 1940. Geographical and temporal considerations interact with the range of political and moral ideas that inform the production of invasion fiction to ensure that the same invasion is never imagined twice. This chapter will study this diversity through two key issues that recurred throughout the invasion fiction of the period. Firstly, the variety of ways in which these imaginary wars are fought and conquests resisted will be examined. Secondly, what it is that is being defended, in both an ideological and a geographical sense, will be scrutinised.

**Responding to the Threat**

In September 1939 both the populace and the military saw the idea of an invasion of Britain as highly unlikely.[14] HG Wells comments on this in *Babes in the Darkling Wood* (1940) when his protagonist is still able to claim at the beginning of 1940: "No man in his senses believes that Hitler and his Germans can do anything that will amount to a decisive conquest of Europe, and that is their modest ambition."[15] We can read a decisive conquest of Europe as Wells' code for a conquest of Britain. In the post-Dunkirk world, and after the Nazi and Soviet invasions of Finland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the possibility of invasion undoubtedly began to grow. This point in the war saw the publication of novels such as *Loss of Eden* (1940), in which appeasers bring about an occupation, and *Invasion* (1941), which describes an invasion of the USA.

During the summer and early autumn of 1940 the invasion of Britain was perceived as a real and genuine possibility. Hitler issued the directive for the invasion of

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[14] Tom Wintringham, the left wing military commentator and pamphleteer, admits in his 1940 pamphlet *New Ways Of War*(Middlesex: Penguin, 1940), p.10 that before the start of the European conflict he had not expected Germany's tactics to be so successful: "These are not claims that I foresaw what would happen in this war: actually I was so sure of the possibility of defence against tanks and aeroplanes that I though this war would be a deadlock."

[15] HG Wells, *Babes in the Darkling Wood* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940), p.373.

England in July 1940.[16] Although Admiral Erich Raeder of the Oberkommando der Marine was less than confident about the possible success of such an invasion, the idea caught the British imagination.[17] Eden's appeal for men to join the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) in May 1940 was met with overwhelming enthusiasm from the population at large.[18] The steady production of invasion fiction also demonstrated a level of popular fascination in the possibility of invasion. Publishers recognised this interest in invasion and attempted to cash in on it. Faber and Faber, for example, published Captain GC Wynne's study of German military tactics in the First World War with the misleading title *If Germany Attacks* during 1940.[19] The British Government in the adoption of a 'backs to the wall' style of rhetoric in Churchill's speeches in this period also acknowledged this fear of invasion.[20]

During 1940 Britain was attacked, but this attack took the form of an aerial assault rather than an invasion by ground forces. Interestingly, aerial assaults are frequently depicted as apocalyptic rather than militarily effective in predictive fiction, as Chapter Five will discuss. Fictional representations of invasion, however, focuses on the fear of the German storm trooper striding up to the front door. Although this possibility significantly receded after autumn 1940, British society was reawakened to the possibility of occupation. Furthermore, the issue of invasion did not simply disappear after the start of 1941. The continued success of the Axis across the globe meant that it could not be seen as a spent force at least until the German defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943. For a period of over two years the British people existed in a climate of uncertainty about the continuation of the nation.[21]

One of the primary problems of using the novel form to deal with a fast moving situation is the length of time novels take to produce. Aside from the actual period of writing, the production of novels during wartime was beset with problems. The introduction of paper rationing at the start of the war proved one such problem, as did

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[16] Flower and Reeves, *The War: 1939-1945* (London: Cassell, 1960), p.155.
[17] Michael Glover, *Invasion Scare 1940* (London: Leo Cooper, 1990), pp.12-14, 36-37.
[18] Ibid, p.32.
[19] Captain GC Wynne, *If Germany Attacks: The Battle in Depth in the West* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940).
[20] See for example the 'finest hour' speech on 18 June 1940. Quoted in Flower and Reeves, p.124.
[21] Outside of Europe the situation remained volatile for considerably longer. Germany posed a significant threat in North Africa well into 1943 while Japan continued to threaten Australia and New Zealand for even longer.

the possibility of bomb damage to the stock and buildings of the publishing industry, and the overall shortage of labour. Nonetheless, there is little evidence to suggest that the publishing industry was any slower to react to events in wartime than in peacetime.[22] Ultimately, the production of a wide variety of political and aesthetic responses to the threat of invasion was hampered but far from prevented by the problems imposed by war. In this period, as in all others, writers emerged to deal with the most pressing issue of the day. While we can speculate that in a country with more paper, more novels might have been produced, it is quickly apparent that the amount of invasion fiction published marks the issue out as a concern that the industry responded to, allocating its paper ration accordingly.

An additional problem with using the novel as an indicator of public opinion is that novels, whilst rooted in their historical moment, quickly transcend it. A novel has a far longer shelf life than almost any cultural formation. Priestley and Churchill's radio broadcasts lasted a matter of minutes, the ever-dwindling wartime newspapers a day, even the most popular films were rarely current for more than a few months. Novels, however, can conceivably be passed around and experienced for the first time for a number of years. This process is also more democratic than any of the other types of culture mentioned, as the power to recommend and pass on a novel lies largely with the individual. Therefore a pre-Dunkirk novel would not have been gone and forgotten by July 1940, or even perhaps by July 1944. In some cases history will overtake the events of a novel making them seem absurd, but much speculative fiction, as with other types of fiction, remains viable and contemporary for a number of years. Discussions about fiction produced during a particular period should not preclude the possibility that older fiction may still be being consumed.

**As the threat developed**
There was an obvious synchronisation of consciousness on 3 September when Chamberlain made his radio broadcast and war was finally confirmed. Yet, the feeling of an approaching conflict dominated public discourse in the late 1930's. The most vivid pre-war speculation about what form the war would take is Nevil Shute's *What Happened To The Corbetts.* The novel examines the personal and civic consequences of total warfare and through its apocalyptic depiction argues persuasively against the

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[22] Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life In London 1939-1945* (Newton Abbott: Readers Union, 1978).

bombing of civilians. Yet, while Shute's novel draws on the future war genre it stops short of imagining the possibility of an invasion by ground forces. Even so, *What Happened To The Corbetts* is unusually pessimistic for a novel produced in the immediate shadow of the Second World War. Many other novels like Thurlow Craig's *Plague Over London* (1939) embrace the possibility of war more positively, acting as jingoistic cheerleaders. The conflict was simplified to a battle between right and wrong and reduced to the level of a personal feud. The enemy, who in this case are the Japanese, are characterised in racially abusive terms, as "The Huns of the East", "Yellow", "The New Yellow Peril" and so on, repeatedly being depicted as morally inferior and cruel.[23] The territorial ambitions of a Japanese master villain took on a less fantastical air in the fevered atmosphere of 1939 and the fear that warfare will be conducted by chemical and biological means also represented an anxiety about the nature of the oncoming conflict. However, the ease with which these threats are banished reassures the anxious reader that the British establishment is more than equal to the threat.

After the fall of France the national mood darkened, generating a new type of fiction. This is typified most effectively by Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell's novel about the creation of German Nazi hegemony in Britain, *Loss Of Eden.* The novel provides a marked contrast with *What Happened To The Corbetts* both in its political sophistication and its ultimate prediction of defeat for liberal capitalism. This is not to say that Brown and Serpell saw the invasion of Britain and the corresponding destruction of the country's democratic traditions as inevitable or even particularly likely, this was only a novel after all and its sensationalism is part of its appeal. However, in the aftermath of Dunkirk, the possibility of defeat becomes a far more direct concern of literature and political discourse.

Around this time a series of novels concentrated more specifically on the possibility of an invasion of America. Novels like Robert Nathan's *They Went On Together* (1941) or Hendrik Willem van Loon's *Invasion* admonish the American government for "still playing tiddlywinks" when they should be preparing for war.[24] Van Loon's novel is obviously intended primarily for American consumption, but like *They Went On Together* it also received a London publication. *Invasion* used the

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[23] Thurlow Craig, *Plague Over London* (London: Hutchinson and Co: 1939).

scenario of the invasion of the United States as a way to talk about both the events that were occurring in Europe and as a petition to the American government to enter the war. The novel's postscript notes: "America some time soon will have to decide what course it intends to follow. Hence this little book."[25] Once again the novel is not primarily predictive, but rather persuasive. This novel perhaps more than any other examined here became outdated almost as soon as it was published. After Pearl Harbour and the entry of the United States into the war, the persuasive task of the novel had been achieved and its description of German as opposed to Japanese invasion was obsolete.

After the entry of Russia and America into the war the possibility of the Nazi invasion and conquest of Britain receded. In this period novels like HV Morton's *I, James Blunt* (1942) are written with the clear purpose of doing what they can to avert an invasion. The capitulation of Britain will lead to conquest and the "scientific extermination of British nationality"; therefore it is to be avoided at all costs.[26] *I, James Blunt* was published in 1942 and in many ways is still a product of a nation unsettled by the proximity of invasion. Where it differs from *Loss of Eden* is that, for HV Morton, while the war can be lost by Britain, it cannot be won by Germany. The novel critiques the profiteers and bureaucrats who are holding up Britain's war effort, but the likelihood of a successful invasion is still shown as relatively small.

As the fear of invasion receded through 1942 and 1943 the type of fiction produced becomes more confident and forward looking. Novels such as *Tunnel From Calais* (1942) and *When The Bells Rang* (1943) find it difficult to conceptualise a successful invasion.[27] Both of these novels examine a potential invasion and while in *When The Bells Rang* an occupation takes place it is clear that both of these novels use the genre as a way to demonstrate British strength and ability to cope under all circumstances. Even during the height of the invasion in *When The Bells Rang* there is no real fear that the home guard based partisans will not be able to defeat the German military machine. This period also saw the publication of Mea Allan's *Change of Heart* (1943), which began to examine how an allied occupation of a defeated Nazi Germany

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[24] Robert Nathan, *They Went On Together* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1941), p.81.
[25] van Loon, p.170.
[26] HV Morton, *I James Blunt* (London: Methuen and Co, 1942). This dedication is printed on the back page of this short novel.
[27] David Divine, *Tunnel From Calais* (1942; St Albans: Severn House, 1975).

should be conducted.[28] Allan's novel will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Three, but it is worth noting here, as its publication was indicative of an increased optimism in the conduct of the war.

Invasion fiction declined during and after 1944. Novels that utilised the invasion motif tended not to engage directly with the details of the Second World War. An example of the kind of treatment that the invasion theme received towards the end of the war was the humorous *Mariners of Space* (1944). *Mariners of Space* transformed England into the Earth, Germany into Mars (complete with a "Robot Army"), Italy into Venus, and the Battle of Britain into "the Battle of the Firmament - that grim and decisive conflict of the Interplanetary War".[29] The translation into a kind of British take on pulp SF served largely to ridicule and satirise the German threat. Even with the freedom offered by his form Collins saw no point in imagining a German/Martian threat as in any way effective.

The tone and themes of invasion fictions clearly reflect the contours of the military and political conduct of the war. Yet, this simple correlation between the military situation, the popular mood and the tone of the novels can be reductive and misleading. Invasion fictions are not simply passive reflectors, but rather active participants in a cultural conversation. The rest of this chapter will concentrate on the specifics of what these novels have to say and the moral and political judgements they make about both invaders and invaded. The novels express a wide variety of ideological positions and by examining them it is possible to see how an anti-Nazi hegemony was built and to determine the ideological components thereof.

## Strategies of defence

> How should we train the army? To those who know that a German invasion may occur before this booklet is published this may seem rather a foolish question. On the contrary, this possibility makes it an even more serious question than it would otherwise have been. For invasion does not mean the end of all things. It certainly does not necessarily mean the end of war.[30]

Tom Wintringham's observation that an invasion would not spell the end of conflict, rather that it would mean the start of a new phase of, perhaps, more intense

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[28] Mea Allan, *Change of Heart* (London: George G Harrap and Co.Ltd, 1943).
[29] Collins, p.230
[30] Wintringham, p.62.

conflict, tied in closely with the experience of occupied countries in Europe and elsewhere during the Second World War. In France, Holland, Poland and many other occupied countries, energetic and politically diverse resistance movements were created to oppose fascism, German invasion, genocide and any other threat that the invading forces were seen to represent.[31] Largely the political leadership of the resistance movements determined the way in which the threat of the invasion was conceptualised and opposed. To put it crudely communists fought fascists, Gaulists fought for France and the Warsaw ghetto resisters fought for racial survival. The anticipation of invasion began this process of ideological manoeuvring. New political ideas and formations were brought into being by a dialectical relationship between the military politics of wartime and existing ideological positions.

The experience of the European mainland demonstrated that opposition to occupation did not just die with the seizing of the state machinery. It also demonstrated that such resistance could be effective in certain circumstances. Partisans and resistance groups, backed to a limited extent by the British and American governments, were frequently able to disrupt the plans and movements of the Nazi war machine during the remainder of the hostilities.[32] Indeed, some people believed that the most likely defeat of German occupation would come through what Wintringham labeled "a People's War".[33]

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[31] An early attempt to assess the nature and effect of European resistance movements can be found in *European Resistance Movements 1939-1945: First International Conference on the History of the Resistance Movements held at Liege-Bruxelles-Breedonk 14-17 September 1958* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1960).

[32] Successful attempts to hamper the German military by resistance movements include the three general strikes that took place in the Netherlands between February 1941 and September 1944 (see L De Jong, "Anti-Nazi Resistance In The Netherlands" p.140-142), the sabotage of Danish railways by the Danish resistance in 1944 (see J Haestrop, "Expose" p.155) and the successful military campaigns of Greek partisans throughout the war (see CM Woodhouse, "The Greek Resistance 1942-44"). All of these essays are in *European Resistance Movements 1939-1945.*

[33] Tom Wintringham uses the term "People's War" to describe a war fought by democratic armies of the people in *New Ways Of War*, p.73. Other evocations of a People's Victory brought about by popular uprisings can be found in novels like Gordon Boshell, *John Brown's Body*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942) and Storm Jameson, *Then We Shall Hear Singing.* Communist intellectual Rajani Palme Dutt also speculated about the possibility of a Bolshevik revolution in Germany, brought about by the state's closer links with the Soviet Union. "Here comrades may have seen the statement in *The Times* on Saturday in regard to the question of Germany going Bolshevist." King, Francis and Matthews, George (ed), *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Outbreak of the Second World War. The Verbatim Record of the Central Committee*

The political nature of resistance movements was rarely mentioned by the dominant discourse although it was cause for considerable concern. Despite the rather gung ho rhetoric of Churchill's assurance that "we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender", the government were careful to try to prevent the arms that might have made this possible from falling into the hands of the general populace.[34] This was perhaps most notable in Northern Ireland where fears about arming the IRA resulted in the province being excluded from the first call for LDV volunteers.[35]

Effective preparation against a threatened invasion therefore had radical political implications that were resisted by the political mainstream. A resistance campaign would have put weapons into the hands of the population and this was something that a government so historically associated with the interests of the propertied classes was unwilling to do. Nonetheless there was significant demand for an armed populace. Roderick James wrote to *The Times* on the 12th May 1940 and argued that Britain was open to attack from "a handful of German parachutists" and that the populace should arm swiftly to counter this.[36] George Orwell picked up on this spirit of militant patriotism a month later in a letter to *Time and Tide* in which called on the government to "ARM THE PEOPLE".[37]

Tom Wintringham realised that "the idea of arming the people is a revolutionary idea" and went on to argue that "most of us can find plenty of room in this country for some sort of revolution, for a change that will sweep away the much of the past."[38] Wintringham, like many others calling for an armed populace was a political radical (he was in actual fact an ex-communist) and his book made the link between an armed populace and revolution as explicit as those in power had always feared it to be. While the LDV and Home Guard initiatives clearly went someway towards meeting the

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*Meetings of 25 September and 2-3 October 1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.76.

[34] Winston Churchill, "Dunkirk", Randolf S. Churchill, MP (ed), *Into Battle: Speeches by the Right Ho. Winston S. Churchill C.H, M.P.* (London: Cassell and Company, 1941), p.223.

[35] Glover, p.34.

[36] SP Mackenzie, *The Home Guard: A Military and Political History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.25.

[37] George Orwell's letter to *Time and Tide*, 22nd June 1940, quoted in Mordecai Richler (ed), *Writers On World War II: An Anthology* (London: Vintage: 1993), p.81

demand for an armed populace, clear attempts were made to prevent the new breed of citizen soldier from thinking too much about the radical implications of their new position. The War Office clamped down on radical ideas in the Home Guard by, for example, instructing the BBC to drop a story they were planning to run on Wintringham's Home Guard training centre at Osterley Park.[39]

The novel *Loss Of Eden* picks up on the spirit of these calls for armed resistance by depicting a number of attempts to fight Nazi occupation. Most interestingly it relates two resistance movements led by Stephen Mallory and Patrick Rosse. Stephen Mallory was a National Labour MP who attempts unsuccessfully to build a mass movement to challenge Nazi autocracy.[40] This movement is avowedly nationalistic, even fascistic, in its purpose, but it also contains key liberal and left elements:

> Mallory, it must be confessed, was no democrat. Rather, he was fascistic, believing that Britain, suddenly finding herself plunged into a state of shame and self-pity as marked the Weimar Republic, needed the counterpart of the National Socialist movement to restore her self-respect. But it was a Christian Fascism that he envisaged, a movement that would redeem the pagan brutality of Hitler's regime, and set forth as its first principle a respect for the rights of others.[41]

Mallory's biography provides a fictional representation of the confusing and dialectical relationship that nationalism and patriotism had with leftist political movements. Mallory's embrace of a "progressive" fascism mirrors the frequent crossing of the blurred lines between left and right undertaken in the 1930's and 1940's by figures as diverse as George Bernard Shaw, Stalin and Oswald Mosley.[42] Brown and Serpell's

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[38] Wintringham, p.78.

[39] McKenzie, p.75.

[40] Brown and Serpell note that Mallory was elected on the platform of National Labour, but it is unclear as to whether they mean this to be taken as a fictional minority party or as a follower of Ramsey McDonald. Ultimately, this is unimportant as Mallory's politics are developed into a new ideology by the establishment of Nazi government. The label National Labour serves really to disassociate Mallory from any existing mainstream current of British politics although it also points perhaps towards an identification with National Socialist.

[41] Brown and Serpell, p.107.

[42] For information on George Bernard Shaw and his flirtations with Stalin and Mussolini see Erich Strauss, *Bernard Shaw: Art And Socialism* (London : Gollancz, 1942) or Colin Wilson, *Bernard Shaw: A Reassessment* (London: Hutchinson, 1969). There is no need to rehearse the arguments about the Nazi-Soviet pact and the Commintern's "social-fascist" position but the Soviet Union and the Commintern often seemed unable to make sophisticated ideological distinctions. Mosley perhaps more than anyone else represents the complex way in which new ideological positions were

novel explores this web of complex ideological crossovers and inter-relationships without seeking to deny the important differences that existed.

Patrick Rosse leads the indigenous British fascist organisation, "The League of Britons" or "the greyshirts". Brown and Serpell use this movement to demonstrate the links between social exclusion, economic slump and the growth of the organisations of the far right.

> Looking back, I am ashamed to think that I had not paid more attention to the rise of Fascism in England. It was an alien, injected poison, but when the right conditions for its growth appeared it began to flourish soon enough.[43]

> Unemployment had of course hit the industrial areas hardest, and it was here that the League found its staunchest and most stubborn adherents.[44]

The novel refuses to caricature Nazis in the way that *When The Bells Rang* and *Then We Shall Hear Singing* do. In these novels Nazis are frequently described as "cruel" and "bestial" or, in Churchill's description of Nazism, "a barbarous paganism…which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution".[45] The officer class attempt to mask these characteristics with a calculating and intellectual inhumanity. Armstrong and Graeme describe their evil Nazi overlord Wasserman as having an "undercurrent of bestiality" noting that this is not fully disguised by his "suavity".[46] Unusually then, Brown and Serpell characterise the Nazi not as an inhuman other, but as a symptom of wider social and political problems. The charismatic leader Rosse could not be dismissed as evil or opportunistic and his rehabilitation at the end of the novel as an anti-Nazi freedom fighter again demonstrated the novel's ability to describe ideological positions in interesting and perceptive ways.

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being defined in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Mosley's movement from Conservative to radical liberal, to Labourist, to rudderless populist in the New Party, and finally to fascist was indicative of the places where the political movements of the 1930s intersected. See Robert Skidelsky, *Oswald Mosley* (London: Macmillan, 1975).
[43] Brown and Serpell, p.52.
[44] Ibid, p.61.
[45] From Churchill's October 1938 speech denouncing the Munich agreement, Andrew Roberts, "Hitler's England: What If Germany Had Invaded Britain In May 1940?", Niall Ferguson (ed), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Picador, 1997), p.298.
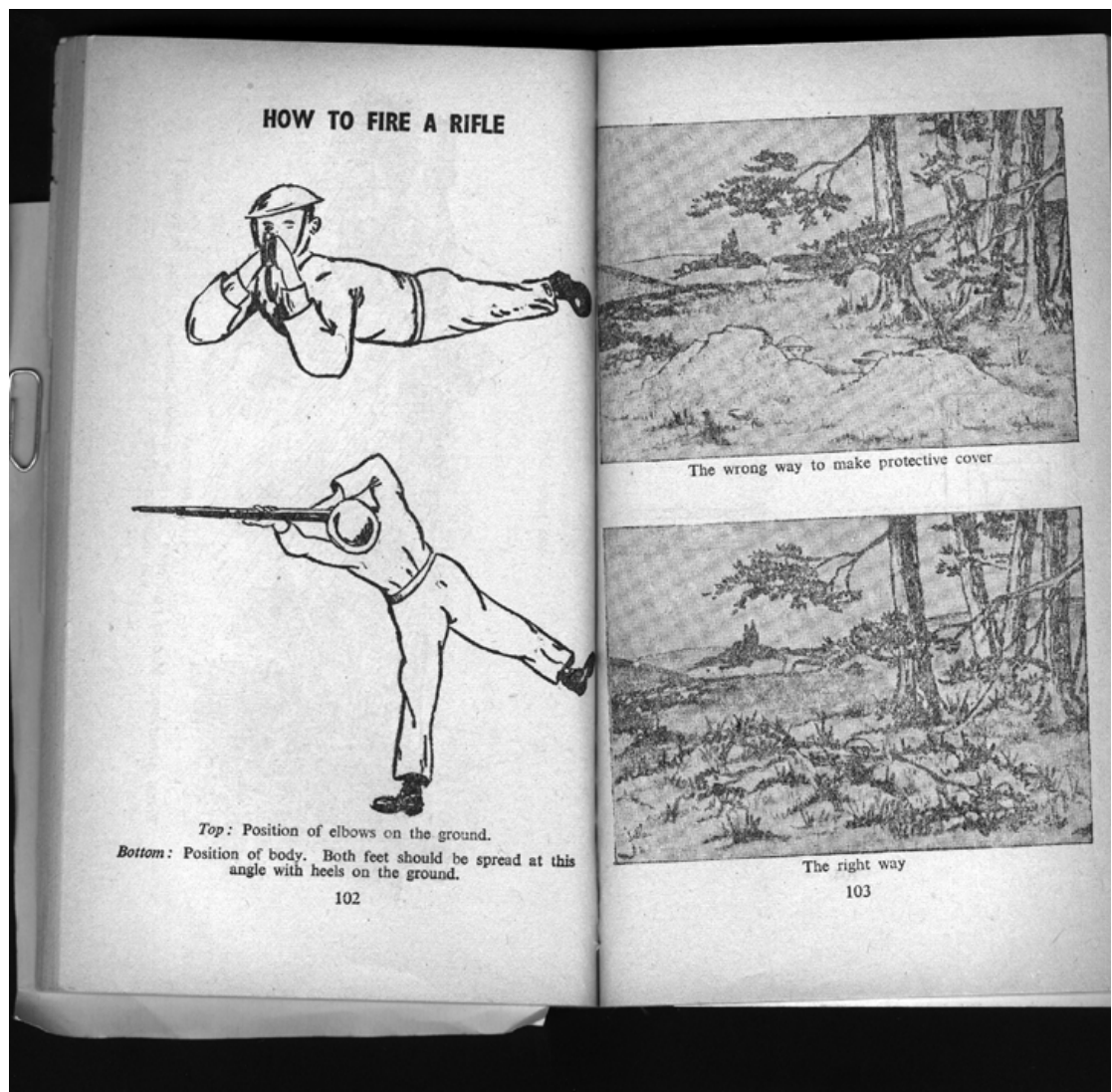[46] Armstrong and Graeme, p.112.

The nature of the anti-Nazi forces that *Loss of Eden* portrays was quite divorced from the practical plans that the "International Brigade Class of '38" were making.[47] Brown and Serpell were happy to show Stephen Mallory and his followers clashing with the British Nazi state through the portrayal of mass demonstrations being broken up, riots and occasional bits of sabotage. Yet, the possibility of organised partisan resistance was not considered at any length. Figure 2.1 shows how this portrayal of anti-Nazi resistance as primarily non-military differs from the plans that the left were making. This book was written by Hugh Slater who, with Tom Wintringham, established the Osterley Park Home Guard training school.[48]

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[47] Orwell, Slater and Wintringham had all fought in Spain - although Orwell famously with the POUM rather than the International Brigade. These men and others like them brought military and political experience back from Spain that gave them rather false hopes and expectations about the ideological and organisational conduct of Britain's war against Nazi Germany. This led to a spate of military-political pamphlets and essays being published arguing for political education and an armed population as the keys elements of an anti-fascist war.

[48] McKenzie, p.72-73.

*Figure 2.1*



Hugh Slater, *Home Guard For Victory! An Essay on Strategy, Tactics and Training* (London: Gollancz, 1941), p.102 - 103.[49]

A clear division therefore emerged between the political/military pamphlets of the period and the invasion fiction. In the former a link between radical politics and the demand to arm the populace is maintained while the later was often highly conservative. Even in *Loss of Eden*, the most progressive example of the genre, the possibility of an armed populace is almost completely ignored.

## Fear and defeatism

From a military point of view it was difficult to argue against the assertion that if Germany invaded, Britain would be in a better position if the populace were armed and

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[49] Hugh Slater was the Chief of Operations in the International Brigade Staff during the closing stages of the Spanish Civil War.

trained. Hugh Slater, one of the many on the left who felt empowered to criticise the conduct of the war due to his experience in Spain, argues this case persuasively:

> From a military point of view, the Home Guard, combined with the regular forces, makes a military occupation of Britain by German Fascism fantastically improbable. Politically, a fully developed Home Guard provides an absolute guarantee against both the crude Fascism of a Mosley and the more insidious Fifth Column activities of any would-be British Petains.[50]

Given the logical strength of this argument the most effective way for those who felt dubious about arming the populace was to claim that it was unnecessary. By denying the possibility of a successful invasion the issue is avoided and energy and arms have to be directed to more conventional and state controlled forms of warfare. *The V Plan* (1941) and *Tunnel From Calais* both utilise the threat of imminent invasion but finish by reassuring the reader that the social, political and military elites could avert any serious attempt at conquest.[51] *The V Plan* shows the military wing of the state requisitioning a mining village in South East England in order to dig a tunnel through which to invade Northern France. The inhabitants of this village have no say in this, and the more awkward individuals are weeded out and sent elsewhere.

From a post-war perspective it seems impossible to imagine that, necessary though certain increases in state power may have been, they did not set warning bells ringing in a country fighting fascist authoritarianism. One of the most significant areas where the state subordinated all other economic needs and political rights to its authority was in the imposition of the "labour budget". The need for a large, skilled and mobile labour force was one of the key requirements of fighting a "total war" and it is difficult to see that the state had any choice but to conscript and direct people to where they were most needed. As an afterthought it should be noted that to see state power as the only way to compel the individual into the service of the collective assumes that there was no way in which an active anti-fascist hegemony could have been built. However, in absence of such active support, the wartime government had the mechanisms to implement the "labour budget" with the passive agreement of the

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[50] Slater, p.120.
[51] Graham Seton, *The V Plan* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1941).

people.[52] As Stephen King-Hall, the author of yet another forties book on political warfare, commentes;

> It can be asserted without fear of contradiction that Herr Hitler's powers over the Reich citizen cannot be greater than those at the disposal of the British War Cabinet, for the simple reason that the various Defence Regulations give the executive complete powers over the person and property of every citizen.[53]

Yet *The V Plan* does not even begin to problematicise these shows of state authoritarianism. Rather, it celebrates the power of the nation and the state as one, and ridicules any attempt to include the needs or wants of the populace in the conduct of the war.

> "I've never seen team work like this before in my life, Grant," remarked a visiting member of the War Cabinet. "What's the recipe?"
>
> "Just the will to win, sir," replied Grant, a grin creasing his lined face.
>
> "Well, well," grunted the Cabinet Minister.
>
> "And yet men still demand to know what are our war aims."
>
> "To win is our sole objective," said Grant grimly.
>
> "It's just inherent in the British character. The old Boche may think us a funny lot with our football and our cricket, but we always play to win."[54]

The reference to "war aims" is indicative of the way in which the novel sees the nature of the conflict in both a political and military sense. War aims, or peace aims, were a political football during the Second World War as the Labour Movement attempted to use its co-operation with the war effort as a lever to win some concessions from capital and the state.[55] The assumption that it is unnecessary to give in to these kinds of demands, and the ridiculing of the idea that any motivation other than blood-thirsty patriotism might be needed, clearly sets out the political perspective of this novel. Conversely Brown and Serpell describe the way in which a state organising for total

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[52] P. Inman, *Labour In The Munitions Industries* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957).

[53] Stephen King-Hall, *Total Victory* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1941), p.37.

[54] Seton, p.308.

[55] An obvious example of the Labour Movement using the war to cut a deal with the state and capital can be found in Ernest Bevin's decision to drop his opposition to "the conscription of labour" in return for his appointment as Minister for Labour and the

war has a tendency to slide towards the corporatism that *The V Plan* opposes. Brown and Serpell observe that "one does not spend ten years building a self-sufficient war economy without learning some of the arts of socialist organisation."[56]

**Follow the leader**

Orwell revisits his critique of traditional military drill in a 1941 review of *Home Guard for Victory!* "There is much controversy in the Home Guard as to the value of parade-ground drill, and the difference of opinion goes deeper than is sometimes realised. Usually it is true that people of reactionary outlook are believers in spit and polish and people of "Left" opinions have a guerrilla attitude to war."[57] Yet, the "reactionary" *When The Bells Rang* demonstrates that after an invasion, social and military structures can not carry on unaffected.

Ralph Wallace, the young leader of the Home Guard who has been forced out of the army because he is just *too* useful as a non-combatant, tells his men immediately after the invasion: "You're out of the Russocks Home Guard and you're now in the Russocks Home Guerrillas".[58] However, the practical and conceptual differences between the Home Guerrillas and the Home Guard are minimal. While some combatants hide in the woods, most continue in their day jobs. The unit continues to report, whenever possible, to the British Army command structure, retains its hierarchical, class determined, command structure and shows a general unwillingness to give up the "spit and polish" that Orwell was so disdainful of. This reflects the instructions that the British Government was issuing, which exhibited some concern that the British people would turn into a red rabble uncontrollable by the regular army. The "Stand Fast" leaflet, for example, urged civilians not to make "independent attacks on military formations."[59]

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Restriction on Engagement Order, which essentially forced employers to give trade union members first refusal on any new jobs, Inman, p.41.

[56] Brown and Serpell, p.189.

[57] Orwell, "Review of *Home Guard for Victory!* by Hugh Slater for *The New Statesman and Nation* 15th Feb 1941", Peter Davison, Ian Angus and Sheila Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Twelve: A Patriot After All 1940-1941* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.388.

[58] Armstrong and Graeme, p.70.

[59] Roberts, p.305.

*The V Plan* also asserts that strong leadership is the most essential component of the British war effort arguing that, "when it comes to a showdown" the British people "want to be told what to do".[60] Invasion narratives generally demonstrate a belief in the innate ability of the ruling classes to lead. Despite the social disruption of a German invasion in *When The Bells Rang*, the solid, dependable Wallace family, like the Corbetts before them, still end up with both narrative and social supremacy. The English ruling class, even with its back to the wall and facing the Nazi menace, never feels the need to call on its social inferiors to do anything other than the most menial of tasks.

While most invasion novels maintain a consistent democratic rhetoric, there is no attempt to define the war effort as a war *of* the people. It may be a war fought on *behalf of* the people but an elite conducts it. The elite adopts many forms in these novels particularly in terms of its relationship to official representatives and institutions of the state. The heroes of popular fiction are often enthusiastic amateurs, regularly, unofficial government agents or occasionally, fully fledged members of some shadowy intelligence service. Despite this, the casts of these novels are almost exclusively drawn from the titled classes (De Richleau in *Strange Conflict* or Sir John in *Tunnel From Calais*), the gentry (Henry Maxwell in *When The Bells Rang* and Richard in *Strange Conflict*), officers in the armed forces (Macrae in *Tunnel From Calais* or Colonel Duncan Grant in *The V Plan*) and the international rich (Rex in *Strange Conflict*).

If you have never been to public school you are unlikely to find yourself appearing in a novel about the defence of Britain against possible or actual invasion. The working class and peasantry generally appear briefly as loyal sidekicks or as foolish but occasionally useful incidental characters. Henry, the poacher in *Tunnel From Calais*, happily contribute what abilities he has but refuses to take any leadership in the defence of the country. "Cor, I don't know," said Henry "I haven't got the brain for puzzlin. If it's anything moving in the dark it's mine, but that's as far as I go."[61] This relegation of the bottom rungs of society to a supporting role was perhaps surprising when we think that the cabinet contained men like Ernest Bevin. However, the invisibility of the working class from fiction is an oft remarked upon phenomenon and it is clear that most of the authors of wartime invasion fiction make little attempt to redress this balance.

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[60] Seton, p.149.

**Men make grenades, women make jam**

How conditions changed for women during the Second World War has been as hotly debated as any other aspect of Second World War historiography.[62] This study is unable to do justice to the complex questions of gender politics during the period. Yet, the contention that the analytical tools of conventional politics will not describe Second World War politics tessellates with the feminist critique. Lynne Segal, for example, talked about how "different types of oppression are connected in such complex ways" and argued that classical Marxism "had failed to theorise adequately the specific situation of women."[63] Phyllis Lassner has argued that women writing in the predictive mode in the 1930s and 1940s were attempting to overtly "challenge prevailing notions of progressive and conservative."[64] This feminist sense that political culture cannot be summed up as a point on a spectrum, but rather as an area within a three dimensional matrix offers new perspectives from which to understand the culture and fiction of the Second World War.

The role imagined by invasion fiction for women in resistance movements is interesting in part because it offers a way to assess a political struggle that is poorly represented in the sources associated with parliament and mainstream party politics. While resistance movements across the continent allocated important, albeit often un-equal, roles to women there is little engagement with this in most British invasion fiction.[65] In *When The Bells Rang,* the middle-class Mrs Wallace is described as having "an inborn conviction that wars were things of men, for men, and that they alone understood what it was all about." The text is keen to stress that "she did her part" but it continues, "she didn't hope to comprehend."[66] While not all women are portrayed as

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[61] Divine, p.62.

[62] For example in B Frieden, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 1965); Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War* (London: Macmillian, 1968) and Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers In The Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[63] Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago Press, 1994), pp.43-44.

[64] Phyllis Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.125.

[65] A powerful example of the involvement of women in the French resistance can be found in Jeremy Josephs, *Swastika Over Paris* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990), pp.73-74. He tells the story Paulette Szlifke a young Jewish woman who became part of the resistance movement in Paris. She organised industrial sabotage in the factory where she worked making gloves for the German army. She also undertook dangerous information gathering missions for the resistance.

[66] Armstrong and Graeme, p.7.

having quite the same level of congenital stupidity, they have little to do with actually repelling the Nazi invaders.

Ralph's girlfriend Dora is, like Anita in *Tunnel From Calais* and Yvonne in *The V Plan*, cast in the role of victim. She is a prize that Ralph and his father must wrest from Wasserman and his invaders, who are intent that she and other English women "will carry German-begot children in their wombs".[67] Women who take a more active part in the resistance movement are usually constructed as in some way unfeminine. Jane and Arabella Locke, the village spinsters, are able to sabotage a German vehicle but only because they have nothing to fear from the bestial Germans. Jane Locke actually seems to look forward to the possibility of rape "'And look what they do to civilians and to - to women' - her voice was pregnant with morbid curiosity."[68] The only woman who is seen to take an active and deliberate part in the organised resistance movement is Mrs Flint, the drunken slattern whose daughters are known for their easy virtue.[69] She kills the sinister German officer Wasserman at the end of the novel and redeems some of her self-esteem, if not her femininity.

Tommy Tucker's description, in *Plague Over London*, of the dangers posed by a successful female spy further enhances the incompatibility of feminine morality and martial competence.

> Girls are the more hard boiled sex, and they're far more successful at the game than men, generally. I suppose that's because they have something to sell for the information they get which a man hasn't got. It's they only way to look at it. Mrs Grundy may call it prostitution, and, well, if she's right, all I can say is that it's prostitution for a very high ideal. Anyhow, I've never known a successful woman agent who wasn't always prepared to go to the limit; and I must have known hundreds. Remember, Jack, always treat your popsy as a machine. In goes the money - out comes the information.[70]

In many ways the negative presentation of women in *When The Bells Rang* and *Plague Over London* is unusual only in the amount of coverage given to female characters. Novels from across the political spectrum largely ignore women altogether. Whether it be *Invasion, I, James Blunt* or *Loss of Eden* the message is clear, action, whether political, military or intellectual, was man's work. Women, if they appear at all, are

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[67] Ibid p.122.
[68] Ibid, p.80.
[69] Ibid p.34.

rarely developed as characters and more usually fulfil a metaphorical role. The courtship of a young, attractive woman repeatedly serves as an anthropomorphised translation of the battle to invade or repel invasion. Furthermore, if a woman in a 1940s invasion fiction is not a pure, virginal victim, it is a fairly inflexible rule that she will be an evil and immoral enemy agent.

Despite the fact that the type of conflict described in invasion fiction would be impossible without at least passive, and probably active, involvement of women, female characters are generally excluded from decision-making and other active roles. This policing of gender barriers is perhaps surprising when the Second World War is generally seen as a period when women are becoming more closely integrated into the military and industrial workings of the state. Both in the resistance movements in occupied Europe and in the factories and farms of Britain, women were, and were seen to be, increasingly essential to the conduct of total warfare. Yet the (largely male) authors who dreamt up potential invasions seem to have found that their imaginations failed them when they attempted to conceptualise the roles women might play in these conflicts.

Female authors like Storm Jameson and Vita Sackville-West were almost alone in imagining a significant role for women in the aftermath of an invasion. Yet we should not simply assume that the feminised resistance movement of *Then We Shall Hear Singing* or Sackville-West's strong female characters spring automatically out of the gender of the author. Neither Jameson nor Sackville-West were 1940s everywomen. Both moved in circles where feminism and pacifism were frequently discussed. Jameson in particular was a pacifist and feminist activist of national renown and her conception of invasion springs out of the debates of these movements.

*Then We Shall Hear Singing* centres around a group of women who provide a principled and largely non-military opposition to Nazi occupation. The occupied nation, "the Protectorate", draws its strength and resilience from women-centred communities. The novel can be seen as laying out a theorised feminist agenda. While making war is male and patriarchal, suffering is female and therefore women are better positioned to cope with the increased levels of oppression they encounter under the Nazi occupation force. The novel is not dismissive of masculinity as entirely oppressive. The men of the

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[70] Craig, p.22.

Protectorate ultimately have to go off to the hills to liberate the nation. Nevertheless, it was noticeable how in the quotation below it is "men" who are cruel to each other while women's bodies stand the suffering.

> They walked off, the two women, well-built, strong, one with her family carried invisibly in her arms, the other bearing about with her a dead lover, despair, hatred, anger. Their faces were calm - gay enough, too. Fortunately, the human body is surprisingly tough -or how could it have stood all these centuries the cruelty men have for each other?[71]

There is obviously a clear feminist political tradition of seeing war as essentially patriarchal. How far this analysis was part of the feminist movement in the 1940s is debatable. On one hand, equalitarian feminists campaigning for the vote had fought the assumption that war was a male preserve as this provided a justification for an inequality of the franchise. If women were not expected to sacrifice equally with men how could they demand an equal voice in the nature and direction of government? However, in the total wars of the twentieth century this justification no longer stood up to any intellectual scrutiny. As one suffragette pamphlet argued in 1914, "after the sack of Louvain... can it be said any longer that women have no share in the horrors of war?[72]

The feminist movement of the 1940s remained in the shadow of the campaign for the franchise. By 1939 women had only been voting on the same basis as men for eleven years. Yet by the 1920s feminists were beginning to question whether the goal of a feminist movement was simply equality with the patriarchal society that created their oppression. This section of the feminist movement labelled itself as new feminists and was becoming intellectually dominant from the mid 1920s. One new feminist, Mary Stocks, argued "It is a poor kind of feminism which adopts unquestioningly the standards of a man-made social philosophy."[73] These debates demonstrated the difficulty of reducing politics to questions of left and right. The feminist movement had its own disagreements that opened up political questions in radically different ways to the debates between conservatives and socialists.

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[71] Jameson, p.37.

[72] The front page of *Votes For Women*, 11th September 1914 quoted in Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement 1918-1928* (London: IB Tauris Publishers, 1997), p.16.

[73] Mary Stock quoted in Law, p.167.

Jameson is obviously influenced by the idea that it was possible to identify patriarchal and anti-patriarchal social and political systems. Interestingly, the women in Jameson's novel are not clamouring to work in the factories and fight in the armies of The Protectorate. Their battle is not for acceptance into a patriarchal order represented in its extreme form by Nazi invasion, but rather to maintain small, mutually supportive communities and to protect their culture from displacement. That this aim is gendered is demonstrated by Jameson's biological determinist rhetoric.

> A woman carries her child nine months. During these nine months she is every woman; she remembers the gestures she learned then, and they serve her in place of a common language. Forgotten in anger, they return in suffering, poverty uses this language, and so do happiness, death, childhood.[74]

The women of the novel recognise this universal bond of femininity and motherhood and use it as a bulwark against the ultra-patriarchal Nazism. Under the pressure of Nazi cultural cleansing, even women like Liba, who originally situates herself outside of the feminine community, realise that they need to rely on networks of sisterhood.

> "I've never wanted to rely on another woman," Liba said. " I'm not made like that - to have arguments or secrets. I could tell my secrets to my husband, or the table when I was cooking. But you can rely on me. So can your child. If I have one they can play together."[75]

Intriguingly, Jameson's conception of femininity has a number of similarities to the representation of women in *When The Bells Rang* and *The V Plan*. Both Jameson and these more patriarchal fictions see women as nurturing, non-violent mothers and partners. Yet, in the other invasion fictions these supposedly pre-determined feminine qualities are used as a reason to exclude women from decision-making and power. Conversely, in *Then We Shall Hear Singing* these qualities form the basis of the resistance movement and are the ultimate source of the nation's power. As Phyllis Lassner notes in her reading of the novel: "Dominated by the Nazi ideology of 'kinder, kurchen, kirche', the women turn it to their advantage, using their prescribed nature – their position as mothers – to recreate culture."[76]

In Jameson's novel it is a woman who leads the resistance, yet she is not a feminised version of Ralph Wallace in *When The Bells Rang* or Macrae in *Tunnel From*

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[74] Jameson, p.46.
[75] Ibid p.146.
[76] Lassner, p.107.

*Calais,* who are unproblematically depicted as British supermen; young, intelligent without being bookish, athletic, patriotic and full-bloodedly heterosexual. Jameson sets up her heroine in opposition to this quasi-fascist fetishisation of male perfection. Anna Kouvilouva is not a feminised version of the all-action upper-middle class hero that dominates Second World War fiction. Jameson resists the temptation to have a Valkiric leader guide the Protectorate to its salvation. Anna is an old woman whose authority to lead the resistance comes from mental and spiritual as opposed to physical strength. She represents a shamanistic mixture of religion and racial memory that enables the culture of the Protectorate to survive the Nazi oppression. The novel plays out a conflict between the ultra-modernism of the Nazi invaders and the spiritual values of the invaded.

While it would be easiest to locate Jameson's politics as leftist and progressive, it is clear that she was ideologically distinct from the New Jerusalemers. In the Protectorate Jameson created a nation free from the trappings that we would associate with European capitalist countries. The Protectorate only seems to have one city and no factories or domestic civil service. Indeed no mention is made of the pre-Nazi government at all. The novel does not mention the existence of any oppression before the invasion, but equally the people of the Protectorate do not look towards a ruling class to save them once they are invaded. The novel shows only the conquered or conquerors – it does not discuss any differentiations within those groups. In most invasion novels, where an opposition exists, a member of the political or social elite leads it. More leftist novels spurn the feudal social relations which novels such as *Plague over London*, *The V Plan* and *When The Bells Rang* celebrate, and look to Labour politicians and trade union leaders to lead the fight against the Nazis. *Then We Shall Hear Singing*, however, displays an almost anarchistic belief in the spontaneous collective mobilisation of the populace.

**A battle between good and evil**
The nature of the occupation experienced in *Then We Shall Hear Singing* determines the nature of the resistance. The Protectorate is not simply invaded rather, the people are experimented on by Dr Hesse who discovers "a method of destroying the higher functions of the brain without affecting the body in any way."[77] The novel examines whether resistance is still possible in the face of the most extreme forms of

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[77] Jameson, p.17.

repression. It engages very directly with ideas about ethnic cleansing and cultural domination.

Jameson is dismayed and revolted by the inhumanity of the Nazis and exposes it through Hesse's mental and biological experimentation. There is no attempt to understand the reasons why Nazism might have grown up; the Protectorate lacks collaborators or homegrown fascists. The people of the Protectorate, especially the women, represent the best that humanity has to offer. Their ultimate triumph over Nazi occupation and Hesse's mind control experiments represent a humanist transcendence. They are able to drive Nazi invaders from the Protectorate, not because they are stronger or better organised, but because they have light on their side and good must be victorious over evil.

*Then We Shall Hear Singing* expresses a belief that good inevitably transcends over evil. This is in part humanistic, but is also tied closely to the Christian mysticism that Anna espouses throughout the novel. Anna's leadership of the resistance springs from her belief that the people of the Protectorate will arise Christ-like from the brain-death created by Dr Hesse's experiments. When the doctor returns to inspect the results of his biological experiments he discovers the beginning of resistance, the people are no longer "quite, obedient, docile," but "restless" and "making us some sort of religion." [78] In many ways the resistance movement described was a kind of Liberation Theology. Religion and a resistance, which is to some extent class based, were bound together to create the ideology and practice of a mass movement.

The way religion is characterised in *Then We Shall Hear Singing* also makes it possible to see it as part of an anti-modernist longing for pre-scientific, pre-capitalist forms of social organisation. In Jameson's novel we see this love of pre-capitalist social and economic organisation given a radical twist. The closeness of the peasants to the land, their land, enables them to defeat the onslaught of Nazi imperialism and science.

> The sources of their faith were no longer the pillaged universities, the school-rooms become guard-rooms, the cathedrals become museums. The true source was in what each individual remembered of the past, and in what each child dreamed; it was in the fields, in the workshops, at the cross-roads from which the invaders had taken away a crucifix, in the stones. With these last - short of

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[78] Ibid p.206

changing the place of every stone in the country - the invaders could do nothing.[79]

Whereas in *Loss Of Eden* Brown and Serpell counterpose liberal democratic civilisation against Nazi barbarity, Jameson uses modernity and technology as her inhuman others. The Nazis represent irresponsible over-reaching while the peasants of the Protectorate display an honest and desirable lack of sophistication that would be incompatible with an advanced capitalist mode of social organisation. For other writers, anti-modernity is generally couched as a love of feudal relations, while Jameson depicts flat hierarchies, perhaps more reminiscent of some kind of primitive communism. Whereas *Then We Shall Hear Singing* affirms the humanity and agency of the peasantry, other novels present that class as less than human. In *The V Plan* the peasantry are seen to be integral to national identity, yet they are robbed of humanity by being constructed in terms of nature rather than culture.

> Grant spoke quietly in reply. "If the test came I wonder if we should respond to it. Love of country in England has grown less. A strong and prosperous peasant life is essential to the welfare of the state. Industrial civilization is paralysing the National heart-beat."[80]

The "we" in Grant's speech clearly does not include either the French peasantry or the English (again note this label is used rather than British) industrial working class. The organic class system has to be functioning correctly to ensure national health, but the conception of who actually comprised the nation is more complex.

Anti-modernism strides political divides although the way in which it is characterised serves a number of different and often conflicting purposes. Anti-modernity is a key component of wartime ideology. Stalinism, Nazism and total war inevitably tarnish the idea of progress in both a political and technological sense. The ideological manifestations of this can be found both inside and outside of the predictive fiction that is the subject of this study. For example, when Jameson counter poses her vision of an organic Christianity to Nazi science, she is echoing the Church of England's official report *Towards The Conversion of England* that attacked "the Industrial Revolution and the Machine Age" and hoped that the religious revival would begin in rural England.[81]

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[79] Jameson, p.103.
[80] Seton, p.15.
[81] Wilkinson, p.284.

The idea that the Nazis represented the worst of modernity is pervasive in Second World War fiction. Yet, this equation of Nazism with modernity is a partial picture of the movement. While there were modernist elements within Nazism there were also self-consciously anti-modernist strains in a movement that was anti-capitalist, anti-democratic, anti-liberal and contained elements of neo-paganism and Wagnerian Romanticism.

A potential Nazi invasion is not resisted in any one way or for any one reason. Military and political responses to war and the possibility of invasion are formed to a large extent by the ideologies of those responding. Leftists look to re-fight the Spanish civil war against the backdrop of Britain cities, while conservatives re-assert their faith that organic class structures and existing military hierarchies will survive even the challenge of invasion. Other authors' politics and military strategies can not be classified so easily, but they too were preparing to resist a possible invasion. Yet, contradictory though it may seem, none of the invasion fictions, or even the military pamphlets produced by Wintringham, Slater et al, are primarily about the possibility of an invasion. All use the external threat as a way to reflect on what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of Britain, its political, military and economic systems and its various inhabitants.

**Visions of nationhood**

Orwell observed in 1941 that it was "chiefly the atavisitic emotion of patriotism, the ingrained feeling of the English speaking peoples that they are superior to foreigners" that had kept "England on its feet during the past year".[82] In many ways the themes and tone of much invasion fiction seems to bear Orwell's assertion out. Invasion fiction is rife with nationalism. *When The Bells Rang*, for example, is full of clichéd evocations of the English people and landscape.

> Sweeping his gaze back, Tom was suddenly struck, as often before, with the beauty and peace of the scene. The forest dusted with young green, the occasional rich brown of ploughed field, the clusters of farm buildings sleeping childlike in a hollow, white sheep dabbed about over a distant green meadow; then just below the copse with primroses and cowslips and the gold of daffodils in his own garden. And over it all the spring sunshine, now beating strongly in at the window. All this went to make up not Russocks only, which he loved, but England, which he loved even more deeply. The peace of garden-like England:

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[82] George Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State", *Horizon*, IV, 20 (Aug 1941), p.135.

> peace even with the Hun across the water itself only twenty-one miles away
> beyond the hills: a peace, an England, worth fighting for to the last ditch.[83]

These conventionalised images of rural Britain come thick and fast in invasion fiction and quickly demonstrate that what is being defended is continuity and British tradition. Images of rural bliss are frequently linked to a one-nationist socio-political outlook, while the left, and those engaging with its vision, more frequently utilize urban imagery. Brown and Serpell situate the majority of *Loss Of Eden* in and around London. Likewise Orwell's fantasised revolution in "My Country Right or Left" argues that the "London gutters will have to run red with blood."[84] When the wartime left does engage with the rural it is characterised in Utopian rather than defensive terms, so while the right wants to defend the existing rural England, the left dreams of a pastoral utopia.

The rural imagery employed is clearly that of the Home Counties. The intensely cultivated and enclosed agri-industrial landscape of the South East is advanced repeatedly as an ideal of Englishness and of organic relationships between man and nature. Writers conceptualising England in terms of a rural ideal ignore the craggy hills of the north or the wild gullies of Cornwall. Needless to say, the rural geography of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are also completely ignored in this type of fiction. Invariably, the South East serves as a cipher for England and England as a cipher for Britain. This focus on the South East comes in part from a genuine assessment of where the invasion is likely to land. However, for the imaginative writer (or military strategist) there are alternatives to the Calais/Dover crossing. In van Loon's *Invasion*, America is attacked by a combination of fifth columnists and paratroopers, but no writers speculate on this kind of aerial attack in England. Churchill speculated frequently about a variety of possible invasion sites from Newcastle to Harwich. Furthermore, Rear Admiral Karl Fricke examined the coast between the Thames and the Tyne for possible landing sites.[85] The fact that no English writers choose to focus on anywhere other than the South East is therefore as much about asserting a regional hegemony as about facing up to a genuine military likelihood.

Alun Howkins traces the emergence of this conflation of the topographical conception of England with what he calls the "south country". Howkins argued that the

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[83] Armstrong and Graeme, p.12.

[84] George Orwell, "My Country Right or Left", *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), p.41.

hegemony of the "south country" comes in part from a loss of confidence in Britain as an industrial power.[86] The shift in economic and political power from the industrial north to the service dominated south is not however particular to the war. Yet, the particular social formations that dominated the "south country" are typified by "the ideas of continuity, of community, of harmony, and above all a special kind of classlessness" and this perhaps had a particular resonance with People's War ideology.[87] Locating the invasion narratives in the "south country" is a simple way to dodge questions about the internal schisms that could be detected in British society. The "south country" stands as a metaphor for an organic political unity and to assert its hegemony is to assert one-nationism and the consensus ideology of the People's War.

The dynamics of class have a central importance to wartime conceptions of what was being defended. Rural class relationships are portrayed as organic and mutually supportive rather than exploitative. Henry Maxwell, the patrician farmer in *When The Bells Rang*, is depicted as an essential part of the community. His relationship with his workers is detailed as symbiotic with no suggestion that anything other than mutual respect and equality exists.

> Henry Maxwell seldom went to the inn unless his friend Tom Wallace went too. As a big farmer employing a large share of Russocks labour he felt a little shy of 'butting in' at a place where that labour took its ease and enjoyed its social contacts. Yet as a Russocks man born and bred he loved the hot fug, the broad, burring country talk, the smell of beer, the cigarette smoke - thick and strong as a cloud of poison gas and, by closing time, about as deadly - the warm sense of human companionship, kind as the rich southern soil from which he lived, leisurely as the seasons. 'Comforting' was the word he would have used if he could have analysed his feelings.[88]

The human companionship that Henry appreciates is described with a metaphor of rural fecundity binding together social, familiar and natural relationships into a single sense of organic Englishness. The social setting from which this organic relationship springs is grounded in "the rich southern soil". This representation of what was being defended was not lost on one Highlander who remarked on the beaches of Dunkirk that "If the

[85] Glover, pp.15, 25, 37.
[86] Alun Howkins, "The Discovery of Rural England", Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (ed), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 64.
[87] ibid, p.75.
[88] Armstrong and Graeme, p.11.

English surrender too, it's going to be a long war!"[89] Values are endorsed that seem rooted in tradition, even if this tradition is to some extent a modern construction, and it is noticeable that the only thing that dates the scene in the Russocks inn as to the twentieth century is the reference to "poison gas".

In *Loss Of Eden*, Brown and Serpell take a more left/liberal line in their defence of Britain. For them it is not the class system and rural Britain that is being defended, rather it is the highly developed civil society that characterises the home of the "Mother of Parliaments" which requires celebration and a defensive commitment. Their description of the House of Commons demonstrates this faith in the political culture of Britain. "One thought of the wise social legislation brought to fruition, the scandals exposed and ended, the voices of successive statesmen summoning the nation to its constructive tasks. Thus had British democracy and empire been slowly and delicately integrated, through storm and calm, until to-day it had come to provide the framework of millions of happy and useful lives."[90] While the vision of traditional values is vastly different than that in *When The Bells Rang*, by setting their novels in Britain these authors assert the need to defend an enduring British culture. Fascism is not just being opposed, Britain and whatever the authors believe it to represent is being actively defended. Despite this level of patriotic agreement it is possible to find a large variety of conceptions of what Britain is, was, or should be, in these novels.

The majority of invasion fictions defend a right-wing and nationalist conception of Britain. The anti-fascism expressed is usually Churchillian at most, as in *When The Bells Rang* or *Invasion*, but is often non-existent, as in *Plague Over London*. Henry Maxwell in *When The Bells Rang* uses Churchill to conceptualise and guide his resistance.

> His glance was attracted by an old newspaper which lay in a drawer. He had used it to cover some document. On the side uppermost was a photo - the picture of a determined, bulldog face with jutting chin, dome-like brow and a cigar - Winston Churchill.
>
> "Yes Winnie," said Henry Maxwell suddenly to the picture.

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[89] Quoted in Roberts, p.318.
[90] Brown and Serpell, p.43.

"We will fight on the beaches. We will fight in the streets. We will fight in the fields."[91]

The Churchillian vision of Britain aimed to defend a country that was nominally democratic, moderate and conservative against invasion and influence from Germany, Italy and Russia, which were depicted as dictatorial, fanatical and anti-traditional. The popular writer of supernatural thrillers Dennis Wheatley described the Axis powers as "the Powers of Darkness" despite having penned *Black August*, which Andy Croft describes as a pro-fascist novel, during the 1930s.[92] Yet, more interesting was the way in which he characterises the Powers of Light:

> Whether or not Hitler and Mussolini themselves are great masters of Black Magic, nobody can possibly contest that it is through such ambitious and unscrupulous men, German, Italian and Japanese, that the Powers of Darkness are working and in recent years have acquired such a terrifying increase of strength upon our earth...... If they triumph, within seventy years such words as justice, toleration, freedom and compassion will have ceased to have a place in the vocabularies of the races of mankind.[93]

The defence of Britain is constructed as the defence of a moderate centrist politics. A national identity is being written into existence that seems progressive but avoids any specific political commitment. The attempt to establish an identification with "national values" which transcend class, gender and region (even if heroic characters are invariably upper middle class, male and from the South East) is a common rhetorical strategy of both the wartime government and rightist political movements of all kinds. These books are heavy with rhetorical commitment to democracy but universally light in any kind of discussion of what that means.

Moderate nationalism is a largely negative ideology, offering little in material terms apart from freedom from invasion. Whereas other ideological positions promised their favoured group (the working class, the Aryan race, intellectuals etc) the fruits of the system, moderate nationalism offered nothing more than a continuation of the status quo. The ideological agenda of most of these novels is in many ways defined by the concept of defence. Yet, it is the active defence of a particular place and understood

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[91] Armstrong and Graeme, p.106.

[92] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.221.

[93] Dennis Wheatley, *Strange Conflict: A Black Magic Story* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p.290. First published 1941.

way of life against a feared totalitarianism. More complex ideological concepts like capitalism or even democracy often seem irrelevant in comparison to this preservation of an organic tradition.

This type of approach differed sharply with the perception of the nature of the war that liberals and leftists were trying to advance. Cyril Connolly argued repeatedly in *Horizon* that the acts of winning the war and building a new society are mutually supportive noting that "we have the opportunity of establishing new ideas where old ones have been bombed, of replacing bankrupt institutions by better ones, of defending our old, and insisting on new and wider, social liberties."[94] The task for those who did not seek, like Connolly, to transform society into a beacon of technocratic modernity was to reconceptualise the present and even the past as an anti-modern, anti-progressive utopia.

Britain was worth defending because it was both powerful and just. Whereas other nations may be one or the other, Britain combined the two. This is in effect what Churchill was arguing when he equated the defeat of Britain with "a new dark age".[95] This conflation of the interests of Britain with the interests of world liberty was one of the key strategies of wartime political language. It functioned domestically to pull pacifists, communists and anti-imperialists into the service of the government and to give the general populace an absolute certainty that this, unlike the previous war, was an unproblematic moral crusade. The rhetoric of world freedom and Britain as the last beacon of liberty also functioned as a persuasive tool in the rest of the world, most notably in America. In Dennis Wheatley's *Strange Conflict*, Rex, the token American, and his father, are involved in lobbying to bring America into the war. They draw on the American iconography of liberty to create a moral imperative for intervention in the war. The Statue of Liberty, they argued, "stands to-day in the Straits of Dover".[96]

Adrian Alington likewise describes Britain as "this proud, courageous, battered island" which "is today, in sober truth, the living hope of the world" in *Sanity Island*.[97] The location of the war geographically around Britain and ideologically around the vague but stirring concept of freedom is crucial to the way in which the purpose of the

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[94] Cyril Connolly, 'Comment', *Horizon* III, 14 (Feb 1941), p.89-90.
[95] Churchill quoted in Flower and Reeves, p.124.
[96] Wheatley, p.152.
[97] Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), p.307.

war is presented. An indistinct utopian world could just be glimpsed after the defeat of Germany. The exact details of this world were vague but it would undoubtedly look something like a global version of Surrey.

While it is impossible to dismiss the Churchillian equation of Britain with world freedom as a cynical rhetorical strategy, it is interesting to note that a country which had enjoyed universal adult suffrage for less than twenty years and which pursued a rapacious and undemocratic imperialism saw fit to label itself unproblematically as the home of liberty.[98] People were fighting not just to keep the Germans from the door, but for the defence of liberty and democracy and freedom from invasion. The nature of nationalism was therefore becoming increasingly fluid. While the right were unwilling to make any actual concessions they were forced to utilise the language of progressive democrats in order to pull the left on board and to define themselves in relation to fascism. The nature of British capitalism did not necessarily need to change, although to some it extent it did transform itself, but more important was the need to re-label it in an emancipatory terminology. Imperialism, for example, could be rebranded as the export of liberty.

**Redefining class relationships**

Inequalities are denied in the face of wartime unity and the behaviour of the landed classes towards their social inferiors is frequently glossed over. Indeed the whole question of property, ownership and power is deftly avoided. In the face of Nazi invasion all are equally in danger of being dispossessed, therefore logic dictates that if the invasion is foiled all would possess. *When the Bells Rang* first asserts the existence of pre-war mutual respect between classes by assuring the reader that nobody "rich or poor" had ever "demanded admittance to another's house" until the invasion. Yet after the invasion these feudal relations have to bend to the ideology and necessity of wartime. People's War values are adopted and the reader is assured that regardless of class "all houses were to become open to all Russockers whenever they needed shelter."[99] This novel is clearly not attempting to document reality but rather to play a part in the negotiation of the social coalition that fought the Second World War.

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[98] Ross McKibben has noted that "Even in the early 1920s use of the word 'democracy' to describe the English polity was not universal. By 1939, however it was universal." Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.v.

[99] Armstrong and Graeme, p.101.

The People's War coalition had to be carefully manufactured and maintained with assurances of mutual interest. Everyone had to be seen to be facing the same peril regardless of social class, and to be seen to sacrifice equally towards the defence of England. Despite the idea that Britain witnessed a swing to the left during the war, the background details of many of the novels show a Britain that was dominated by the class system and unified by its imperial greatness. The sense of social solidarity that was developed during the war ironically had a particularly right-wing flavour. While the idea of collective endeavour is frequently encouraged it is shown to be dependent on the existence of hierarchical social and political structures.

The Britain, or to be more precise the England, that is being defended is frequently presented in fiction as a crypto-feudal society based around landowners and their tenants. The reality wa somewhat different however as the social distribution of land ownership had recently changed fundamentally. Between 1919 and 1921 it is estimated that one-quarter of the land surface of the United Kingdom changed hands as the aristocratic class dismantled their huge landed estates.[100] Authors such as Armstrong and Graeme are clearly trying to return to a pre-modern, rather than pre-war, Britain. Were it not for the occasional glimpses of the mechanised war machine, novels such as *Tunnel From Calais* and *When The Bells Rang* could be depicting a Britain in which the industrial revolution has not taken place. This ideological and geographical commitment also has the effect of excluding large sections of British society; industrialists, trade unionists, office workers, artists, government officials and other creatures whose natural habitat is urban.

Tom Harrisson notes that wartime writing voiced suspicion about certain, largely urban, sections of the population:

> It is common for war books to blame the war on something. Most commonly they blame (often with bitter violence) the intellectual, the young man, the allegedly feeble character, who is continually mixed up with the Pacifist, the Communist, the Socialist, the undergraduate and the poet.[101]

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[100] Newby, Bell, Rose and Saunders, *Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), p.37.

[101] Tom Harrison, "War Books", *Horizon*, IV, 24 (Dec 1941), p.420.

Figures such as the poet and the undergraduate are criticised for being militarily redundant and outside of the organic class structure. In *When The Bells Rang* Vivien Munro's disability is seen as symptomatic of his effeminate, artistic leanings and his cowardice. He is held up for ridicule and suspicion because his bad heart fails to prevent him from "walking miles and miles about the countryside communing with nature for inspiration for his musical compositions."[102] This prejudice is ultimately endorsed when he is discovered to be a traitor and hanged without trial.

What Harrison fails to comment upon was the way in which the dividing lines between social classes are vigorously policed by wartime fiction. Those who refused to fit in to society are censured, but so too are those who attempt to fit into a place different from that which birth has allocated them. The social arriviste and the nouveau-riche are censured almost as severely as the intellectual. The heroes of invasion novels often knew each other and the authorities, through a network of school and university connections. The failure to present and utilise these nepotistic networks is usually sufficient to condemn a character as a spy.

Why is there this attempt to locate Englishness, the national ideology of one of the world's most advanced capitalist countries, in a pre-capitalist tradition? It may have grown from the patrician illusions of the ruling class, particularly those elements of the ruling class that drew their power from land rather than capital. It is certainly possible to detect elements of this desire for a patrician past in some of Churchill's speeches. Dennis Healey comments on Churchill's understanding of the social composition of Britain saying,

> I always remember one broadcast in which he talked about, "You men and women of England, who are listening to me in your cottages." He really was totally out of touch with the real world.[103]

This attempt to write the urban and the modern out of existence is obviously not a planned strategy. The drive to unite all sections of society in defence of Britishness, in some ways mitigated against this ideological anti-modernism. The elite was forced to widen access to power and to allow other social forces to participate in the exercise of power. This was obviously most remarkable in the inclusion of the leaders of labour in

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[102] Armstrong and Graeme, p.15.

government, but also could be observed in the way in which the artistic and intellectual communities were brought into the state machine through organisations like the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) and the expansion of the range of BBC broadcasters.[104] Much invasion fiction reacts decisively against this corporatisation of society and the elevation of new sectors into the social and political elite.

The writers discussed so far were frequently attempting to use the war as a way to entrench certain sections of the ruling elite at the same time as driving back elements of capitalist development. It is therefore possible to label these as regressive fictions in that they sought to halt and push back the modernising forces that were represented by labour, urban growth and social fluidity. However, other writers used the same form to highlight the progressive elements of British culture and to call for the extension and development of these areas. Invasion fiction is therefore a site of contestation in which progressive and regressive fictions vie over alternative vision of Britain. This contestation cannot however be reduced to a simple left/right split and more importantly cannot be seen simply as a conflict between dominant and emergent ideologies. The programme of the Labour inspired planners of Westminster is a political intervention, not an inevitable point in an unstoppable grand narrative of progress. Although, a technocratic modernism had become hegemonic by 1945, invasion fictions reveal that these values were resisted by sections of British society.

**Defending and extending Jerusalem**

In contrast to the regressive fictions discussed above HV Morton's *I, James Blunt* and Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell's *Loss of Eden* are explicitly leftist and construct their conceptions of what is to be defended out of political and moral values defined by their politics. HV Morton worked for the Labour supporting Daily Herald from 1931 and *I, James Blunt* was clearly born out of his mainstream Labourist sympathies.[105] The novel is concerned with the fate that may have been waiting for trade unionists and political activists in the case of a Nazi invasion. James Blunt, a failed Labour prospective parliamentary candidate and an anti-fascist activist, worries

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[103] Dennis Healey quoted in Austin Mitchell, *Election '45: Reflections On The Revolution In Britain* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1995), p.97.
[104] FM Leventhal, "'The Best for the Most': CEMA and State Sponsorship of the Arts in Wartime, 1939-1945", in *Twentieth Century British History,* I, 3, (1990).

about his son-in-law, "as his record as a trades unionist is well known" and "they are always the first to disappear".[106] James' predictions prove accurate when the Nazis enact a "purity purge" and lock up left wing political activists and trade unionists. This novel voices the concerns of the organised industrial and political wings of the Labour movement.

Brown and Serpell also appear to be supporters of the Labour movement and see the antithesis of fascism in the trade union movement and the working class. Mallory, one of the novel's main resistance fighters, says on going to Lancashire:

> This is where our resistance begins. You could sweep the whole decadent world of London away to-morrow, and these people would throw up a new set of politicians, financiers and professors without any fuss at all. I have been addressing some meetings of the local Cotton Spinners' Association, and, if the men here are typical of the trade-union movement up and down the country, I can assure you that next September's meeting of the TUC will change the whole situation. The Greyshirts are strong here too, but I prefer the quite strength of the loyal Labour men. No Hitler could begin to undermine their confidence and determination, or resist them when the time comes to act.[107]

However, the implications of *Loss of Eden* stretch out beyond the world of organised labour. Brown and Serpell look to a wider spectrum of society. The failure of the revolt described above serves to underline the fact that, in Brown and Serpell's opinion, the industrial working class is not in and of itself adequate to successfully oppose fascism. The Britain that Brown and Serpell seek to defend is an older, more liberal conception of society than that envisioned by others on the left.

The elements of society that Serpell and Brown are defending and celebrating represent the best traditions of tolerant liberal democracy.

> The London I had come to six short years before had been a Weltstadt, a mainspring of world civilisation. It had been an imperial capital, the source and inspiration of good government in a thousand corners of the globe. Its financial organisation had governed that immense system which allowed railways to be built in Argentina and power-houses in Turkey. It has been the place where conflicting ideas met and found their levels. Above all it had been teeming with ideas, societies, and causes which, working themselves out through the whole

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[105] "HV Morton a biography", *Aftermath: When The Boys Came Home*, http://www.aftermathww1.com/morton_biog.asp, 4th May 2001.
[106] Morton, p.14.
[107] Brown and Serpell, p.123.

body of human endeavour, had leavened the mass and given zest and purpose to life.[108]

It is difficult to place this celebration of pluralism, liberty and liberalism within a wartime context that is not highly reductive. We could see it as symptomatic of the supposed broad swing to the left. This novel could be a literary manifestation of the "thoughtful corporal" described famously by Arthur Koestler who felt "vaguely attracted by Common Wealth" kept "a diary at irregular intervals" planned to contribute to "Tribune or New Writing" and looked forward to an uninspiring program of self-improvement through "W.E.A. evening classes, night reading and an elaborate saving plan for a week's visit to France."[109] Koestler's mention of the wartime socialist party Common Wealth is instructive as it demonstrates that there was a plurality of voices on the left.[110] Wartime politics, even left wing politics, contained a lot more diversity than has often been recognised. Correspondingly Serpell and Brown's novel is not simply representative of a swing to the left; it is also engaged in thinking through what the left actually stands for.

In fact the most obvious context which we can find for *Loss of Eden* is that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Yet this is obviously to stand the issue on its head as *Loss of Eden* predates Orwell's work. This leads us to wonder whether Orwell read and was influenced, both politically and structurally, by *Loss of Eden.* More importantly, it suggests that the political points of reference around which Orwell moved (the ILP, Tribune and the Trotskyist left) provide the reader with clues as to where Brown and Serpell were coming from.[111] The war awakened and developed a number of ideological strands and the conflict between these ultimately resulted in what has been somewhat inaccurately labelled the post-war consensus. Largely this conflict was resolved simply through the harnessing of the most powerful social movements (especially the Labour Movement) behind a Fabian devised programme of state socialism. However, it is possible to find all sorts of forms of dissent from this new hegemony.

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[108] Brown and Serpell, p.194.

[109] Arthur Koestler quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background, 1939-60* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1993), p.20.

[110] For a brief summary of the historiography surrounding Common Wealth see Appendix Two.

Brown and Serpell's book is primarily about the dangers of fascism, but also celebrates the strength of democratic pluralism. The progressive, non-statist vision that they articulated found no significant electoral manifestation, yet, did this mean that they were simply irrelevant? They may have been two tiny figures standing alongside Orwell and other irrelevant dissidents as the juggernaut of Labourism left behind radical democracy and headed for the centralist social democracy of the post-war period. The Introduction to this study argued for the need to reassess the nature and extent of the apparent wartime "swing to the left". Brown and Serpell offer one clue about some of the elements that made up wartime political culture. Their novel is an expression of moderate leftism yet they articulate a politics significantly different from that of the mainstream. If, however, we were to view them not as writers but as voters it would seem almost inconceivable that they did not vote Labour in 1945. To draw conclusions about the aims of Labour voters from the party that they support is therefore likely to lead to an unsubtle and often incorrect appreciation of wartime political culture. This is not to claim that the Labour votes in 1945 hide some unfulfilled radical socialist projects. Rather it is to recognise that the political projects outlined in fiction during the war frequently did not fit onto conventional political reference points.

## So why imagine an invasion?

Much more than realising a genuine fear of invasion these novels provide intellectual space for reflecting about the nature of British society and government. Socialists felt that the threat of invasion might provide an opportunity to radicalise the populace, while Churchill and those like him used the fear of conquest as a way to inspire a more wholehearted popular engagement with the war. That there was a very poor level of preparation for invasion did not mean that a general level of anxiety about its possibility was not present. The volume of invasion discourse produced during the Second World War demonstrates this anxiety. Yet, all the fictional representations fail to engage in any significant way with contemporary models of resistance. This was most notably demonstrated through the failure to really engage with what civilians in general, and women in particular, would do in the case of an invasion.

Invasion fiction, like other forms of imaginative fiction, is not largely predictive. The novels use the fact of an invasion to discuss social relations and often to legitimise

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[111] For a discussion of Orwell's political influences and associations see John Newsinger, *Orwell's Politics* (Macmillian: Houndsmill and London, 1999).

favoured elements of the status quo. The conscious political and cultural strategy of building an anti-Nazi hegemony during the Second World War sought to convince the participants in the war that all their interests were bound up together. All of the authors who chose to write in the invasion mode were overtly anti-Nazi, and in different ways they all sought a basis on which as many people as possible could unite against the Nazi threat. All also sought to legitimise the defence of national boundaries against invasion. However, national defence was not always the sole focus of their texts. The threat was also conceived as patriarchal, anti-labour movement, anti-English, anti-democratic or more generally as anti-traditional. Nevertheless, there was rarely any attempt to understand how and why German Nazism targeted such diverse groups and what the nature of Nazism was.

Perhaps the most significant social and political effect of the threat of invasion was the legitimisation of a centralising state machine. The worst possibilities of Nazi invasion were held up to justify the compromises that people needed to make in the here and now. Yet, even as state power was being entrenched, critiques of it were being constructed. Some, like Jameson or Brown and Serpell, critiqued the growth of state power as authoritarian and anti-liberal, while others reacted against the creeping socialism they perceived in the call for "war aims". However, many others were simply unhappy with the whole of modernity: wars, invasions, governments, civil servants, bombs and working women. There was a repeated sense that things used to be better, yet on closer examination the "used to be" actually encapsulated an ideological rather than a historical ideal. The topography of the "south country", the organic class structure, the lack of urbanisation and perhaps most importantly the absence of war or change of any kind all provided a sense of what was being fought for that was at least as powerful as any leftist "war aim". This desire for continuity, stability, even for retreat into the past was interesting because it offers a dramatic contrast with the progressive dream of the New Jerusalemers. History may have been on the side of the technocrats but as they led the public further into the shining cities of modernity many were looking over their shoulders and longing for what they dreamed they had left behind.

## Chapter 3: To the right of Jerusalem

Chapter One argued that the 1930s saw a growing sub-genre of dystopian fiction that aimed to satirise or critique the Nazi state. Novels like Naomi Mitchison's *We Have Been Warned* (1935), Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night* (1937) and Storm Jameson's *In the Second Year* (1936) had already painted a vivid picture of life in the fascist state by the outbreak of war.[1] These novels in turn drew on a long-running tradition of dystopian writing about authoritarian states. The conditions of wartime clearly focused some of these concerns in new ways for both readers and writers. Those who read *Swastika Night* in 1937 would undoubtedly have considered it a more speculative and playful text than those who read the Left Book Club reissue in the grim days of 1940 and 1941.

Chapter Two finished by commenting on the poor understanding of Nazism in many of the invasion fictions. Yet, the ideology of fascism was being debated in other places. This chapter will examine the motivation behind these attempts and assess how successful realisations of fascist states were. Many authors set out to construct an ideological and imaginative defence against fascism alongside the military defence. One way to do this was to defend the idea of Britain and the ideology of "freedom" and to depict fascism as a living hell, the worst of all dystopian possibilities. Yet, this demonisation of the enemy was not all pervasive; as this chapter will show responses to fascism were more complex even to the extent of being surprisingly sympathetic to elements commonly associated with fascist ideology.

Some authors use their fictions to explore the attractions of fascism, asking how it has become so powerful. Others analyse fascist institutions and psychologies attempting to learn and teach more effective anti-fascist strategies deduced from their reading of the fascist party, leader or state. In *Peace In Nobody's Time* (1944), for example, George Borodin satirises fascist groups by creating a fictional party, the Leaderelites, who yoke together key fascistic elements such as authoritarianism, eugenics and racism alongside mystical paraphernalia.

> They laid great emphasis on autocratic control, as their use of the word 'leader' showed; and to this they added the doctrine of racial purity, indicated by using 'elite' as a suffix. They traced the etymology of the name Bolonia back to Baal,

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[1] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 228-232.

and never tired of extolling the virtues of that god and assailing his ancient enemies.[2]

Borodin's naming of the parts of fascism makes the ideology manageable and enables him to begin to satirise and ridicule elements of it. This chapter will demonstrate how other authors attempted this kind of analysis of fascism as the first step in building an anti-fascist ideology and practice. Phyllis Lassner argues that many wartime predictive fictions were indeed engaged in this kind of anti-fascist struggle but that their decision to "pit Britain against Nazi Germany in an ideological war" forced them to conduct "an open-ended trial of liberal democracy".[3] British society was not simply being defended but actively and continually remade and reconceptualised in order that it could more effectively stand as an alternative to the ideology of the enemy.

Many of the authors of Second World War predictive fiction chose not to tackle fascism in this overt way. While their novels may have concentrated on exactly the issues that Borodin and others identified as being at the heart of fascism, this was not done as part of a conscious anti-fascist politics. While European fascism provided an important context within which certain issues were considered, authors also looked beyond the immediate context. Political and philosophical speculation of the sort found in predictive fiction continued to imagine worlds and to engage with ideas not exclusively determined by the immediate ideological and material needs of the war.

It is important that we remember that the "Holocaust" as the destination point of fascist states was not something that would have been understood by anyone in the Second World War. Norman Finkelstein makes the controversial point that the idea of the Holocaust and the literature associated with it was a "tiny cottage industry originating at the time of the Eichmann trial", until the late 1960s when it began "appearing regularly in the titles of essays and books, freshly equipped with both a

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[2] George Borodin, *Peace In Nobody's Time* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1944), p.26. Incidentally this description ties in quite closely with Roger Griffin's account of what he calls the raw components of fascism in *The Nature of Fascism*, p.viii. "Its raw materials were such forces as militarism, racism, charismatic leadership, populist nationalism, fears that the nation or civilization as a whole was being undermined by the forces of decadence, deep anxiety about the modern age and longings for a new era to begin."
[3] Phyllis Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p.109.

capital letter and the definite article."[4] In other words at some point it stopped being a series of historical events and policies associated with Germany and Europe in the mid-Twentieth Century and became a unique and defining moment in human history. Finkelstein sees this re-labelling and re-valuing of historical events as a result of a renewed Zionism "in the wake of the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war".[5] While it is not necessary to get embroiled with the controversy around Finkelstein's thesis here, it does at least make the point that the history of the actions of fascist states is an ideological reading of events rather than pure reportage. Even if the authors of Second World War fiction had been in possession of all the facts that holocaust historians have at their disposal, and for the most part they did not, they could still not written about fascism and the Holocaust in the same intellectual, ideological and moral registers as people writing after the war and the subsequent ideological and historiographical debates.

The issue of eugenics provides a good example of how wartime understanding of the nature of fascism differs substantially from post-war understandings. Because of this the engagement with eugenics and issues of race displayed by the authors of British predictive fictions can be unsettling. Eugenics regularly featured as a positive and progressive element in 1940s utopias. This chapter will argue that in this the authors of predictive fiction were demonstrably in step with wider political and social trends. What was seen as fascism in the 1940s and what is currently seen as fascism are different things. Furthermore what was and was not fascism or anti-fascism was not always easy to agree on even during the war and writers reflected this uncertainty in their discussions of fascism and the issues that we would normally group around that ideology.

Concerns about an over-mighty and highly centralised state were also voiced regularly in 1940s predictive fiction. Although disparaging comparisons to the Nazi state were frequently made, the author's primary targets were usually undesirable trends that they perceived in British politics and culture. A comparison between the British state and a fascist state obviously critiqued both, but the rhetorical thrust was focused at home. A combatative engagement with fascism and fascist politics was a part of political discourse in wartime Britain, but it was not the sum of it. While some predictive fiction portrayed fascism as an absolute evil other fictions preferred to engage

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[4] Norman H Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York; Owl Books, 1998), pp. 92-93.
[5] Ibid, p.92.

with its ideas, analyse it, use its existence as a rhetorical weapon in domestic political debates or even to consciously or unconsciously reproduce some of its values.

This section will develop elements that have already been covered in Chapter Two. Whereas the previous chapter examined fears about the nature and extent of the threat from the Axis, this chapter will concentrate more specifically on the way in which the fascist state was conceptualised. In particular the chapter will examine how British writers engaged with Nazi ideas about race and the state. How successfully were Nazi policy and ideology understood? What motivated writers to engage with the ideology of the national enemy? And from what perspectives were these ideas critiqued?

**Why did it happen?**

While it was often easy to dismiss fascism as a deranged evil from the relative safety of wartime Britain, this failed to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of many of the authors of anti-fascist literature. Mea Allan's *Change of Heart* attempts to come to terms with why fascism developed. The novel imagines a recently defeated Germany and outlines the treatment that the nation should receive. Allan draws frequent parallels with the end of the First World War arguing that this time the German people should not be allowed to fall back into poverty and economic slump. Rather, the admittance of Germany to a global system of Common Ownership will ensure decent wages and salaries for all.[6]

In *Change of Heart* the German people are not just given planned socialism to keep them happy and stop them turning back to Nazism, they are also plied with a range of luxury goods. After the end of the war is announced a nurse comments, ""We'll be able to have silk stockings again…Silk…and lipstick!"[7] Ready access to luxuries of these kinds is seen as a bulwark against any future Hitlers. This sense that the rise of Hitler and Nazism were attributable to the terms imposed on Germany at the end of the First World War appears repeatedly in the fiction of the Second World War.

Others were less sympathetic than Mea Allan, most notably Noel Coward whose ironic *Don't Let's Be Beastly* to the Germans could have been written in direct response to *Change of Heart*.

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[6] Mea Allan, *Change of Heart* (London: George G Harrap and Co. Ltd, 1943), p.93.
[7] Ibid, p.6.

> Don't let's be beastly to the Germans,
> You can't deprive a gangster of his gun.
> Though they've been a little naughty to the Czechs and Poles and Dutch
> I can't believe those countries really minded very much.
> Let's be free with them and share the BBC with them
> We mustn't prevent them basking in the sun[8]

But regardless of Coward's disgust at pacifists and bleeding hearts, there was a desire to trace the roots of fascism and many authors sought it in social deprivation and national humiliation.

Chapter Two noted that Brown and Serpell compare post-invasion Britain to the Weimar Republic and argue that the nation "needed the counter-part of the National Socialist movement to restore her self-respect."[9] This analysis was commonplace and other authors also demonstrated it by imagining the growth of similar conditions in Britain. Clemence Dane notes in *The Arrogant History of White Ben* that "England was an endless village street in the nineteen-fifties, and Kent practically a camp, with the dispossessed sleeping under makeshift tents, and the unemployed tramping the roads in leaderless bands."[10] It is out of this vast army of the dispossessed, the "gypsies, hop-pickers, men out of work and a great many women" that Dane's fascist demagogue puts together his movement.[11]

The analysis that equated the growth of fascism with economic deprivation and political impotence was not universally held. Plenty of authors portrayed the growth of Nazism as a natural outpouring of German humourlessness and authoritarianism. Still others attributed its growth to the maniacal power of a great leader. Yet, some novels did attempt to understand and contextualise fascism. For these authors fascism was not simply a continental problem but potentially something that Britain may have to worry about if circumstances changed.

**Marching together**

HG Wells' interest in fascism was not motivated entirely by concern about its growth. Wells experimented with a number of ideas about how utopia was going to be

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[8] Noel Coward, "Don't let's be beastly to the Germans", Anwar Ragep, *Noel Coward*, http://www.stanford.edu/~aragep/noel.htm, 16th September 2002.

[9] Brown and Serpell, p.107.

[10] Clemence Dane, *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1939; Bath: Cedric Chivers Ltd, 1971), p.246.

[11] Ibid, p.314.

brought about and at the outbreak of war he was still able to express some hope that fascism may be able to be harnessed for progressive ends. *The Holy Terror* (1939), draws on his observations of European fascist parties and explores whether this form of organisation might be useful in the advancement of the Wellsian agenda. In the novel a charismatic and brilliant young leader drawn from a lower middle-class background assembles a group of like minds around him. His ideas are technocratic and progressive, based on the airmen and "the ever-multiplying class of scientific workers", and unlikely to be advanced by the "doctrinaire inflexibility and intolerance" of the Communist Party.[12] Because of this they fix on the Purple Shirts movement, taking it over and switching it away from anti-Semitism and towards the creation of the planned world state.

Wells clearly recognised the potential power that a popular movement could offer. He depicts the authoritarian structure of what becomes the "Common Sense Party" showing how it offered an enlightened minority the opportunity to decide on a new world structure. The novel goes on to show how the leadership of the Common Sense Party is able to disseminate its world-view throughout the party and beyond and subsequently to defend and implement this view through paramilitary, military and political strategies. The opportunity for rapid and efficient propagation of his ideas appealed to Wells for obvious reasons. Wells could see in the hierarchical, populist and ultimately powerful nature of the fascist party something that satisfied his sense of urgency about the need to build the world state. *The Holy Terror* was published on the eve of war, but its positive presentation of fascist movements was not isolated. Fascism, or something very like it, had been established in three major European states and challenged for power in a number of others. It was not enough for all authors to simply dismiss it, the roots of its attraction had to be sought out and lessons learned from its obvious strengths.

For Wells the usefulness of a fascist movement was what it could achieve. The utopian ends would justify almost any means. Rud's lieutenant Thirp runs a highly oppressive secret police, but it is this in part that allows the more creative members of Rud's team the space to restructure education, the economy and the rest of the new world society. For others writers however, the ends were less interesting, it was the

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[12] HG Wells, *The Holy Terror* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1939), p.47.

means that were desirable. Writers frequently explored the experiential element of belonging to a fascist movement in an attempt to unlock the attractions of fascism.

Fritzel Krauffner in *Change of Heart* finds his enforced return to civilian and non-Nazi society deeply unsettling. "It was the total and final loss that overwhelmed him, the loss of everything to which he had belonged – the Party, the comradeship of bodies strong and minds willing in obedience to the Fuhrer, the triumph of marching at last, gloriously to war under Hitler's command."[13] This sense of belonging to a powerful and single-minded group was frequently portrayed as highly desirable and safe. Keith Vaughan, for example, wrote, "The attraction of an organisation which enforces a programme of action which is beyond criticism…is obvious", before going on to suggest the RAF and fascism as two organisations that develop this kind of mentality.[14] For Fritzel Kauffner, this secure rigidity is multiplied as he has served in a hierarchical army within a fascist system. His institutionalisation makes his attempts to fit in with the liberal humanist regime of the United States of Europe bewildering as it forces him into making decisions for himself rather than "sinking his individuality in a mass group that overwhelms everything like a tidal wave."[15]

Likewise, in *The Aerodrome*, Roy celebrates the fascistic unity he experiences in the Airforce as a willing participant:

> But we had an aim which was nothing less than to assume ourselves the whole authority by which men lived, and we had a power that was not an affair of cyphers, but was real and tangible. We were set to exercise our brains, our nerves, our muscles, and our desires towards one end, and to back the force of our will we possessed the most powerful machines that have been invented by man. It was not only our dexterity with these machines, but the whole spirit of our training which cut us off from the mass of men; and to be so cut off was, whether we realised it or not, our greatest pleasure and our chief article of pride.[16]

This direct engagement by the central character in the workings of the fascist organisation has the effect of forcing the reader into understanding the appeal and attraction of fascism. The reader is presented with a terrifying but credible social system. While the novel invites a philosophical and psychological rather than political

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[13] Allan, p.21.
[14] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.63.
[15] Allan, p.36.
[16] Warner, p.248.

reading, it is possible to imagine a military clique like the Air Force assuming state power and then presiding over an authoritarian, ultra-modernist cultural revolution. In this situation Roy and those like him have the opportunity to be part of Air Force's will to power, again submerging their individuality in the collective, or to stay outside of it confused, weak and ultimately crushed.

Authors such as Dane, Brown and Serpell, Allan and to an extent Warner attempted to understand fascism as their contribution to the war effort. These attempts to analyse, interpret and publicise the nature of fascism hoped to play a role in building an anti-fascist consciousness and suggesting possible routes for the conduct of the war and whatever was to follow it. These authors' refusal to engage in crude black propaganda was a tactical decision rather than a political one. They felt that their anti-fascist aims could best be furthered by a serious engagement with the politics of fascism as they understood them. Yet, some of these authors, and others like Wells, also discovered things that they found attractive and wished to learn from within fascism.

**Race and eugenics**

In the aftermath of the war the racist and in particular the anti-Semitic nature of the Nazi state has become a defining feature of how the war against Nazi Germany is remembered. Finkelstein describes this arguing that from 1967 "the version of the Nazi genocide gaining currency conceived it not as a complex and contingent event but rather as a uniquely Jewish event perpetrated in the name of eternal anti-Semitism".[17] It is worth recalling that this racial element was not necessarily found in all versions of fascism. Anti-Semitism was not a central component of fascist ideology in Italy until Hitler exerted some pressure.[18] While wartime British predictive fiction reveals a widespread awareness of the racial dimension of Nazi ideology, there is no clear consensus about how to deal with this knowledge. Furthermore, there is a frequently stated enthusiasm for eugenics in many novels.

An anti-Nazi ideology that would emerge after the reports from Bergen-Belsen and other concentration camps became part of the official story of the war. Leo Mates locates the origin of an international concern with human rights in the discovery of the holocaust that goes beyond the purely Jewish version of events that Finkelstein disputes. Mates argues that the Holocaust "certainly contributed to the emergence of more

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[17] Finkelstein and Birn, p.93.

[18] Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), p.38.

enlightened views towards populations of a different color of skin, culture, or language. The conscience of European people was awakened also in regard towards the underdeveloped countries of the formerly colonised parts of the world."[19] If this is a little naïve in the face of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, religious war in Afghanistan, *Daily Mail* campaigns against asylum seekers and Le Pen's challenge for the French Presidency, it does at least show that a particular anti-fascist ideology was developed in the wake of the Second World War and not during it. This ideology is anti-racist, finds anti-Semitism intolerable, is committed to international human rights and is highly suspicious of eugenics. Yet, during the Second World War these elements were not necessarily collected together into a coherent anti-fascist ideology.

*The Arrogant History of White Ben* was Clemence Dane's anti-Nazi fable and in many ways seems to articulate a version of Nazism that is closest to the post-war reading of the nature of the ideology. Ben is a scarecrow who has been mystically transformed into a living creature and his popular crusade seems initially to be to rid the fields of England from crows. However, as others project their expectations onto Ben the scope of the crusade widens with the "crows" defined as an ever-expanding group. First crows stand for thieves, profiteers and capitalists, but as Ben's obsession deepens they take on racial characteristics. Ben begins to espouse a version of Norman yoke theory seeing any one with black hair and a hooknose as a "crow".[20]

White Ben realises that "crows" were everywhere and that Norman blood must have been widely dispersed in Britain and calls on people to ask of their friends and colleagues "Are you of my race? For if you are not, though I have liked you, loved you, worshipped you, served you, worked for you, commanded you, obeyed you, still I must drive you away."[21] As the novel progresses White Ben's party takes control of Britain and commits increasingly appalling acts of genocide and torture. Even one of Ben's inner-circle Jenny Ollerton bleaches her hair every week from crow black to blonde in order to fit in with Ben's new order, but her deception is eventually discovered and she is shot.[22]

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[19] Leo Mates, "The Holocaust and International Relations", Lyman H Legters, (ed), *Western Society After The Holocaust* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983).
[20] Dane, p.137.
[21] Ibid, p.353.
[22] Ibid, p.389.

*The Arrogant History of White Ben* evokes the perilous attraction of a racially motivated and populist movement coming to power in Britain. The parallels between Ben's "crows" and Hitler's dissidents and Jews were clear, the injustice, brutality and ultimate pointlessness of it are clearly spelt out. Yet Dane does not paint Ben and those around him as simply evil, but rather as a response to genuine injustices, even if a dangerous and misguided one. One working class man, weary from years of unemployment and austerity, happily says "not an unemployed man in the town since he took over, good old Ben!" to Jenny as she attempts to flee from her impending execution for being a "crow".[23]

The warnings of *The Arrogant History of White Ben* and its various dystopian predecessors often fell on deaf ears. Lord Wedgewood's pleading introduction to the pamphlet *Stop Them Now: German Mass-Murder of Jews In Poland* (1942) revealed one way in which British observers attempted to shield themselves from the horrific truth of what was taking place on the continent.

> When the Polish Socialists first asked me to write a preface I declined. I was born long ago into a decent world; the Nazis have made it indecent. Must we read these pages of insane cruelty? I now think we must.[24]

Many others, like Lord Wedgewood, did not want to find out the details of what was going on but, unlike Wedgewood, most did not struggle their way through the inaccurate newspaper reportage and search out first hand reports issued by the Polish Bund.

Yet, if Second World War predictive fiction largely avoids the issue of racially motivated genocide, the rhetoric of the master race and racial purity is a gift to British satirists eager to expose Hitler and the Nazis as insane. Adrian Alington's novel *Sanity Island* (1941) contains satires on a variety of political creeds. Most memorably Frinck, the leader of the Strong Men, is used to satirize all aspects of Hitler's politics, including the racial project. Alington paints a picture of fascists as "little tinpot heroes" strutting about in purple shirts obsessed with "men with red hair".[25] Alington's novel revels in the absurdity of a fascist party, wearing purple shirts, and pursuing the red headed. Tom

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[23] Ibid, p.406.

[24] S Zygielbojm (ed), *Stop Them Now: German Mass-Murder of Jews In Poland* (London: Liberty Publications, 1942), p.3.

[25] Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), p.13.

Harrisson's claim that wartime literature was characterised by a virulent strain of anti-Semitism, would initially suggest that Alington's satire is atypical.[26] However, Alington like many other authors is more interested in satirising the language and attitude of fascism than in engaging with the details of fascist politics.

*Sanity Island* is a satire on political movements rather than a dystopia and concentrates on ridiculing the fascist demagogue. Frinck's dialogue is a litany of ill-considered and rabid ranting: "I ask you, old comrades, what fouler combination, what filthier rag-bag of the vilest qualities could walk the earth on two legs in human shape than that - a red-haired Englishman! And this swine, this fox-hunting guttersnipe, this off-scouring of a decadent and hypocritical country, has seen fit to attack the party, to attack me."[27] Readers would have laughed at the parodic racism, yet they would have laughed far more at Frinck's oxymoronic use of colourful insults. If the best insult that the fascist orator can come up with for an Englishman is a "fox-hunting guttersnipe" the readers of the novel could be sure of outwitting the fanatical and humourless European regimes ranged against Britain.

Critiques of Nazi racism and eugenics were not necessarily bound up with an understanding of, or interest in, the Jewish dimension of Nazi racial policy. Dennis Wheatley's *Strange Conflict* (1941) briefly describes conditions in Poland talking about how the Germans "have injected the whole of the population so as to make them incapable of producing children" and "how they have sent the Polish women by the thousands into brothels for the amusement of the German soldiery."[28] Yet, what is difficult to assess is how far this was engaging with an understood reality and how far it was propagandist scare-mongering. It is important to notice that Wheatley talked about Poles rather than Jews. Julian Duncan Scott has remarked upon the elision of Jews from wartime discourse and noted that both the British Government and press avoided identifying the victims of Nazi mass-murder as Jewish.[29]

Wheatley's depiction of Nazi racial policy does not simply reproduce the popular substitution of "Pole" for "Jew". He extrapolates Nazi policy arguing that the

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[26] Tom Harrison, 'War Books', *Horizon*, IV, 24 (December 1941), p.420.

[27] Alington, p.163.

[28] Dennis Wheatley, *Strange Conflict: A Black Magic Story* (1941; London: Hutchinson, 1966), p.257.

[29] Julian Duncan Scott, "The British Press And The Holocaust 1942-1943" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 1994), p.26.

destruction of the "British race" is its ultimate aim. The novel describes how, if allowed to win the war the Nazis will ensure that "there is never to be another generation" and that "the British Isles will be depopulated by wholesale shipments of her remaining men and women to toil as beasts of burden for their masters on the Continent until death brings them release."[30] Many of the authors of predictive fiction seem to have based their discussions of Nazi policy on race and eugenics on rumour and innuendo rather than on what facts were available. Even a novel with highly serious intent like *Change of Heart* plays down the anti-Semitic elements of Nazi ideology. Fritzel's anti-Semitic comment that "that one out of every nine English persons is tainted with the blood of the Jews" is intended to make him look foolish rather than genocidal.[31]

A discussion of anti-Semitism therefore formed a part of a small minority of predictive fictions that examined fascism. However, this discussion was rarely well informed about the actual nature of Nazi anti-Semitism despite the fact that activists like Lord Wedgewood were trying to educate the public of the Jews plight. The importance of the racial element of fascist ideology was understood in a very different way to how it would come to be understood after the war. The shifting understanding of the relationship between fascism and racial policies is made particularly clear by the way that predictive fictions treat the issue of eugenics. The link between eugenics and anti-Semitism was not in fact a necessary or even particularly likely association for a British writer to make during the early 1940s. There is overwhelming evidence of a strain of anti-Semitism continuing throughout the war. For example the *Daily Telegraph* decided to obscure the Jewish identities of holocaust victims so that it would refer to "people" rather than "Jews". As well as suggesting the existence of some institutional anti-Semitism in the press, this example also implies that the editors of the *Daily Telegraph* perceived a wider strain of anti-Semitism amongst their readers that would have militated against a more explicit discussion of the particularly Jewish nature of the atrocities.[32]

At the same time as this anti-semitism there was support for eugenics amongst the scientific community in the same period. Nevertheless, the eugenicists and the anti-Semites were drawn from very different constituencies. Tony Kushner notes that

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[30] Dennis Wheatley, *Strange Conflict: A Black Magic Story* (1941; London: Hutchinson, 1966), p.257.
[31] Allan, p.108.
[32] Scott, p.38.

surveys carried out by Mass Observation in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* revealed the majority of interviewees to be "blaming the Jews for their own misfortune".[33] However, as Henry Srebrnik has shown, the labour movement, Communist Party and other progressive forces generally led the struggle against anti-Semitism.[34] Conversely, it was generally progressive and left leaning scientists who were most likely to espouse eugenics. Diane Paul notes "eugenics implied, at a minimum, the development of a social, and often a state, concern with reproduction."[35] Eugenics was in fact increasingly problematic for the British Right. This was because, despite widespread racism and class prejudice, the right's analysis was becoming ever more critical of the state.[36] So while eugenicists were overwhelmingly radical and progressive, British anti-Semites were more likely to be conservative and possibly even concerned about the use of eugenics.

Ruthven Todd's novel *The Lost Traveller* (1943) explores some of the political consequences of eugenics. The novel is too politically indistinct to characterize on the left/right spectrum but like his earlier novel *Over the Mountain* (1939) it describes, in Brian Stableford's words, "an individual's battle with oppressive authority in absurd hallucinatory circumstances".[37] In particular this novel works through a concern with the extra powers that eugenics and science might give to an already over-mighty state. The novel describes the experiences of a traveller from 1940s Britain transported to a city ruled by an all-powerful dictator. The city's residents are divided into two distinct classes, citizens and officials. Initially, this appears to be a class-conflict novel, but as we learn more about the city we discover that the "citizens" are not simply of a lower social status, they are genetically different. Citizens are both physically and mentally distinct from the officials who seem to be human in the conventional sense.

> They went about three hundred yards without meeting anyone except officials, and then Christopher came face to face with three of the featureless women.

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[33] Tony Kushner, "Beyond the Pale? British Reactions to Nazi Anti-Semitism, 1933-39", Tony Kushner and Kenneth Lunn (ed), *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1990), p.152.

[34] Henry Srebrnik, "The British Communist Party's National Jewish Committee and The Fight Against Anti-Semitism During the Second World War," Kushner and Lunn, pp.83-84.

[35] Diane Paul, "Eugenics and the Left", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XLV, 4 (Oct-Dec 1984), p.570.

[36] Ibid, p.573.

[37] Brian Stableford, *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p.258.

>They resembled the pictures of Humpty Dumpty which he had drawn on egg-shells when a child, except that then he had made some attempt to show a nose and a fullness of the lips that was completely absent in these faces.[38]

It is worth noting briefly the fact that it is the "citizens" who are the inferior caste and are forced to perform the menial tasks while the "officials" form a privileged class. Like other writers of the period Todd is registering a concern about the explosion in the size of the bureaucratic class during the Second World War. However, I will deal with this issue at more length in Chapter Six.

More relevant in the present context is Todd's discussion of the likely results of state-controlled eugenics. The novel depicts the creation of a subservient class who exist solely to perform menial tasks. However, this does not result in a leisured life-style for the rest of the population. The official class are equally oppressed by the dictator and also forced to perform pointless tasks unquestioningly. All sense of agency and individual choice has been removed. The state that is powerful enough to intervene in people's reproductive practices, the novel suggests, will not allow any area of human activity to go unregulated.

The dark alienated dystopia of *The Lost Traveller* is not a typical presentation of the possibilities of eugenics. While there was a deep-seated concern about the growing power of both state and science, mainstream discourses remained firmly committed to a modernist conception of progress and eugenics was a part of this. With regards to eugenics Diane Paul argued, "through at least the early 1940s, there existed something very close to a consensus amongst geneticists concerning the genetic determination of intellectual, psychological, and moral traits."[39] This consensus was not confined to the scientific community as eugenics frequently appears in the predictive fiction of the period. Olaf Stapledon, who had a degree in history and no formal scientific training, discussed the issue at length in his novel *Darkness and the light* (1942).[40]

>The world bureaucracy was selected by psychological tests for organising and moral integrity. It was known that superior organizing ability ran mainly in certain families or biological strains. Consequently there began to emerge strong traces of an aristocracy of birth, rather in the manner of the loose network of crystals which appears in water in the act of freezing.[41]

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[38] Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943), p.59.
[39] Paul, p.586.
[40] Stableford, p.199.
[41] Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the light* (London: Methuen and co, 1942), p.117.

The mainstream scientific community was not to question the fundamental values and suppositions of eugenics until after the war had finished. Nevertheless by the 1940s eugenics was no longer seen as the single factor that was "going to save the world" as leading eugenicist Caleb Williams Saleelby claimed in 1909.[42] Yet, it was still capable of capturing the imagination of a left leaning writer like Stapledon as a force for good, even as extreme racial nationalism was pulling apart Europe.

Brian Stableford argues that Olaf Stapledon was one of the "major writers" of scientific romance between the wars.[43] The highly ambitious *Darkness and the light*, which Stableford all but ignores, shows that he was still capable of impressive and idiosyncratic novels during the Second World War. The novel presents the development of parallel dystopias and utopias starting from the present war and extending over the next few thousand years. The attempt to render grand historical narratives in novel form allows Stapledon to examine possible vehicles through which alternative social systems are created, the nature of those societies and the contradictions within them. Stapledon is extremely interested in the social use of eugenics, describing in detail the process through which the eugenic project is conducted.

> Much was done in order to foster intelligence and integrity in the rising generation. Lavish research produced at last very reliable mental tests. Defectives and certain types prone to criminality were sterilized. Dullards were severely discouraged from having children. Parents of good average intelligence were of course helped to have large families. Those of exceptionally high intelligence were handsomely subsidized. Outstanding children were treated as the world's most precious possession, and trained with the utmost care and skill to enable them to make full use of their powers.[44]

Stapledon's story of the light ends with humanity evolving into a new and more advanced species. The reader was therefore at liberty to conclude that eugenics rather than politics or more conventional technological progress was most likely to bring about utopia. Likewise, Stapeldon's story of the darkness is filled with discussion about racial degeneration and depicts humanity ultimately climbing back down the evolutionary ladder. Stapledon occasionally articulates a libertarian critique of dictatorship and the

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[42] G.R. Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain 1900-1914* (Leyden: Noordhoff International Publishing, 1976), p.1.
[43] Stableford, pp.198-216.
[44] Stapledon, p.137.

state, nevertheless he, like many other leftist writers, ultimately argued that it was through an extension of state power that the utopian society would be delivered. Stapledon's faith in both eugenics and the state is sufficient to allow him to present the sterilisation of dullards and criminals as a progressive move without fear that this "technology" would be used in authoritarian and anti-progressive ways.

The support for eugenics should not simply be understood as naivety. Eugenicists did not go through a Pauline conversion when presented with the evidence of the gas chambers. Rather, they continued to believe in the value of eugenics despite its increasingly pariah status in the aftermath of the Second World War.[45] Despite its growing association with the ideas of the racist right, eugenics continued to have a powerful lure for liberals and socialists into the 1950s and beyond. While eugenics was only to exist on the edges of public policy in Britain, in the left-leaning Scandinavian countries, its advocates succeeded for a time in bringing it into the mainstream.[46]

The preoccupation with eugenics that could be found in many of the progressive novels of the 1940s was therefore clearly representative of intellectual positions that were widely held on the left and beyond. What may appear to the reader of 1940s fiction as ringing endorsements of fascism were quite the reverse. This is not to claim that there is some value in the pseudo-science of eugenics but rather to locate what would otherwise seem to be simply bizarre novels in a coherent contemporary ideological framework. Furthermore, the left's broad acceptance of eugenics should also not be interpreted to mean that eugenics was not also seen as being associated with Hitler, or to claim that it is not fundamentally racist.

Rex Warner draws an explicit link between fascism and eugenics in the *The Aerodrome* (1941), when he reveals the Air Vice-Marshall's absolute belief in human/scientific control over evolution and the need for the "evolution…of consciousness and will".[47] Yet while the evolutionary task outlined by the Air Vice-Marshall would perhaps have been unrecognisable to the scientific and respectable

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[45] "Circumstances changed, shifting the ground from under their position, but their own views were little affected by them. Their cause failed, not as the result of deserters from the ranks, but from the inability to win new recruits." Paul, p.590.
[46] Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), p.261.
[47] Warner, p.207.

eugenicists of the period, it is clear that Warner is engaging with the rhetoric of racial degeneration and improvement. It is as much Warner's conservatism that leads him to satirize this eugenic rhetoric as his rather more fashionable socialism. The novel is concerned with modernity, and the growth of the state, and the expanding power of science and eugenics is just one aspect of these more general concerns.

Was it ultimately possible to see a clear link between the anti-Semitism and racism that could be found in the period and an ideological belief in eugenics? I have argued that these were not necessary bedfellows. However, it is also difficult to believe that they were entirely unrelated, even if many of their respective advocates would have been appalled by this notion. It is possible perhaps, to see common roots for the fear of foreigners, especially Jews, and the search for scientific racial improvement in the pervasive discourse of racial degeneration.

Characters in 1940s novels, as in many other periods, are described in terms that are highly focused around race. When Daniel O'Den writes in *Crimson Courage* (1940) "the thickset little chap turned his black eyes on John's fair aquiline profile," racial differences are being used to highlight moral value.[48] The power of the moral/racial interface becomes clearer when we learn that John is actually also from Scorta and therefore of the same racial stock as the "thickset little chap". This is clearly not intended as an endorsement of Nazi ideology, rather it emerges from O'Den's sense of commonly held values, in short that the more English you are the more moral you are likely to be.

Even in liberal texts like Viscount Samuels' *An Unknown Land* (1942) where difference is portrayed positively and a clear defence of Jewish culture is mounted, there is still a reliance on the discourse of racial degeneracy. Incidentally Orwell saw fit to describe this novel as "dismal" largely on aesthetic grounds, but did not comment on its latent racism.[49] While the Bensals in *An Unknown Land* are very clearly different from the novels narrator they still have the majority of their racial characteristics in common with northern Europeans. The outcasts from Bensal society however are shown to have degenerated over the centuries and are described as "more like some people of Eastern

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[48] Daniel O'Den, *Crimson Courage* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1940), p.18.
[49] John Freeman (attributed to Orwell) "Can Socialists be Happy?", Peter Davison, Ian Angus, and Sheila Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.43.

Europe".[50] This consistent presentation of the relationship between physical/racial characteristics and moral/intellectual ones is one of the most striking elements of the descriptive style of 1940s fiction. HF Parkinson's novel *They Shall Not Die* (1939), for example, discusses the "rather low average intelligence of the mixed people of the Balkans."[51]

GR Searle argues in *Eugenics and Politics in Britain 1900-1914* that eugenics developed as a political movement rather than just as science in the aftermath of the Boer war. The generally poor state of the nation's health revealed by the recruitment drives for the Boer war sparked a national debate around the issue of racial degeneration. The science of eugenics remained tied to this discourse until it faded away in the post-war period. As the utopian hopes of the eugenics movement were for racial progress, the dystopian fear was that racial degeneration was taking place unchecked. While this was not necessarily racist, in practice it frequently was. Diane Paul remarks, for example, that the left wing eugenicist Edward Aveling believed that "a greater innate difference separated blacks from whites than humans-in-general from apes".[52]

The discourse of racial decline and of a morally degenerate racial other therefore pervaded the literature of the Second World War. Clear condemnations of Nazi policies and anti-Semitism were often accompanied by an acceptance of the legitimacy of the terms of a racialised debate. As Tony Kushner has argued, there was a clear distinction between the barbaric acts of the German state and the generally perceived "problem" that had pre-empted these actions: "social ostracism and 'polite' discrimination were acceptable but mass murder could not be rationalised."[53]

**State power**

The literary understanding of the fascist state was motivated by fear of oppression, censorship, intrusion and the unknown. Fascist states were seen as being characterised by the amoral and immoral exercise of power in pursuit of ideological goals or an uneasy stability. Thirp in *The Holy Terror* runs a secret police force called the Ministry for the Preservation of the Revolution. "It had its prisons and its oubliettes – often

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[50] Viscount Samuel, *An Unknown Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1942), p.18.
[51] H.F. Parkinson, *They Shall Not Die,* (London: Constable, 1939), p.110.
[52] Paul, p.584.
[53] Kushner, p.149.

prisons taken over from the old order and very incompletely modernised. It watched for an anticipated militant reaction, and particularly for any systematic attempts to revive nationalist feeling or race antagonism, it was as underhand as the evils it attacked, it was suspicious in spirit and its methods secret and arbitrary."[54] This combination of ideological zeal, nervous insecurity about the stability of the regime and the ruthless pursuit of dissent was typical in presentations of fascist states.

The post-revolutionary state in *The Arrogant History of White Ben* is similarly portrayed as highly authoritarian and oppressive. Furthermore, like Rud and Thirp in *The Holy Terror*, Ben becomes increasingly paranoid. More and more people are defined as "crows", more and more institutions as "rookeries" whilst Ben and his followers enact ever more bloody purges. Arthur Ladimer, a character who maintains some critical engagement with White Ben's project, says "White Ben can't be argued with because he's an idealist", and this sense of the danger of ideology and idealism is reproduced in many of the predictive fiction of the Second World War.[55]

Predictive fiction realises a variety of states in which dictators have taken over, yet very few of these states are stable and secure places to live. The authoritarianism and bureaucracy that Ruthven Todd and others described frequently pervade every level of the state. Both Rud, in *The Holy Terror*, and White Ben, in *The Arrogant History of White Ben*, preside over highly authoritarian states in which power is concentrated in their person, yet they both end up unhappy and are killed by the person who they love most. Fascist and totalitarian systems are often imagined as poisoning everyone involved, from the system's architects downwards. The dictator never succeeds in dictating absolutely. Even in extremely autocratic dystopias like the City in *The Lost Traveller* there is still a need for negotiation between classes. Omar, the dictator, is rumoured to engage in a variety of prohibited sexual activities, yet the Official class ensure social stability by closely guarding this information.

> The funny thing is that nearly all the official class have a pretty fair idea of what he does when he's out of sight, but they daren't say anything or there might be a complete reversal. The citizens might be made into officials and then the officials would have to work. And I know that Omar'd do that if he felt like it. Of course, it would be an awfully foolish move, as it would be sure to lead to a

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[54] Wells, p.375.
[55] Dane, p.114.

revolution, and there's no telling where a revolution will end. They might even try to overthrow Omar, and then there'd be a fine kick-up.[56]

Omar maintains his dictatorship by a mixture of fear and appeasement of the official class. The system is maintained not by the will of a single individual but by the willingness of a sizable minority to police the rest of the population. Yet the official class in *The Lost Traveller* are no happier than Rud or White Ben. Even the extreme totalitarianism of the city is maintained by reference to a dystopian other. If the political class does not continue to endorse the hegemony there will be an uncertain revolutionary disruption. A sense of insecurity and instability permeates all presentations of fascist states. They are all impressive structures built on straw and the effort of maintaining them tells on everyone from the dictator downwards.

Viscount Samuel depicts a Nazi state in *An Unknown Land* and traces the pervading sense of instability and anxiety further down the social hierarchy. The Nazi state Mina is ultra-modern and apparently highly efficient, yet the Minan people are too scared to enjoy the privileges that this efficiency has brought.

> The houses in the town were well-built and spruce; the roads in striking contrast with Ulmia were excellent. The people seemed alert, but anxious also; and there was a hungry look about them all. The more I went about the more I realised that it was a people under strain, apprehensive and unhappy.[57]

Why, Samuel's novel asks, are the people of Mina under strain, apprehensive and unhappy? What sanction is held against them if they do not do as the state commands them? Whereas Rex Warner sees a dark erotic pleasure in submerging individualism to the state, Samuel attempts to briefly demonstrate the day-to-day levels of oppression. That the Minan army all wear masks to destroy their individuality is represented as horrific and dehumanising in contrast to the empowerment that Warner's airmen felt. Minan society is only made viable by the maintenance of a secret police force, which is believed to control a third of the population.[58] Despite this presentation of the fascist state, the reader is left wondering what lay beneath it, are there huge prisons and an indiscriminate slaughter of the population? Yet these issues are not overtly engaged with in *An Unknown Land*, and it is possible that they are not even really implied. How

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[56] Ibid, p.121.
[57] Samuel, p.173.
[58] Ibid, p.174.

much does the mind of the modern reader inevitably fill in the gaps left by forties texts with the post-war understanding of Nazi Germany?

The fascist state is not simply autocratic and unjust but also riddled with a new type of class privilege. Yet, unlike the British class system, fascist hierarchies exist in an uneasy and unstable way and have to be constantly and actively reinforced. The traveller in *An Unknown Land* notices placards in the fascist state of Mina that read:

> In order to be lords over others we must ourselves be slaves.
> We are nothing Mina is all.
> It is to die for Mina that we are born.
> Whatever the government says is true, even when false.[59]

The need for this kind of active propaganda to legitimise the very existence of the state is clearly intended to show a weakness in this political system. The utopian Bensals need no such sloganeering. The language used to sum up the Minan regime in *An Unknown Land* could serve as an introduction to depictions of Nazism during the Second World War:

> Never, in all my travels had I left any country with a feeling of such revulsion as I experienced then. It was quite plain that the political system which the people had adopted - repressive at home and aggressive abroad - had made their state, not only a curse to their neighbours, but an even greater curse to themselves.[60]

The fascist state fails all who live in it from the bottom of society up. The highly rigid hierarchies of the fascism are revealed to be brittle on closer inspection. The "mass group that overwhelms everything like a tidal wave" is terrifying from a distance but appears compromised as authors inspect it in more detail. The fascist state is feared because it is felt that it is a new, more powerful, form of state organisation. Yet, wartime predictive fiction shows the fascist state to be essentially weak and even to be unstable. The appearance of ultra-modernist order and efficiency is only maintained by an extreme authoritarianism that ultimately benefits no one, not even the rulers and administrators of the system.

**Presenting an uncomfortable reality**

If the fascist state is maintained not by hyper-efficiency, but by authoritarianism and brutality, how is this presented in 1940s predictive fiction? Presentations of

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[59] Ibid, p.175.
[60] Ibid, p.179

violence can be an effective way of demonising the wartime enemy, but they also run the risk of stretching credibility. How much violence was humanity actually capable of? Some novels (*Change of Heart*, *Peace In Nobody's Time*, *Sanity Island*) prefer to downplay fascist violence and portray the fascists as laughable, foolish and self-deluding. These novels denigrate fascists and avoid presenting them successfully doing anything, even committing acts of violence. At the other extreme some novels concentrate on exposing the violence of the state and locating in the oppression a moral context for the state's perceived modernity or efficiency. Between these polar opposites existed a variety of possible presentations of violence.

Published on the eve of the Second World War *The Arrogant History of White Ben* is, in places, shockingly graphic in its depiction of popular and state violence. Ben's follower Trelawney, who begins the novel as a Christian Socialist and educates Ben in leftist, popular rhetoric, is put in charge of the "concentration cage."[61] The people put in the cage are fed on "roots and grain…proper crow food" and given no water.[62] Trelawney finds presiding over the torture and slow starvation of masses of people extremely uncomfortable, but is so scared of Ben that he finds it impossible not to implement his will. Trelawney's narrative allows the reader to imagine what it would be like to experience a totalitarian regime like Ben's both as a victim and an unwilling participant. Elsewhere the book presents its readership with quantitative records of the effect of Ben's purges.

> Following up the lines of our discussion, beg to report I have returned from four months' purge of country.

> | Total bag of crows killed | 700,000 |
> |---|---|
> | Still rounded up in concentration cages | 1,600,000 |
> | Died in cages owing to food difficulties, illness and under discipline | 30,000 |
> | Shot while escaping | 15,700 |
> | Suicides | 12-14,000 |
> | Rookeries destroyed | 4,000 |

> (NOTE: I have classed under the word 'rookery' all mansions of over ten bedrooms, and these I have confiscated according to instructions. Losses were occasioned principally by fire, due to crow-fever when mob got out of hand.)[63]

Strangely Clemence Dane's powerful evocation of fascist violence and mob rule found few echoes in subsequent wartime anti-fascist fiction. Much wartime fiction

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[61] Dane, p.361.
[62] Ibid, p.362.
[63] Ibid, p.363.

sought to dismiss the fascist systems as appalling and yet at the same time laughably substandard. Gordon Boshell portrayed Hitler as a slavering madman in *John Brown's Body*.

> "Tell me, which end of the carpet is he biting - the one near the window or the one near the potted palm?"
>
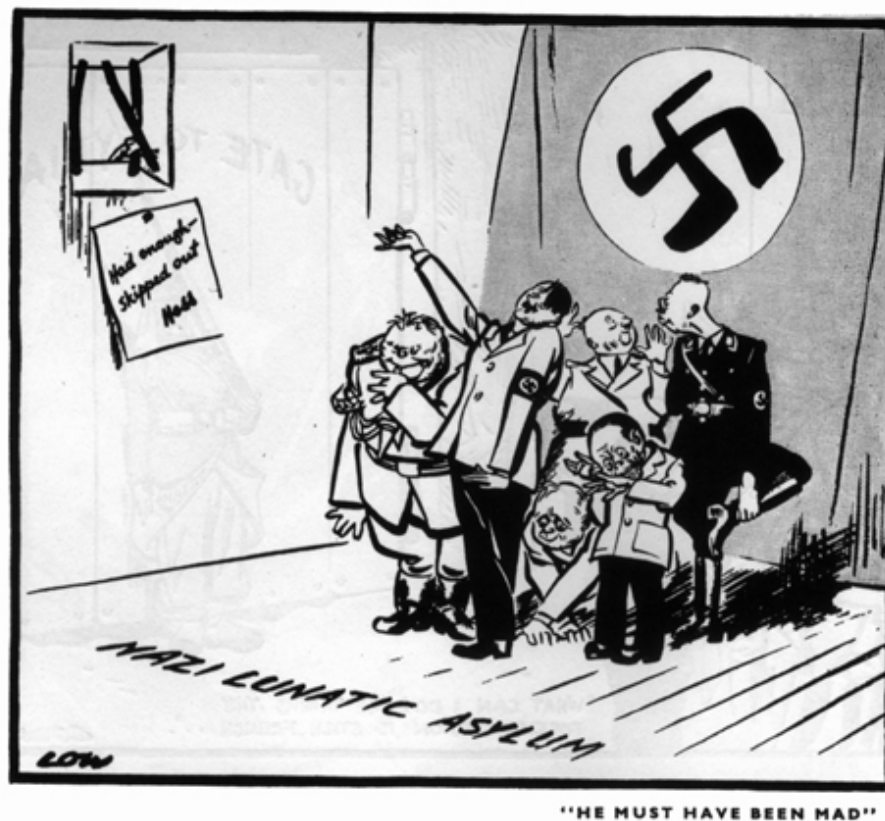> "I fear the Fuhrer has bitten all the tassels off the end near the potted palm."[64]

Although this novel is essentially an anti-Nazi fable Boshell fails to engage with the violence of the Nazi state in any significant fashion. Hitler's crime for Boshell is in preventing ordinary English people going about their day-to-day business and the more murderous aspects of the Nazi state are sidestepped. Similar attempts to laugh at the leadership of Nazi Germany can be found across the culture of the Second World War, perhaps most memorably in the bawdy rhyme "Hitler Has Only Got One Ball".[65]

The decision to laugh at the German high command, especially to deride their masculinity reveals important strategic and psychological choices that were made during the war. Rather than opting to demonise the foe as Clemence Dane's presentation of violence does, British culture largely chose to diminish it. While we can find plenty of examples of Hitler being portrayed as a monster, we are far more likely to find him being shown as a rather pathetic and foolish figure. The satirical presentation of the German High Command is perhaps most succinctly demonstrated in the following cartoon, published after Berlin attempted to explain Rudolf Hess's trip to Britain as the actions of someone who was mentally unsound. Its presentation of Hitler and his various aides as inmates in a mental hospital must have been of some comfort to British sensibilities in one of the more difficult moments of wartime. If you can laugh at someone, his or her power to intimidate and terrify is quickly diminished.

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[64] Gordon Boshell, *John Brown's Body* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1942) p.169
[65] *A British Soldier Remembers: Music and Songs of WWII*,
http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/9656/music.htm, 8th February 2000.

**Figure 3.1**



"HE MUST HAVE BEEN MAD"

David Low, *Years of Wrath: A Cartoon History 1932-1945* (London: Gollancz Ltd, 1949), p.162. First printed 15th May 1941.

Even where images of this kind engaged with the human cost of Nazi policy there was still an attempt to diminish the German leadership. Figure 3.2 details the state murder of Jews but still chooses to depict Hitler as a slavering sub-human madman. The semi-comic presentation of Hitler serves in many ways to undercut the horrific presentation of the open railway carriage stuffed inhumanely with Jews being carried to their death. It is possible for the railway carriage and the slaughterhouse in the cartoon to be read as metaphors, just as Hitler's monstrous stance, bulging eyes and claw-like hands are methaphorical. The reader would have been aware that Low was making Hitler more grotesque for propaganda reasons, how could they have been sure that the crimes were not also being exaggerated?

**Figure 3.2**



David Low, *Years of Wrath: A Cartoon History 1932-1945* (London: Gollancz Ltd, 1949), p.226. First printed 14th December 1942.

Apart from *The Arrogant History of White Ben*, the fiction which depicts possible Nazi invasions and fictional fascist states is surprisingly devoid of horrific images designed to terrify people into redoubling their war efforts. While Brown and Serpell speak of "the horrors of the Godalming concentration camp" the reader is spared narrative details of this.[66] Why there is such an unwillingness to go into the more explicit details of Nazi rule, after the outbreak of war, it is difficult to say conclusively. It is possible to offer a variety of pseudo-psychological explanations by speculating that a presentation of Nazi atrocities would have been beyond the bounds of good taste, that it would have been demoralising or that the proximity of such speculation to reality meant that it was better left unsaid. However, authors were quite prepared to explore other forms of oppression and to portray other unpleasant realities such as the Blitz. It is also perhaps possible that there was a failure of both understanding and empathy on the behalf of many British writers. The proliferation of untrue atrocity stories during the First World War may also have led writers to be cautious when commenting on what was being reported as happening in Eastern Europe.

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[66] Brown and Serpell, p.63.

What was happening on the continent seems to have hardly been comprehended and its potential implications for Britain rarely explored. In this, the writers of imaginative fiction were perhaps in line with much of the rest of the British population. A Mass Observation survey conducted in April 1945 after the detailed reports about the liberation of the camps had become public revealed that while 86% of people had been aware of the camps over half of these "did not believe or understand the scale and severity of the camps."[67]

The dystopian form offered a serious opportunity to examine the workings and possible development of the Nazi state. In many respects this opportunity was not really taken up during the war. While there were attempts to represent the more murderous element of fascism many authors choose to avoid this or to diminish it in some way. Perhaps the details of the Nazi program were too obvious and too horrific to require detailed representation in fiction. Alternatively it was possible that a mix of anti-semitism, ignorance, fear and lack of interest in the gruesome workings of the Nazi state militated against detailed engagement with the actuality of what was happening across the English Channel.

**It is here already**

Unsurprisingly, the fascist state was presented as an unpleasant place to live in British Second World War fiction. It was authoritarian and oppressive, rigid and ideological, even murderous at times. These factors were in many ways what distinguished it from the British state and made the war worth fighting. However, the fascist state was also extremely bureaucratic, ridden by hierarchy and bound up with an assertive modernity. These factors all allowed for comparison with the British state. Authors could effectively use presentations of fascism, not only to build support for an anti-fascist war effort, but also to challenge unwanted policies and practices at home. Comparison with the enemy in time of war was an extremely powerful rhetorical tool and one which authors frequently employed for their own political ends.

Phyllis Lassner's observation of the need to conduct "an open-ended trial of liberal-democracy" as part of mounting a defence against fascism is incisive and reveals a key motivation present in much Second World War predictive fiction. Wartime critiques of state power, bureaucracy and oppression were double-edged swords that

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[67] Duncan Scott, p.11.

challenged the practices of the British as well as the fascist state. Authors seized the opportunity that this presented and used these novels as an opportunity to question the direction that contemporary society was travelling in. Britain was rarely held up as an ideal against which fascist states could be judged and found wanting. Frequently Britain was simply portrayed as less compromised and less extreme than Germany. By setting novels like *The Arrogant History of White Ben* and *The Aerodrome* in Britain authors were anticipating tendencies in Britain from which the fascist society could develop. The novel that examined this possibility most thoroughly was *The 1946 MS* (1943) in which a war hero returns after defeating Hitler and leads Britain to its own form of fascist dictatorship. This was not to say that authors did not find qualities in the British people that were unique, worthy and antithetical to the totalitarian urge, but these qualities were commonly in danger of being betrayed by politicians and ideologues. The essence of the British people, their traditions and outlook on life were all at risk and while fascism was the biggest danger, liberal-democracy also had much to answer for. The alternative to fascism could very likely be found somewhere in the hearts of decent ordinary English, or occasionally British, people, but it would not be found in the contemporary British political system.

As a domestic ideology fascism was extremely weak in Britain by the 1940s, yet it was possible to detect authoritarianism and a will to centralisation in the practice of the mainstream political parties in this period. Interestingly this was demonstrated in part by the government's treatment of Mosley's tiny British Union of Fascists. The BUF was in what was to be its terminal decline and had been forced to sack 80% of its full time officials in 1937 to avoid bankruptcy. Subsequently it had been faced by a series of splits and defections led by disgruntled former officials.[68] Furthermore, despite initial hopes to cash in on dissatisfaction with the war, the British Union of Fascists polled one per cent, three per cent and one per cent in the three parliamentary by-elections they stood in after the outbreak of war.

Even though the BUF was not a major threat to national security the organisation never got the chance to stand in any further by-elections during the war as Defence Regulation 18b was extended on the 22nd of May 1940 to allow, amongst other things, the arrest of Mosley and various other key BUF personnel.[69] The clamping down on

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[68] Colin Cross, *The Fascists in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1961), pp.170-172.
[69] Ibid, pp.191-193.

freedom of speech and the massive empowerment of the state demonstrated by the very regulations that made Mosley's arrest possible showed one way in which the domestic state opened itself up to accusations of fascistic conduct. Mark Rawlinson quotes John Middleton Murry who gave voice to these concerns in 1940 arguing that "'holding a nation together by turning it into a regiment' would destroy what was ostensibly being defended."[70]

The points of comparison between Nazi Germany and liberal-democratic Britain were emphasised in a variety of texts throughout the war. In Ruthven Todd's *The Lost Traveller*, Christopher is transported to a dystopian city governed by endless and seemingly pointless rules, which at most, ensured that hierarchy and social division is maintained.

> They wandered through the streets, but did not enter any of the buildings which Y pointed out as museums and picture galleries. Christopher would not be admitted until he had received his ticket as a third-grade official, which, in addition to allowing him into these places, would automatically make him a member of The Officials Club. Naturally, Y assured him, the ordinary citizens were not permitted to enter the galleries under any circumstances, with the exception of the lowest rank of females, who were cleaners and whose work had to be finished before the arrival of the first official.[71]

Access to education as well as to social and cultural life is limited to those who have attained particular ranks. There are obvious parallels with both membership of the Nazi Party in Germany and British class privilege. More importantly, Christopher only acquires the ticket that identifies him as an official entitled to privileges after he is subjected to numerous pointless trials and bureaucratic tasks. Authors and readers would have been unlikely to have any experience about the level of bureaucracy that citizens of Nazi state were subjected, but they clearly experienced heavy regulation from the state in their everyday lives in Britain. *The Lost Traveller* argues against this bureaucratic regulation regardless of its origin or purpose.

Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome* (1940) plays out an invasion but at no point mentions Nazi Germany or even engages on an overt level with its existence. The village can serve as a metaphor for England and the Air Force for a fascist invasion.

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[70] Mark Rawlinson, *British Writing of the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.65.
[71] Todd, p.69.

However all of the action takes place within England itself and the dictator and all the major players are recognisably English and indeed have their roots in the village itself. The novel can therefore unfolds as a conflict between different notions of Englishness. Is England going to be the ultra-modern nation of the Air Force or the traditional organic society of the village? The novels depiction of the gradual but forceful assumption of power over every element of village life by the Air Force serves as an analogy for the growth of all authoritarian systems. Yet, the ideology of the Air Force could have arrived on the end of a gun or through a more gradual and domestic process. *The Arrogant History of White Ben* and *The 1946 MS* (1943 also use this domestic context for similar effect. This idea that fascism is not simply a foreign imposition is explored in a minority of the more thoughtful predictive fictions of the period.

*The Aerodrome*'s form presented an opportunity to combine elements of the invasion story with a critique of the growth of domestic authoritarianism. Its critique of fascism clearly resonates with the domestic political system. Not all oppression was in Germany. By the time of the novel's publication in 1941 government authoritarianism (and popular support for it) was growing in the name of effective opposition to the Nazi threat. Paul Addison, described the growth of this over the previous year "Why was there in June 1940 a sudden wholesale internment of aliens, a rash of prosecutions for spreading alarm and despondency, a grotesque campaign by the Ministry of Information for citizens to form a silent column against rumour?"[72] Addison goes on to argue that "from May 1940 the passions for collective aggression were the main force for change."[73] Warner's novel gives him the freedom to critique this upsurge in the unchecked power of the wartime state without opening himself up to criticisms of disloyalty. *The Aerodrome* engages with the dynamics of fascism and authoritarianism on more ideological level than novels that centre their narrative on a defence of Britain and because of this the target of the novel's satire is more wide-ranging and less defensive of the status quo.

**What was fascism?**

Discussions of fascism during wartime were clearly very different to those that have taken place since the end of the Second World War. One of the most immediately startling realisations is that fascism was understood as something quite different during

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[72] Paul Addison, *The Road To 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Random, 1994) p.104.
[73] Ibid.

the Second World War. The lexicon of discussion was radically different: Jews hardly figure; eugenics is just science; fascism is portrayed as modern rather than barbarian; prominent German figures are laughable rather than terrifying etc, etc. Much of this discrepancy can be attributed to post-war discoveries and analysis. However, an analysis of Second World War depictions of fascism also reminds us how far we are caught up in a retrospective myth making about what happened. The Holocaust has become central to our understanding about nature of fascism and the Second World War and yet to contemporaries in Britain it barely registers in any way that is recognisable. This is clearly not an attempt to deny Nazi genocide, rather to recognise that different events and interpretations of the Second World War and fascism have seemed more important at different times. To understand why what happened happened we must begin with the assumptions of the time and not impose our retrospective reading of the events onto those who experienced or ignored them.

Second World War predictive fiction also reveals the difficulty of arriving on a fully satisfactory definition of fascism. The places in which Second World War authors were unable to agree are as revealing as those areas where a consensus emerged. In *A Change of Heart* fascism is portrayed as a result of misguided international policies of reparations. In *The Aerodrome* it is the ultimate manifestation of inhuman modernity. While *The Arrogant History of White Ben* foregrounds the murderous racial elements of the ideology, *The Holy Terror* sees it as a possible force for progressive change. The different political perspectives of the authors of these fictions, their relative awareness of the actual politics of the ideology they were depicting as well as the point during the war that they were writing led to a mosaic of interpretations that undermine what can seem to be received truths about what fascism is and was.

Second World War authors were unable to agree on what fascism was and were drawn to focus on diverse elements of fascist ideology. This uncertainty is in part attributable to the fluidity of the term fascist itself. Academics who have debated the nature of fascism have also been unable to arrive on a commonly held typology as Roger Griffin and Dave Renton both show in the surveys of the field that start their respective books.[74] A myriad of definitions emerge as, for example, Griffin argues that fascism can be best defined by its mythic core, what he refers to "palingenetic ultra-

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[74] "The 'Nature' of Generic Fascism", Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991) or "The Prison of Ideas", Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).

nationalism", rather than by a series of ideological components.[75] Rodger Eatwell in many ways echoes the elements of the quote from George Borodin with which this chapter began and sees fascism has having "a coherent body of thought" which was "seeking to create a 'Third Way' which was neither capitalist or communist" and in which romantic nationalism, social radicalism and a celebration of leadership played a part.[76] While Renzo De Felice argues that fascism's European origin, its mobilisation of the petit bourgeoisie, its revolutionary nature and its endorsement of centralising totalitarian state structure are all key to its nature.[77] Martin Kitchen agrees with De Felice on the centrality of the petit bourgeoisie, but argues that fascism can only grow out of industrialisation and that it is a response to economic crisis and a powerful labour movement by sections of the capitalist class.[78]

This myriad of different interpretations of the term can be confusing and has led Stanley G Payne to argue that "Fascism is probably the vaguest of contemporary political terms", before going on to note that by many points of reference "communist regimes would have to be categorized as the most fascist" and noting that "definition bedevilled the original Italian Fascists from the beginning."[79] Payne's refusal to offer a typology is useful because it helps us to understand the diversity of wartime readings of fascism. If, for example, race or anti-Semitism are seen as the defining feature of fascism or Nazism then very few of the authors of wartime fiction reached very profound levels of understanding of the ideology. Yet, if we recognise the fluidity of the term as a typology and understand its inter-relation with other political ideologies then these fictions are revealing.

These British fictions are not a particularly useful source for telling us about what was going on in Germany or the rest of Europe during the 1940s. Nor are they useful in constructing a typology of fascism, if such a thing is desirable or possible, what they can demonstrate very effectively is the way in which the idea of fascism was utilised in British political culture. They show how fascism was portrayed to evoke particular responses to war. At times ridiculed, at others demonised and at still others analysed

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[75] Rodger Griffin (ed), *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.4.
[76] Rodger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Vintage, 1995), pp.xix-xx.
[77] Renzo De Felice, *Interpretations of Fascism* (London: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp.3-13, 174-192.
[78] Martin Kitchen, *Fascism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), pp.83-85.
[79] Stanley G Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (London: University of Westconsin Press, 1980), p.4.

and even sympathised with. They also show how presentations of the ideas of the wartime enemy were used for purposes tangential to the conduct of the war. The idea of fascism impacted on domestic politics as a warning and as a marker of acceptable and allowable policy. Yet, at the same time as it served as a caution it was also a place to draw on for ideas and power.

The debates over whether a democratic society should utilise propaganda provided one example of how fascism both inspired and circumscribed British political practice. Artists and intellectuals who worked for the BBC and Ministry of Information expressly to create a domestic propaganda to counter the German one worried, in John Lehmann's words, about creating "literature with a state axe to grind" or ending up as part of what Orwell fantasised would become "some kind of State-subsidized culture service" which would "maintain subservient and persecute recalcitrant authors and artists."[80] At once the fascist model of propaganda was aspired to because of its supposed power and feared because of its political associations.

These novels are important because they were genuine attempts to analyse what people were fighting against during the Second World War by people who were often outside of the political centre. Their sense of what they were challenging and what they were, and were not, defending can provide vital depth to our readings of Second World War culture. The opportunity to look at fascism from a 1940s perspective is particularly valuable because it reveals so many differences with the Twenty-First Century reading of that ideology and therefore offers the opportunity to assess contemporary motivations and beliefs and consider what role these played in determining action and the post-war analysis of fascism.

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[80] Lehman and Orwell quoted in Robert Hewison, Under Siege: Literary Life In London 1939-45 (Newton Abbot: Readers Union, 1978), pp.174-175.

## Chapter Four: To the left of Jerusalem

Wartime speculation about the future was not confined to wondering about possible invasion and the discussion of Nazi ideology. Predictive fiction had an equally complex relationship with the ideas of the left. Chapter Three showed that responses to fascism were often surprisingly sympathetic and that the ideology of the enemy was engaged with, resisted in places, but that elements of it were endorsed and utilised in unexpected new ways. The Soviet Union was perceived both as a major threat to British democracy and as its greatest ally. Socialism and communism correspondingly occupied a contradictory ideological space. Communism was at once the antithesis of fascism and practically indistinguishable from it when depicted as just another facet of Twentieth Century totalitarianism.

Although the battles between left and right continued throughout the war they frequently assumed unexpected shapes. Once Russia was incorporated into the allied war effort some on the right began to explore ways to deal more profitably with their neighbour to the east. In the wake of the invasion of Finland however some activists and thinkers on the left became increasingly uneasy about the regard that the Soviet state was held in. Other writers felt that the left/right spectrum was no longer helpful and saw the real debates as going on between democracy and totalitarianism and/or tradition and modernity. This chapter will continue to examine how this variety of imagined futures, conceptual labels and analyses intersected with wartime politics. If, as a variety of historians have contended, there was some kind of swing to the left happening in wartime culture, how did this swing impact on the understanding of socialism, communism and the states that claimed to practice them?

This chapter will demonstrate that the Soviet Union and both communism and socialism more generally were of key importance to many of the writers of predictive fiction. However, predictive fiction's engagement with socialist and communist ideas does not reflect the "swing to the left" analysis of wartime culture in any simplistic way. Most of the novels discussed in this chapter are critical of elements of left wing ideology and practice. The ideas of socialism and communism, and of the Soviet Union in particular, are attacked from a variety of political perspectives. Yet, there are a number of concerns about the actual or future socialist or communist state that reoccur across novels with divergent political agendas. How would a leftist state be brought about, would it require class warfare and bloody revolution as in Russia? What would

be the effect of socialism on the long held beliefs and understandings of the British people? Would it be Godless, ultra-modern and lacking any moral framework whatsoever?

The writers of predictive fiction worked these concerns through against a background of advancing left-wing ideas in British politics. Mainstream leftists were keen to keep the vision of Russia at a distance, whilst the right sought to draw parallels, tarring all with the same brush. In predictive fiction there was greater freedom to explore a variety of possibilities. Writers, like politicians, sought to persuade people of the desirability of their vision, but they also hoped to provoke, entertain and titillate and this often led them towards more extreme presentations of predicted left-wing states.

The twists and turns of wartime foreign policy meant that the political position of the Soviet Union was highly fluid. Similarly the movement of the Labour Party from opposition to government, to opposition and ultimately into government on the back of an election victory also created a shifting ideological battleground. Was Churchill friend or foe? Were the Labour Party loyal subjects of the King or "some form of Gestapo" as Churchill was to allege in his infamous election broadcast in 1945.[1] States, parties and individuals transformed from ally to enemy and back again sometimes in a matter of days. This chapter will begin by tracing this process and demonstrating how it impacted on presentations of the left and how the ideas of the left influenced, challenged and inspired the writers of predictive fiction.

**Shifting allegiances**

Political attitudes in Britain were formed in part by global politics. Yet, the arbitrary and unprincipled game of international relations and global power often produced strange bedfellows. The making and breaking of alliances had to be legitimised in someway to the domestic population. If Stalin was pariah one day, how was it possible to explain his rehabilitation the next? Any diplomatic realignment necessitated a corresponding ideological and political readjustment. Popular political understanding had to be guided to fit with whatever was perceived as most expedient at government level. This was not an entirely one-way process in which the population was brought directly into line with whatever was convenient for the government. Rather, the changing international situation provided a stimulus for contestation.

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[1] Steven Fielding, "The Good War: 1939-1945", Nick Tiratsoo (ed), *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.49.

International realignments thus disrupted the status quo and potentially led to the pieces of the domestic political order being rearranged.

Orwell noted in his 'London Letter' to the American Trotskyist journal *Partisan Review* in late 1941 "the effect of the Russian alliance has been a tremendous net increase in pro-Russian sentiment" but argued that even so there was not "the faintest interest in the Russian political system."[2] Nonetheless, pro-Soviet feeling from 1941 provided a political opportunity for the Communist Party and its fellow travellers. This led to the establishment or development of various pro-Soviet organisations such as the Joint Committee for Soviet Aid, the Russia Today Society, the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR and the Soviet Youth Friendship Committee. The political centre, keen to avoid Anglo-Soviet collaboration turning into a free ride for the Communist Party, set up similar organisations like the Anglo-Soviet Public Relations Committee and the Anglo-Soviet Trades Union Committee.[3] Engagement with the Soviet Union, its society, its role in the war and British people's gratitude towards it therefore became a site of political struggle.

The flexibility of public opinion was perhaps tested most fundamentally during the Second World War in these changing representations of the Soviet Union. As the geo-political situation changed, so the government line on Stalin, the Soviet Union and even communism had to change. This process drew on a historically established process of demonising or rehabilitating foreign leaders and political systems. From the Foreign Office led move towards "painting the German devil on the wall" in the Edwardian period, to the idea that Hitler could serve as a bulwark against an aggressive communism, international politics impacted on the presentation of nations, cultures and ideas in British politics.[4] This process has continued up to the present day with, for example, the privatising Serbian nationalist Slobodan Milosovic being presented during the 1990s as "our man in Belgrade," before becoming "the butcher of Belgrade" as soon as he ceased to be a reliable guarantor of the interests of western capitalism. Stalin, unlike Milosovic however, was no briefly newsworthy but peripheral figure to the lives of people in Britain and the interests of the global political system. Friend and foe alike portrayed Stalin as the bugbear of the western capitalist system. To many, the Soviet

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[2] John Newsinger, *Orwell's Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p.115.
[3] For further information on these organisations see Paul Addison, *The Road To 1945: British Politics and The Second World War* (London: Random, 1994), pp.132-143.
[4] Robert Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness: Britain and The World Role, 1900-1970* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p.15.

Union seemed to be a new, more modern, form of state organisation, one that offered a fundamental challenge to the political establishments in the west. For those who championed Soviet society in the aftermath of the Bolshevik coup it provided a model for socialist development that could ensure what the Webbs described as a modern workers' paradise.[5] Yet for those who opposed the Soviet system, Stalin with his purges, centralised control of industry, show trials and powerful Red Army, posed a threat to the liberty of the citizens of the world and to the world hegemony of capitalism.

The recognition of the alternative threat to the world capitalist system posed by Hitlerism came relatively late for much of the political elite in Britain. However, once Hitler was on the march there was a pragmatic need to enlist Russia as an ally in the fight against an expansionist Germany and then from 1941 a need to justify this to the domestic population. Churchill recognised this and reportedly said to Stafford Cripps and John Platts-Mills: "I've been teaching the British since 1919 that the Russians eat their young. For the sake of the war effort, take as much money as you need and change the public perception of them."[6] Military and political aspirations were in conflict and dealing with this demanded a change in the way the left were popularly represented. In addition domestic changes, such as the incorporation into government of the Labour Party, also required that the idea of the red scare be re-examined.

The changing geo-political situation therefore had enormous ramifications for the practice of British politics. The nature and role of the Soviet Union had to be re-evaluated and both socialists and conservatives responded to this. Before the war the left had broadly endorsed the Soviet system with even the moderate figures that led the

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[5] Sidney and Beatrice Webb's book *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* (London: Longman, 1944) is packed with examples that demonstrate the high quality of life for the soldier, citizen, worker and peasant of the Soviet Union of the 1930s. The following extract encapsulates the level of fictive hyperbole that they and their Bolshevik guides inspired each other to.

> It is exactly accurate to describe the government of the USSR, at any rate from 1917 to 1927, as a Dictatorship of the Proletariat, meaning the urban or industrial manual-working wage-earners. Since 1928, that government may be deemed to have in view also the interests of the kolkhosvuki, the owner-producers in agriculture who have joined together in collective farms. Perhaps the scope of the word proletariat is becoming enlarged, so that it now includes all those, whether mechanics or agriculturists, who will admittedly be qualified for citizenship of the future "classless state". [p.347].

[6] Lena Jeger, "John Platts-Mills", *The Guardian* (27th October 2001).

British Labour movement happy to discuss Russian society as unproblematically socialist although they rejected the revolutionary route as particular to Russia.[7] Conversely the political centre-right saw the existence of the Soviet Union as the central problem in both world and domestic government. One result of this was that the red scare tactic was successfully used by the right to keep Labour out of government in a period when unrestrained capitalism was failing in a number of fairly obvious ways.[8] During the Second World War this kind of red scare became increasingly problematic due to the credibility afforded to the idea of socialism by Labour's incorporation into government and by military dependence on a communist state.

Tory MP Sir Tufton Beamish expressed his disquiet about the propaganda opportunities being handed to the left as early as October 1940, saying: "Every trade union and the co-operative movement and the rather cowardly….pseudo-intelligent left movements are using every minute to promote their pestilential view."[9] While Margaret Thatcher was later to write in her memoirs that the war had given Labour members of the Government the opportunity to build "an essentially socialist mentality" in Britain.[10] The predictive fiction of the period suggests that British society's engagement with socialism was considerably more complex than these rather partisan observations would suggest. Nonetheless, it was clear that the way in which the right related to the left changed dramatically during the war and that this had significant consequences.

Before 1941 it was still possible for Tufton Beamish to talk about the left as a "pestilence" and for writers to construct a variety of red scare stories very much in the mould of those that Chapter One argued were produced throughout the 1930s. Van Loon's *Invasion* (1941), for example depicts the Soviet Union actively colluding with Germany over a planned invasion of the United States. The novel mounts an overt

[7] The Labour Party attempted to capitalise on popular gratitude towards Russia in 1945 by including in their foreign policy manifesto for the election the slogan "Left can speak to Left". The Labour administration's foreign policy however was not influenced by this and they remained as anti-Soviet as Churchill ever was. Nevertheless the Labour Party were happy to extol the virtues of Russian Communism when they felt it to be electoral advantageous. FS Northedge and Audrey Wells, *Britain and Soviet Communism: The Impact of a Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.103.
[8] For example the Zinoviev letter which was used to prejudice the outcome of the 1924 election. See Northedge and Wells, pp.42-43.
[9] Quoted in Paul Addison, "Churchill and the Price of Victory: 1939-1945", Tiratsoo (ed), *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.57.
[10] Quoted in Stephen Fielding, "The Good War: 1939-1945", Tiratsoo (ed), p.27.

defence of the current social system and attacks Bolshevism and Bolsheviks on a number of levels. Even without the threat of invasion Van Loon's characters react against the poor social skills of the Bolshevists they know and assert the value of a particularly American brand of one-nationism:

> She was, I am afraid, a bit prejudiced. She had spent too many years in Greenwich Village and had known too many of our parlour pinks, who would talk about the glories of the world to come, without bothering to pay their grocers and bakers in the world of to-day. To her all Bolshevists were toothless poets or messy, sandal-wearing females of Oriental antecedents. Good old James! She did not keep up with the modern 'social' literature. But she paid all bills within twenty-four hours. The radicals hated her, but the grocers and the bakers thought she was swell. And perhaps - in the end - that was the better system.[11]

A more direct form of anti-Bolshevik action was reported by the leading communist Hymie Lee on the 2 October 1939 when he related physical attacks that had been perpetrated on Communist Party members in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet pact.[12] The variety of expressions of anti-communist feeling showed the acceptability and dissemination of red scare discourses in the early part of the war. These tactics could not however survive forever in a dramatically changed domestic and international political context. The extent of this change is demonstrated by looking at the opinions of Churchill himself. Churchill had argued in 1929: "Very little additional employment and no permanent employment could be created by State borrowing and State expenditure."[13] Yet, by the end of his wartime premiership Britain had become to all intents and purposes a state planned economy. While this "war socialism" was broadly accepted as necessary, the credibility that it gave the left clearly made some on the right uncomfortable. Nonetheless the engagement with the left had to change as accusations of pestilence and eating babies would no longer suffice.

During the war the red scare stories had to change, but it was unclear exactly what they had to change into. If a swing to the left did not just mean the end of British civilisation what did it mean? In fact there was a significant failure to engage with the

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[11] Hendrik Willem van Loon, *Invasion* (London: George G. Harrap and Co. Ltd., 1941), p.40-41.
[12] Francis King and George Matthews (ed), *About Turn: The British Communist Party and the Outbreak of the Second World War. The Verbatim Record of the Central Committee Meetings of 25 September and 2-3 October 1939* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.127.
[13] Quoted in Tony Mason, "'Hunger…Is A Very Good Thing', Britain in the 1930s", Nick Tiratsoo (ed), p.15.

specifics of the social democratic state that Labour envisioned. In some ways this was hardly surprising. Conservative thinkers could not have been expected to predict the Labour victory in 1945 and the dominance of Keynesian ideas on the political economy of the world for the next thirty years.

It was not just the right who were struggling to come to terms with a changing political context. Left wing writers were also attempting to analyse and understand the Soviet Union and socialism in a rapidly changing situation. Despite the centrality of the Soviet Union to the left's vision in these years there were, according to Andy Croft, "no novels published in Britain idealising the Soviet Union" during the decade before the war.[14] This position was largely maintained throughout the war, with left wing authors of predictive fiction utilising their energy for tasks other than simply depicting versions of the Soviet Union. Chapter Seven will detail some of the more ambitious plans and dreams that leftist writers had. Yet, the rehabilitation of the Soviet Union undoubtedly provided opportunities for left-wing writers to score political points. Chalmers Kearner, for example, utilised the changed political context to satirize the fanatical anti-Bolshevism of the 1930s in *Erone* (1943). On being warned in the mid-thirties that Nazi Germany poses the biggest threat to world peace, the novel's Chamberlainesque prime minister dismisses the idea, arguing that Russia was the real enemy:

> Perhaps, after all, you are not so very wrong - you have merely mistaken the enemy. It is Communism that is threatening the world with revolution - Russian Communism. Anti-God and anti-Christ, it is a system of Government which must be resisted. We need our friends in Germany and Italy and Japan to help us. As good Christians we British can only support those who are prepared to fight Communism.[15]

By 1943 the idea that Hitler was a convenient dupe capable of distracting the Russians was clearly ridiculous and exposed the failure government foreign policy in the pre-war period. Yet *Erone* was not the work of a committed Stalinist. The Christian Socialist

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[14] Andy Croft, *Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), p.28.

[15] Chalmers Kearney, *Erone* (Guilford: Bibbles Ltd, 1943) p.201. This echoes Chamberlain's concerns in 1938 when he wrote that the Russians were "stealthily and cunningly pulling the strings behind the scenes to get us involved in war with Germany." This fear was so widespread that the Czech Minister of Propaganda felt it necessary to turn down Soviet offers of help against German invasion on the grounds "It was even more important to consider that our war by the side of Soviet Russia would have been not only a fight against Germany, but it would have been interpreted as a fight on the side of Bolshevism. And then perhaps all of Europe would have been drawn into the war against us and Russia." Northedge and Wells, pp. 61-65.

utopia it depicted would have been anathema to Marxist-Leninists. Nonetheless the broadly pro-Soviet position that it adopted was indicative of the breadth of support that the Russian system could command during a war against fascism.

Not everyone on the left was happy with the Soviet Union during the war. While the left was broadly loyal to Stalin's Russia throughout the war, the consistent championing of the Soviet Union perhaps started to pale for some on the centre-left after the Soviet invasion of Finland. One of the leaders of Adrian Alington's "Humorous Rearmament Movement" in *Sanity Island* (1941) was a disenchanted communist sickened by what he saw in Finland. "You know Mervyn, in my innocent youth I used to be a communist. Natural reaction against being a millionaire's only son, I suppose. What I saw in Finland cured me."[16] HG Wells captured this sense of betrayal in *Babes In The Darkling Wood* (1940). The novel's idealistic hero Gemini muses on the impact that Soviet Russia had on his generation whilst undergoing psychoanalysis to try to deal with the trauma caused by what he saw during his travels in Europe in 1939 and 1940.

> "At the back of the thought of all my generation was Soviet Russia. We did think that there something saner, more generous and juster than the outworn, self-deceiving selfishness of capitalism, had established itself. It was something more primitive and fundamental and yet wiser and scientific. We hung on to that. Men had achieved that in Russia and so they could achieve it everywhere. We were ready for any claim or statement that confirmed our faith. It helped us enormously that so much anti-Bolshevik argument, spat with malice and had an ugly face. We endured even the doctrinaire gabble of our simpler comrades. Soviet Russia gave us the background for all our defiances and braveries. Faith in Russia contained our minds and when the container broke-"
>
> "It broke?" said Dr Kentlake
>
> "Obviously it broke"
>
> "Finland?"
>
> "Finland settled it. For me."[17]

Orwell also continued to develop his own brand of anti-Stalinism during the war through his engagement with both the Labour left and with a variety of independent

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[16] Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), p.13.
[17] HG Wells, *Babes In The Darkling Wood* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940), p.321.

Trotskyists.[18] Orwell combined his satire with visions of possible alternative left utopias. In *Animal Farm* (1945), for example, Old Major's vision of the future combines left libertarianism with a English pastoral ideal.

> Rings shall vanish from our noses,
> And the harness from our back,
> Bit and spur shall rust forever,
> Cruel whips no more shall crack.
>
> Riches more than mind can picture,
> Wheat and barley, oats and hay,
> Clover, beans and mangel-wurzels
> Shall be ours upon that day.
>
> Bright will shine the fields of England,
> Purer shall its waters be,
> Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes
> On the day that sets us free.[19]

Until the pigs ban the singing of "Beasts of England" this utopian vision continues to provide a blueprint against which the various failures of the post-revolutionary regime on Animal Farm were judged. Despite its brevity "Beasts of England" was quite specific about what the new world would be like and what it would feel like. This alternative vision gave an added clarity to the nature of the betrayal that Orwell and those within his orbit felt about the Soviet Union. For those on the left who were critical of the Soviet Union the scale of the tragedy was far greater than it was for right-wing observers. In addition to intensified levels of oppression and the murder of millions, Bolshevik Russia was responsible for the betrayal of an ideal and the discrediting of socialism.

The left's disillusionment with Stalinism was one thing, but perhaps more mysterious was the right's increasing enthusiasm for Soviet Russia. TS Eliot's decision to reject Orwell's *Animal Farm* during the war because it was too critical of Soviet Communism showed how the international situation was impacting on domestic

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[18] Orwell contributed to a variety of magazines over the course of the Second World War. His appointment as ad hoc literary editor of the Labour Left *Tribune* is well known. John Newsinger shows that Orwell also had a sustained engagement with two American journals *Partizan Review* and *Politics* which were both influenced by strands of Trotskyist thought.

[19] George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p.7-8.

politics.[20] In 1944 Orwell was publicly bemoaning the fact that it was "next to impossible to get anything overtly anti-Russian printed" in *Partisan Review*.[21] *Animal Farm,* interestingly attempted to explain how capitalist regimes could come to reassess the threat that they perceived in the Soviet system, and to close ranks around their former enemy. Mr Pilkington, the representative of liberal capitalism, approved of the social system which he witnessed on a visit to Napoleon's Animal Farm:

> Today he and his friends had visited Animal Farm and inspected every inch of it with their own eyes, and what did they find? Not only the most up-to-date methods, but a discipline and an orderliness which should be an example to farmers everywhere.[22]

Orwell's critique was based on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union during the 1930s and the understanding of the Soviet system that was being built up as reports leaked out and were publicised by novels like Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940). The way in which these facts were understood was clearly influenced by his considerable reading of a vast variety of political pamphlets, articles and books. Orwell was well acquainted with ILP, Trotskyist and anarchist critiques of the Soviet Union and reflected many of the concerns of the revolutionary left in his writing.[23] However, the criticisms of Soviet policy were beginning to move beyond these narrow circles and touch figures like Wells who had traditionally supported the Soviet state.

The Nazi-Soviet pact, the invasion of Finland and the growing awareness that the Soviet aims in the Second World War were to create an empire in Eastern Europe forced even a committed Communist like Harry Pollit to ask some questions about the behaviour of the Soviet Union.[24] Nevertheless many, probably most, on the left stayed loyal to Stalinism while the right continued to view Russia with suspicion. The Second World War did not throw up any events that would destroy the credibility of the Soviet state in the fundamental ways that the 1956 intervention in Hungary or the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 subsequently would. The literature that examined the Soviet system and the threats posed by alternative leftist systems betrays this state of flux and

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[20] Addison, *The Road To 1945*, p.137. Rodden, p.44 shows that the unwillingness to allow Orwell the space to criticise Stalinism extended to many other publishers.
[21] Newsinger, p.115.
[22] Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p.92.
[23] Newsinger, p.90.
[24] Pollit's failed attempt to defy the instructions of the Commintern is rendered complete in King and Matthews.

therefore provides a very interesting insight into the beginning of the reconceptualisation of the Soviet Union that would happen during and after the Second World War.

**Absolute bloody revolution**

While the war saw changing representations of what was taking place inside the Soviet Union, relatively little predictive fiction was as well informed as that of Orwell and Koestler. Authors like Wells, Orwell and Koestler struggled with the details of the internal workings of a state that had a clear relationship to their ideas and the ideas of socialism more generally. Other authors, were less concerned with these particularities because they were either less committed to the organised left or antagonistic to it. Although left-wing politics was becoming more mainstream during the war it was placed within a very definite political context. Reforming Labourism could be tolerated as an extension of various British progressive and radical traditions. The post-revolutionary Soviet State could also be accepted because they did things differently over there, but this in no way translated into any significant support for revolutionary politics in Britain. Despite Orwell and others' over excitement in summer and autumn 1940, the coming English revolution remained a pipe dream for wartime leftists. Indeed the association of socialism with revolutionary action continued to be a way in which socialism was undermined and contained.

It should be remembered that the left and the right of the Labour movement were not divided in the same way as they would be in the post-war period. The question was not whether socialism could, should or would happen - but how it could be brought about. James Jupp comments:

> Every militant on the Left believed himself to be a Socialist working towards a certain form of social organisation. He was part of a movement of protest against capitalism, unemployment, Fascism and war. He stood for the aims of peace and Socialism. The great majority of Labour politicians and officials were also prepared to accept a radical definition of Socialism but were not prepared to reshape their programme accordingly.[25]

The boundaries of debate were therefore drawn very differently from how they would be after the mixed-economy had become a theorised reality and political end in itself. The work of Anthony Crosland in particular completely revised the aims of socialism,

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[25] James Jupp, *The Radical Left in Britain: 1931-1941* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), p.156.

rearticulating it as continued capitalist growth constrained by a prices and incomes policy and the mixed economy.[26] But, it is also notable how different the lines of debate are to those of the New Left of the 1960s who agonised over the ways in which different permutations of radical social change could be repressive to different minority groups ultimately arguing for "something other than a seizure of state power".[27] Indeed, one of the most striking things about the left-wing predictive fiction of the 1940s was its lack of serious examination of the problems of what socialism, or radical utopianism, might actually be.

While the number of left-wing militants who subscribed to revolutionary ideas was relatively small their vision was disseminated widely enough to be worthy of engagement and satire in predictive fiction.[28] That one or two writers of considerable stature were writing revolutionary predictive fiction clearly foregrounded the issue within the genre. Stapledon's *Darkness and the Light* is, for example, positive about the idea of revolution and depicts progressive Tibetans fostering a world revolutionary movement to destroy the oligarchy. The fact that George Orwell, a regular contributor to the Labour left *Tribune,* could write with some satisfaction about the idea of revolutionary violence in a mainstream literary magazine like *Folios of New Writing* showed that revolutionary attitudes and ideas were not entirely ghettoised. To many the red scare tactics must have seemed entirely necessary when Orwell boldly asserted: "I dare say the London gutters will have to run with blood. All right, let them, if it is necessary."[29]

This bloodthirsty attitude provided ample material for those wishing to produce stories of unjust regimes led by vicious madmen. *Crimson Courage* (1940) by Daniel O'Den played on this particular aspect of the red scare very effectively early in the war. His novel is full of gory and detailed descriptive passages outlining atrocities committed during the revolution or by the post-revolutionary state of Scorta:

> She never actually forgot how both her parents were swept away by a careless
> burst of machine-gun fire, quite wanton, down an empty street. One moment

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[26] Kevin Jefferys, *Anthony Crosland* (London: Richard Cohen Books, 1999), p.171-179.
[27] George R Vickers, *The Formation of the New Left* (London: Lexington Books, 1975), p.87.
[28] Jupp, pp.25, 93-103.
[29] George Orwell, "My Country Right or Left", *Folios of New Writing* (Autumn 1940), p.41.

they were walking with her, chatting, and next they lay gory and shattered, gasping out their lives before her baby eyes.[30]

This depiction of the ordinary individual caught up in a political battle not of his or her own making has a powerful resonance. Marching Hore-Belisha, the King and any number of war profiteers towards their execution is one proposition, but murdering babies and their parents is quite another. O'Den frequently builds up this kind of pathos as the narrative focuses in on the suffering and destruction resulting from a violent revolution. Choosing to see these sights through "her baby eyes", he lingers on the sentimental cry to spare the innocent. Obviously, this syrupy call for peace and restraint ignores any kind of violence that is not perpetrated by revolutionary movements. For the critical reader this hypocrisy is immediately evident, but for the author the double standards are probably unconscious. O'Den celebrates British Imperialism with its irresistible gunboat diplomacy at the very moment British planes are bombing civilians across Europe. The imaginative presentation of violence is a rhetorical weapon that is used very selectively. The bloody reality of a fictitious revolutionary situation could be imagined in details that would have been seen as highly inappropriate, even unpatriotic, if applied to the behaviour of British troops in North Africa.

Not all authors attack the possibility of revolution on such an emotional level as O'Den. Nor are all authors motivated by the same level of rampant reaction that fires O'Den's writing. *An Unknown Land* (1942), for example, has a clear understanding that the desire for revolution grows out of social inequality. The novel is concerned about the process of revolution but is sympathetic to those critical of inequality. Samuel's utopian vision is based on the possibility of fundamental social change being achieved through reform, and his rejection of the revolutionary method on the fear that it would destructively distort the desire for equality.

> Lamon had explained to me that when the country was first colonized after the Separation, some of the people had tried to preserve at least a part of the comfort and the culture that had been the rule in Bensalem. But this inequality was resented. It was indeed the reason for the social revolution that broke out half a century later. A theorist arose with a creed that purported to be simple, logical and based on a comprehensive survey of the facts; but which was in fact complicated, muddle-headed and partial to the last degree. Justifying themselves

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[30] Daniel O'Den, *Crimson Courage* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1940), p.49.

by this theory a few violent men carried out the revolution, and East Island became "The Union of Logical Materialist Idealists.[31]

Marxism is badly written, ill-considered and wrong, but of no real harm to anyone if left to rot in obscure books. Samuel's real fear is that it would be picked up by a violent and destructive minority and implemented without it actually gaining the support of the population or of it being in their genuine interests. Samuel's book is too sympathetic to fit into the red scare category; indeed it actually endorses a form of socialism. Yet, it contains a clear and articulate argument against revolution of the kind advocated by the Bolsheviks and other radical socialists. The classless Bensalem and the classless Ulmia are different because one is created gradually through progressive reform, while the other is born in a shortsighted revolution.

> The theory, Lamon said to me, insisted upon a state of society that was classless and equalitarian. "Our own system in Bensalem", he said," is also of that order. But while that has been built up, over a period of centuries, on the principle of raising the whole population to the standard reached by the highest, the equality here was brought about by the much simpler, and much quicker, method of bringing everyone down to the standard of the lowest. In fact one of the catchwords of the revolution was "Misery for All is better than Comfort for Some."[32]

The reformist analysis is repeatedly outlined in the predictive fiction of the period. New social orders are often rebuilt out of cataclysms as Chapter Five will demonstrate but the idea that humanity could pre-empt the crisis was anathema. The options for social change were therefore a period of cautious reform or a reckless apocalyptic mistake. The kind of deliberate and immediate change offered by revolutionary politics was off the cards for most of the writers of predictive fiction.

Disparate authors of both political theory and predictive fiction argued that revolution as some on the socialist left were advancing it would result in the displacement of the ruling class and its replacement with a revolutionary party complete with its own class interests. The anarchist writer JH makes this accusation fairly systematically against everyone on the left with the obvious exception of the anarchists. In *War Commentary* in December 1940, he wrote of Trotsky and his followers in the Fourth International:

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[31] Viscount Samuel, *An Unknown Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1942), p.171.
[32] Samuel, p.172.

> Trotskyism merely promises socialism by adopting the same methods, and mistakes, which have produced Stalinism. The necessity for the total destruction of the state, and all its instruments, and the organising of the revolution with special care to prevent the emergence of a new privileged class; these considerations find no place in the programme of the Fourth International. Libertarianism forms no part of its outlook. One cannot feel any confidence that given the same power and control, it would not follow exactly the same road as the Third International.[33]

Not all anti-Communist writers are as concerned as JH about the existence of a self-perpetuating oligarchy. For many writers the most troubling thing about a revolution was the sort of person who was likely to make up that new oligarchy. Britain had yet to produce a majority Labour government when these novels were written but it is undeniable that some of the sting had ebbed out of the red scare once it had elected a group of public schoolboys to its leadership. Socialist politics posed all sorts of threats for the ruling classes but, if the dystopian literature of the period was to be believed, the idea of being ruled by someone who went to a worse school than you and had a less able tailor was probably the most worrying of these.

> Amid crashing applause conferments of Orders were given out by the Chief Watcher, who was actually present and one of the few men in evening dress like John himself. It sat somewhat oddly on the Watcher General, but John was probably the only person in the assemblage to notice cut and fit.[34]

Communism would have seen the indiscriminate slaughter of babies, the elevation of workshy trade unionists to positions of power and the destruction of the industrial base. But, far worse than any of these would have been a social calendar dominated by bureaucrats and the noveau riche and completely lacking in black tie events.

An extensive critique of social revolutions and revolutionaries emerges from the dystopian literature of the 1940s. This was unsurprising when we consider the extent to which Britain's culture was consciously constructed in opposition to the revolutionary states on the continent.[35] For example, Winston Churchill distanced himself and the nation from "this Continental conception of human society called Socialism", in his 1945 election broadcast, adding "or in its more violent form Communism" in a vain

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[33] VR (Ed), *The Left & World War II: Selections from the Anarchist Journal War Commentary 1939-1943* (London: Freedom Press, 1989), p.38.
[34] O'Den, p.62.
[35] Charles Eade (ed), *Winston Churchill War Speeches 1939-45*, p.477.

attempt to re-ignite the red scare tactics that had served so effectively before the war. In the mainstream, establishment-inspired discourse Britain was reasonable, rational, moderate and even occasionally progressive but never revolutionary. In other words despite Churchill's ill-judged attempts to turn back the clock during the 1945 election, the red scare was becoming more subtle and selective. Socialism, as such, was no longer anything to be scared about, indeed it for some it may even have been desirable. Yet, certain types of socialism and perhaps more importantly certain types of socialist were extremely worrying. This was nothing new as the left had always been divided amongst itself into what we could imperfectly call the reformist and revolutionary strands. James Jupp argues that the general strike entrenched these tendencies allowing them to develop ever more separately.[36] However, during the Second World War the distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" socialist perhaps began to be more widely accepted by the rest of the political world.

**Basic common sense**

Dystopian critiques of socialism and communism generally agree that a movement to a more ideological state will mean abandoning common sense. The exact nature of this common sense is debatable, but the leftist state is likely to twist language and reality into new shapes. Sometimes the twisting of reality and truth is done cynically as a way to maintain totalitarian power, but at other times it is an attempt to fit the square peg of theoretical understanding of how the world should be into the round hole of how it actually was. In Ulmia, or The Union of Logical Materialist Idealists, the normal, common sense, life of ordinary people has been subverted to a bizarre creed. This dominating ideology argues that things were more important than people.

> So far as I could understand it, the theory seemed to be based on a strange doctrine that human societies are simply the products of economic factors, and that the whole history of mankind is nothing more than variations on a single theme - the production and the consumption of Things. Holding such ideas the people had taken materialism as their creed and Tools as their emblem. The national badge was a pitchfork crossed by a saw, with the motto "Things Rule Men".[37]

This is a witty satire on Marxism, but it also makes another point that was repeated in other wartime predictive fictions. In Ulmia the fact that things really do become more important than people shows how an oppressive ruling class can manufacture a kind of

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[36] Jupp, p.3.
[37] Samuel, p.171.

reality. Like Orwell, Samuel recognised that dystopia was only possible once truth, logic and rationality had been rendered as fluid terms dependent only on ideology and the whims of the totalitarian rulers. However the irrationality of Ulmia is based on the adherance to a foolish theory that is ultimately socially destructive whilst the irrationality of Animal Farm is a tool that serves the rulers' needs and allows the pigs to build the society they desire.

In a society where alternative centres of power from the state (the press, the intelligentsia, the artistic community) are either eliminated or placed under the control of the state, it is possible for totalitarian rulers to bend the truth to suit their needs. Clover perceives this in *Animal Farm*: *"She did not know why they had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes.*[38] The "truth" of the pigs is only maintained by extreme violence, but this oppressive totalitarianism is born of opportunism not ideological conviction. The pigs stifle truth and free expression because it threatens to challenge their hegemony. Napoleon and Squealer do not actually need to believe that Snowball was in league with humanity from before the revolution. In many ways it is essential that they do not as they have to continue to manipulate the truth as and when it becomes necessary. An actual positive belief in a set of facts or principles may in fact hamper the effective maintenance of the dictatorship at a later point. Ensuring that truth is fluid is a tactic to guarantee effective oppression. Furthermore, this willingness to behave in an unprincipled manner is often portrayed as a political strength that makes totalitarian systems of government all the more terrifying.

The heroes of dystopian fiction are forced to repeatedly deny the truth by their oppressors. As they are tortured and questioned they succumb to the shows of physical and psychological force and agree to whatever the powerful demand. The manipulation of truth actually becomes one way in which the power of the oligarchy can be asserted. Truth does not need simply to be manipulated to ensure that power is held, the manipulation of truth is also the demonstration of power. Ivanov and Gletkin torture Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon* (1940) not because they can achieve anything by it in any practical sense, but because by wringing a confession out of him they prove the

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[38] Orwell, *Animal Farm,* p.58.

absolute power and superiority of the party.[39] Equally the Questioner and his underlings manipulate Hector in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) to demonstrate their power as much as to protect it.[40] Winston Smith "learning" that two and two equal five is one of a long line of literary figures interrogated and tortured by totalitarian states.[41]

For some authors totalitarianism is ruthless and invincible, but for others attempts to contravene common sense are bound to result in failure. The actions of the pigs in *Animal Farm* or Ivanov and Gletkin are about the cynical manipulation of truth and are therefore potentially powerful. Conversely the "logical materialism" of Ulmia results in the spiritual and material decline of the country. Everything is levelled down rather than up. Likewise Scorta, in *Crimson Courage*, experiences enormous problems, not exclusively related to the corruption of the dictator.

> The ship would bump unless it was very smartly gathered in and flung again. No soft fenders hung overside.
>
> "Don't they want to save a crash?"
>
> "Ship's State property, like everything and everybody. Nobody cares about anything. Nothing's their own - doesn't matter."[42]

The Scortan revolution fails because it attempts to base its natural law on concepts of humanity's innate co-operative nature. The society crumbles because no one can motivate themselves without the carrot of property acquisition and the stick of financial loss. O'Den's novel fails to explore the possibility that the lack of social solidarity was a result of the corruption and oppression of the new ruling class. The greed and the tyranny of the regime are conflated with the theoretical failure to understand the inherently competitive nature of humanity. Together they result in a complete failure to maintain the material and cultural fabric of society.

> As they went along he took in the road that had lost half its pavements, the unrepaired, unpainted houses that looked as ramshackle as theatre scenery, and the stench that comes from stopped up drains. Garbage lay everywhere.
>
> He felt better when they arrived at the unpretentious but solid building of the English Club.[43]

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[39] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (1940; London: Vintage, 1994).
[40] Neil M Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p.99.
[41] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) p.263.
[42] O'Den, p.17.
[43] ibid p.21.

Scortan society is unlike Animal Farm as it is inherently weak. The solid and unpretentious building of the English Club provides the base for the ultimate destruction of decaying totalitarian Scorta. Conversely, the totalitarianism of Animal Farm ultimately informs the way in which the capitalist class governs outside of Animal Farm. These examples may suggest that left critics of Stalinism believed that it was stronger than capitalism while right critics believed that it was weaker but this is an over-simplification. In fact both of these responses coexist in the satires and dystopias of the period. The belief that totalitarianism is powerful stands side by side with the assumption that any deviation from liberal democracy is hopelessly flawed.

Even in the dystopian states where the ruling class appears to be impregnable it is noticeable that a vast amount of energy is consistently expended in the preservation of the system. The Bolshevik dictators of *Darkness at Noon* genuinely fear the marginalized Rubashov. The rulers of The Green Isle have to constantly assert their authority even when it was barely challenged. *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is a depiction of a utopia gone wrong. Paradise has been centralised and taken over by bureaucrats who needlessly modernise the perfect world, collectivising and planning until a dystopia is born. The energy required to maintain the dystopian system is always portrayed as in excess of that required to maintain British society. British values and social practices are usually portrayed as "normal" and "common sense" while the various post-revolutionary states set themselves up in opposition to these values. The contravention of these amorphous laws of common sense, create revolt in the citizens of these states' hearts. For all of their power totalitarian states are never imagined as "normal" even to the people that endured them. Underlying all of these novels is a sense of an alternative to the totalitarian which, to a greater or lesser extent, reproduces the values of contemporary liberal democratic Britain.

Orwell attempts to synthesise and explain both the power and the inefficiency of the totalitarian systems in *Animal Farm.* Despite the hegemony that the pigs achieved, Orwell is keenly aware that even they fail to meet their own expectations of the revolution. For Napoleon the assumption of dictatorship provides a new form of oppression. Napoleon's fear that his own life is in danger and his resulting withdrawal from the farm, shows that even dictators are rarely free from the oppression caused by the systems over which they preside. The inability of the rest of the pigs to break free of the shackles of work and alienation is shown perhaps by their increasing reliance on

alcohol and the empty symbols of the previous ruling class. Chapter Three argued that *The Arrogant History of White Ben, The Holy Terror,* and *The Lost Traveller* amongst other wartime predictive fiction suggests fascist states are essentially unstable. Predictive fictions that focus on what they see as the totalitarianism of the left reproduce this message almost exactly. Once again liberal democracy is perceived as providing a normative, neutral and essentially free space while the ideologically driven state is abnormal, artificial and oppressive.

Chapter Three also argued that predictive fiction saw fascist states as being riddled with oppressive forms of hierarchy that oppressed those at the top as well as those at the bottom. Similarly in Animal Farm the new systems of social organisation are as oppressive as the old although the new oppression takes different forms for different strata of society.

> Somehow it seemed as though the farm had grown richer without making the animals themselves any richer – except, of course, for the pigs and the dogs. Perhaps this was partly because there were so many pigs and so many dogs. It was not that these creatures did not work, after their fashion. There was, as Squealer was never tired of explaining, endless work in the supervision and organization of the farm. Much of this work was of a kind that the other animals were too ignorant to understand. For example, Squealer told them that the pigs had to expend enormous labours every day on mysterious things called 'files', 'reports', 'minutes' and 'memoranda'. These were large sheets of paper which had to be closely covered with writing, and as soon as they were so covered they were burnt in the furnace.[44]

This onrushing bureaucratisation of society is detected and protested against in much of the fiction of the period as Chapter Six will explore in more depth. That Orwell's pigs spend their time working on minutes and memoranda that are simply thrown into the fire represents a concern with the growth of a centralised state bureaucracy in wartime Britain as much as in Soviet Russia. In wartime fiction totalitarianism and Stalinism emerge as both enduring and inefficient. This initially seems to be a paradox, how can a system as inefficient as Scorta or Ulmia endure? Yet, as Orwell was to go on to show in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the system that was at once inefficient and enduring was much more awful.

Paul Flewers criticises Orwell's understanding of the nature of Stalinism for exactly this reason:

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[44] Orwell, *Animal Farm,* p.87.

> Orwell, however, did not view the Oceanian regime's power-hungry rule as a product of a society in decay. Like many others, particularly those who saw the Soviet Union as a new form of society, he thought it would continue for a long time. This is hardly surprising at the time, but looks a little quaint today.[45]

Flewers is correct to state that Orwell was wrong in his analysis that the State Socialist or State Capitalist form of social organisation would become dominant. The bureaucratic inconsistencies, inefficiencies and corruption that Orwell and the other writers of 1940s anti-Stalinist dystopias recognised were to prove too much of a weight for the totalitarianism of the Soviet Union to bear. However, even the most virulent red basher was not simply attacking the Soviet Union but also attacking the growth of a whole host of unwanted social and economic developments. If we see Orwell's work in its domestic context rather than as an academic analysis of the Soviet Union his concerns about totalitarianism, freedom and bureaucracy have a wider and more enduring relevance.

**Degeneracy**

> Fredrick and Pilkington changed their tune and began to talk of the terrible wickedness that now flourished on Animal Farm. It was given out that the animals there practiced cannibalism, tourtured one another with red-hot horse shoes and had their females in common. This was what came of rebelling against the laws of Nature, Frederick and Pilkington said.[46]

Authors from both left and right agree that a socialistic or communistic transformation of society would have profound effects on the moral and behavioural patterns of individuals. Chapter Seven will examine a number of texts in which humanity has been transformed into asexual, unselfish, psychic super-beings. Unsurprisingly, for the dystopian writer, the movement to a communistic social order is most likely to result in the opposite of the values that the utopians hold dear. For every ethereal philosophical scholar in utopian fiction stands a mirror image in dystopian fiction. Petty, stupid, ugly and sexually voracious, the villains of dystopian fiction almost always emerge from the page as more interesting and colourful than their utopian opposites.

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[45] Paul Flewers, *"I know how, but I don't know why"* (Coventry: New Interventions, 1999), p.28.
[46] Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p.25.

In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* the planners who rule paradise while God sleeps decree that nobody shall eat the fruit from the trees. Instead everyone will be provided with a regulated and centrally produced porridge. Life is thereby moved from an individualistic to a collective basis without any apparent increase in the general happiness of the populace. However the effects of this collectivisation go beyond simply denying the joy of fruit to people as God reveals when he finally awakes towards the end of the novel. "As the fruit grows on the tree it contains certain vital properties which once upon a time – perhaps a primitive time – were called the knowledge of good and evil."[47] Gunn's message is clear, the collectivisation of society is likely to lead not just to unhappiness, but also to moral degeneration. As autonomy is robbed from people, so too is responsibility and creativity. A future of central planning and bureaucracy would be likely to lead to dysfunctional individuals as well as a disintegrating society.

Daniel O'Den plays up the moral degeneracy of alternative social systems to their full potential. His revolutionaries do not simply attack the most fundamental concepts of human decency in their denial of the class system, their collectivisation of property, and their complete disregard for the tradition of habeas corpus. Those who live under the Scortan regime become monsters devoid of any real humanity. In a parallel with the Nazi death camps and the experiments of Josef Mengele, the civil servants in O'Den's book perform experiments and torture on dissidents, most notably children. The revelations culminate with the realisation that children are being eaten in the orphanages of Scorta.

> 'Oh, I do not say the schools are kept for that, to be eaten like cows in pens. No, I do not say that!" waving his small shock head from side to side " Of course, it does not matter to the party and Ferrata what becomes of anybody. They have all the food there is and everything else as well. That is why there is none for anybody else. It must be lovely to be a Partizan! No, I mean the people who keep these schools. What of them?' A pause. ' Some of them are hungry sometimes. And - and when you are very hungry a baby's leg tastes quite good. It is the best part.'[48]

The evocative power of cannibalistic-infanticide and mechanised slaughter runs through everything from fairy tales to the unfounded anti-German stories of the First

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[47] Gunn, p.216.
[48] O'Den, p.122.

World War.[49] Although it echoes Churchill's comments to Platt-Mills, the "communists eat babies" allegation is obviously the most extreme, and very possibly to the reader the most ridiculous allegation that O'Den has in his impressive armoury. What is unclear in much of this kind of writing is how far the authors are presenting propaganda from a position of ignorance and how far they are reflecting a reality that was still unfolding in Germany and Russia. O'Den in particular fails to give the impression that he is actually informed about any of the details of totalitarian oppression, but this was not to say that he is not reflecting wider and more general concerns about the possibility of murderous forms of state oppression.

The unspeakable acts that communists are likely to indulge in go far beyond cannibalism and industrialised murder. According to the dystopian fiction of the period they are also likely to engage in all kinds of sexual depravity. In *Crimson Courage* the state outlaws marriage and actively encourages sexual licence. This deviation has become normalised to the extent that the virginal heroine of the novel, Cara, questions the value of a Christian marriage to the Anglicised John. John quickly puts her straight saying 'Free love may serve in Scorta - but it cuts no ice out-side!'[50] Despite this John forces himself to have pre-marital sex with her once he has promised to marry her, unwittingly exposing the hypocritical double standards of patriarchal English culture.

The dislocation of couples, the renegotiation of gender roles and the easy availability of alternatives to British men resulted in a literature that was deeply concerned with the policing of gender roles and the maintenance of the monogamous couple and the nuclear family at the centre of the conception of what it meant to be British. Ruthven Todd explores what would happen if the nuclear family was replaced with a state planned alternative in *The Lost Traveller*. One clear result is the growth of orgiastic debauchery amongst the new ruling class.

> I'm not surprised you found the town dull. You need to have some influence to get into the night clubs. I've been there once or twice, and the things I saw - why, you'd never believe them! Young Omar took me one time, and as he'd just had a bit of a to-do with the governor he showed me what the old man did in his spare time. The room was just a tangled mass of nudity.[51]

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[49] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.116.
[50] O'Den, p.140.
[51] Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943), p.120.

The movement of moral responsibility from the individual to the state results in a weakening of the moral values which underpin the institutions of British, and therefore normal, society.

The presentation of cultures in which less regulatory, sexual and moral systems operate was universally negative. While the reasons for socialism or Nazism might be explored or understood before they are rejected, a sexual liberalisation was an entirely unwanted and negative outcome of other experiments. While some young men might find some immediate gratification in sexual licence its effect was ultimately to destroy women and to weaken social structures. At best, moral liberalisation results in an enjoyable but empty short-term experience. In the long run, movement away from the normative sexual and moral values of British society results in social disintegration. The decision after the Scortan revolution to break up families culminates with packs of wild children roaming the streets indulging in petty crime and terrifying what remains of polite Scortan society.[52]

In opposition to the absurd and dangerous decrees issued by the state and party are the values, often half remembered, of traditional or pre-revolutionary life. In *Crimson Courage*, Cara is redeemed by her memories of the pre-revolutionary era. "Taught by her parents in far-off monarchical days she still had ineradicably gentle ways."[53] The idea that a residual culture existed to provide a potential defence against an assertive creeping modernity can be found across the literature examined in this study from *The Aerodrome* and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* to *Three Men Make a World*, *Then We Shall Hear Singing* and *The Last Man*. Communist and fascist social systems are frequently seen as the end points for a modernism that is beginning to transform culture across the world for the worse. This transformation is most unsettling and terrifying when it is feared that it would happen inside the head and inside the bedroom. The anti-communists could devise strategies to defend themselves against social and economic changes, but the feeling that the very essence of people was changing and that seemingly indestructible institutions like the family might also be blown away with the rest of their traditional values provides a particularly terrifying proposition.

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[52] O'Den, p.77.
[53] Ibid, p.49.

**All the same?**

Adrian Alington's novel *Sanity Island* pokes fun at dictators and aspiring dictators of all colours. For his kind of satire it is irrelevant that there were differences between fascism and socialism. Both systems are portrayed as equally ridiculous, equally illiberal and equally un-British. The changes that have been brought about by the modern breed of ideologue are all for the worse and the exact details of their programs are secondary to this.

> Consider these blown-out rumbustious dictators, who have set the world by the ears and brought death and suffering upon countless innocent people in their own countries and elsewhere. What is the first thing they must do in order to make themselves secure? They must kill laughter. Otherwise laughter would kill them. All their solemn pomposities, their ridiculous comic gestures, their goose-steppings, their 'heils' and 'vivas' their insane mouthings and exhibitions on balconies and white horses - they know quite well that all these things would perish instantly before the first blast of honest laughter. Therefore, say they, to the concentration camp with those who love laughter, beat the jokes out of their system with rubber truncheons, eradicate their sense of humour with castor oil, torture them till their laughter turns to a death-rattle in their throats.[54]

Alington's novel centres on the idea that through good humour all the world's problems can be overcome. The ideological off-the-peg solutions that various individuals, groups and states offer are bound to fail because they are inevitably dogmatic and encourage and endorse oppressive behaviour. Alington's novel is light and amusing, and contains a number of witty attacks on the pomposity and absurdity of the political movements that are attempting to save the world from itself during the Second World War. What is interesting about his work is that, despite the fact that he makes building a critique of political movements and totalitarian states and ideas his business; he is uninterested in the details of their belief systems. The differences between totalitarian systems are dissolved and the appeal of these movements is reduced to a mixture of personal opportunism, egoism, leader worship and misdirected idealism. As in a number of other works a clear and sustained engagement with the actual details of the target of the work was not attempted.

Alington is not the only author to collapse differences between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. In the aftermath of the war Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) played an important role in defining the ideological grammar that could be used to describe totalitarian regimes. The sense that the political systems of mid-twentieth

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[54] Alington, p.10.

century Germany and Russia can be treated to some extent as a pair became a part of the lexicon of the cold war and emerged in a variety of places ranging from sensational studies of individual leadership qualities like *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, to studies of totalitarianism like Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.[55] This comparison is clearly justified on a number of levels, both were focused around bureaucratic systems, nominally under the control of a single deified "great leader", responsible for large scale organised pogroms, ideologically motivated, committed to a growth in state power and extremely repressive in terms of civil liberties.

Wartime British commentaries recurrently argue that the totalitarian states can be understood in tandem, frequently seeing modernity as their common feature. This accusation of modernity is ideologically loaded and largely detrimental to the moderns. Rubashov asserts in *Darkness at Noon* (1940) that "the second quarter of the twentieth century" saw "the triumph of the totalitarian principle."[56] This line of argument asserted that it was necessary to understand Soviet Russia within a wider context. Soviet Russia could not be seen as being simply an extreme left-wing state but should also be understood as a representation of a new type of totalitarian state that had both left and right wing manifestations.

The popular conflation of the totalitarian regimes of left and right clearly draws on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell borrowed freely from different oppressive regimes in the novel to come up with a synthesised ultra-totalitarianism. John Rodden has argued that this conception of totalitarianism, along with the new adjective "Orwellian", entered the popular consciousness in the years after Orwell's death and has remained there until the present.[57] Yet, as Orwell was arriving at his conclusions about the similarity of various authoritarian ideologies and states, so too were many other writers and thinkers. Indeed John Newsinger shows that Orwell had read accounts such as Eugene Lyon's *Assignment in Utopia* and theoretical works like Borkenau's *The Totalitarian Enemy* and that these informed his thinking about the similarity of totalitarian regimes.[58]

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[55] Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London: HarperCollins, 1991). Bullock's thesis is expounded somewhat more concisely in his 1994 lecture to the German Historical Institute published as *Personality and Power: The Strange Case of Hitler and Stalin* (London: The German Historical Institute, 1995); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism. Third Edition* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1967).
[56] Arthur Koestler, p.20.
[57] Rodden, pp.32-41.
[58] Newsinger, pp.110-112.

In addition Orwell was also acquainted with many of the writers featured in this study. He reviewed *Darkness at Noon* for *The New Statesman and Nation*, discussed *The 1946 MS* in his column in *Tribune*, corresponded with JD Beresford, reviewed Alfred Noyes for *The Observer,* Viscount Samuel for *The Listener* etc, etc.[59] Novels like *Loss Of Eden* (1940), *The 1946 MS* (1943) and *I, James Blunt* (1942) reveal the existence of a politically engaged dystopian tradition of which Orwell was clearly aware. Orwell had read and been impressed by Zamyatin's *We* and his reviews, letters and articles reveal an on-going interest in this type of fiction.[60] Indeed the large number of proto-Orwellianisms that are scattered throughout the predictive fiction of the 1940s suggests on its own that Orwell was either borrowing directly from many of the novels discussed in this study or drawing from similar sources. This is a subject that would benefit from a more sustained discussion in another place but, for example, Brown and Serpell's assertion that "the spirit of the people is not dead. For a while it slept, stunned into resignation, but all the time it was being kept alive, not by the intellectuals or the thinkers, still less by the politicians and talkers, but by the greatest and most inarticulate section of the population, the working class" is clearly echoed in Winston Smith's "If there is hope, it lies in the proles".[61] Equally we can see Winston Smith prefigured in Richard Wright the hunted, furtive narrator of *The 1946 MS.*[62] We could go on by noting the similarity of *The Lost Traveller*'s, nameless *Him* to Big Brother or by spotting the genesis of the slogans of the Party in the Minan slogan "whatever the

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[59] Peter Davison, Ian Angus, and Sheila Davison, The Complete Works of George Orwell *Volume Twelve: A Patriot After All 1940-1941* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), pp.357-359; Davison, Angus and Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.13; Davison, Angus and Davison, *I Have Tried To Tell the Truth*, p.115; Davison, Angus and Davison, *I Have Tried To Tell the Truth*, pp.105-7;

[60] As well as the books already cited Orwell was aware of a range of books and authors discussed in this study including Slater's *Home Guard For Victory*, Davison, Angus and Davison, *Volume Twelve: A Patriot After All 1940-1941*, pp.387-38; Storm Jameson Davison, Angus and Davison, *Volume Ten: A Kind of Compulsion 1903-1936*, p.189; CS Lewis' *That Hideous Strength*, Davison, Angus and Davison, *Volume 17: I Belong to the Left. 1945*, pp.250-251; Morton's, *I, James Blunt*, Davison, Angus and Davison, *Volume 14: Keeping Our Little Corner Clean. 1941-1942*, p.301; Mervyn Peake, Davison, Angus and Davison, *Volume 15: Two Wasted Years. 1943,* pp.291-292; Olaf Stapledon, *Volume 17: I Belong to the Left. 1945*, p.455; and Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome Volume 17: I Belong to the Left. 1945*, p.280.

[61] Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell, *Loss of Eden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 248; George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.72.

[62] Robin Maugham, *The 1946 MS* (London: War Facts Press, 1943). For a more complete discussion of Richard Wright's narrative see Chapter Four, Section One of this study.

government says is true, even when false" in *An Unknown Land*.[63] Finally, we could perhaps recognise that part three of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* bears a remarkable resemblance to Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940).[64]

Viewing Orwell within this context makes the achievement of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* look less like a work of prophecy and more like a synthesis of existing debates and styles. Orwell's concerns were not unique but emerged from a widespread intellectual debate that is apparent in the predictive fiction of the Second World War. Many of the other writers who satirized and analysed the totalitarian regimes of the 1930s and 1940s were also struggling with the parallels that they could spot between different states both at home and abroad. Likewise, the readers of various dystopian presentations of political regimes would have been likely to comprehend alternative targets for criticism beyond the immediate focus of the author. Discussions about the evils of nationalisation could hardly have avoided sparking thoughts about the labour budget, just as narratives about Nazi clampdowns on decadent intellectuals would have connected in the minds of informed readers with criticisms of the Bolsheviks such as Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.

For some the Nazi-Soviet pact made concrete this accusation that the ideologies of the far left and right were identical. For those who occupied the political centre ground this was a convenient accusation to be able to make. The appeal of the radical left and right was, at least by 1939, usually mutually exclusive. If it was possible to claim that they were simply variations on a theme the political centre would have discredited both of its competitors at the same time. As we have seen in this chapter and the last dystopian presentations of these different systems focused on similar issues: the power of the state; the imposition of a new and incompetent ruling class; the lack of access to a reliable truth; the number of unwanted modernist innovations.

At the very least the pairing of two supposedly oppositional ideologies via the Nazi-Soviet pact led to accusations of opportunism. If Communism and Fascism were not the same thing then the reader could only assume that Hitler and Stalin were corrupt and leading their movements for personal gain rather than political principle. In *Sanity Island* Stephen the idealistic young communist becomes disillusioned when Frinck, the

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[63] Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943); Viscount Samuel, *An Unknown Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1942), p.175.
[64] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (London: Vintage, 1994).

Hitler cipher, and Torsen, a Lenin/Trotsky figure, go into alliance. "But how can Frinck be our bitterest enemy one day and our ally the next? I tell you, comrades, we're being betrayed. Torsen is simply playing for his own hand."[65] But, if authors were drawing overt parallels, readers were also likely to spot similarities between the dystopian systems in predictive fiction.

At first glance Daniel O'Den's *Crimson Courage* seems to be an effective hatchet job on the left. However, it was noticeable how easily the novel can be transposed onto a fascist state. We can assume that *"Crimson" Courage* like the novel's planned title '"Red" Herrings' denotes that the left is the target of the piece.[66] Yet the reader would have found it difficult to discover an element of the novel that did not fit an attempt to read it as an anti-fascist novel. Likewise *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* seems to clearly be about some kind of Communist state as it focuses on planning and centralising authority, but has no Hitler figure or racial element to the dystopia. However, at one point the planners use the argument that "in a thousand years the Green Isle would be too small" recalling the Nazis demand for "lebensraum".[67] Many authors seem to have been content to see both Hitlerism and Stalinism as facets of a general modernist totalitarianism and not worried about the detailed differences. Most dystopian authors, writing in the 1940s, ignored details about how the Russian revolution had sunk into Stalinism or how the German political centre had complied with Hitler's rise to power. What mattered was that different and unpleasant forms of government existed across the world and that they must not be allowed to develop in Britain.

Robin Maugham was one of the more politically sophisticated writers of dystopian fiction in the period, yet again he chose to minimise the differences between the alternative forms of totalitarianism in *The 1946 MS*. General Pointer, who becomes the totalitarian dictator of Britain said,

> Because Dictatorship was bloody in Russia, and is beastly in Germany and putrid in Italy, that's no reason why it shouldn't be peaceful and decent in England.[68]

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[65] ibid p.189.

[66] O'Den notes in the forward to *Crimson Courage* that he had been planning to call the novel Red Herrings until he discovered that there was another novel with that title.

[67] Gunn, p.94.

[68] Maugham, p.18.

Maugham understood the similarity of dictatorial systems across Europe and saw parallel tendencies growing at home. His work as private secretary to the Director of the National Service Campaign undoubtedly gave him a unique insight into the growing power of the British state.[69] Yet, the novel is also aware of the danger of what the suspension of "the laws which made certain their [the British people's] freedom" in time of crisis.[70] This growth in state power was portrayed as a foreign innovation that was alien to "the gentle tolerant" indigenous culture.[71] The opposition between Stalinism and Fascism was replaced with one between the like and the unlike. Positive values in dystopian fiction are frequently encoded in ideas of the home, tradition and the familiar, while negative, dystopian values, are registered in social experimentation, the future and the alien. While some of this opposition is intrinsic to the genre, much is not and perhaps reflects a wartime culture which was being forced to question the sustainability of its values in the face of fundamental changes in the political economy of the world.

Chapter Six will continue the examination of dystopian fiction focusing on the way in which dystopia is used to critique the domestic political situation. The external ideological and military threats which have been discussed in this chapter and the last are inevitably characterised in a different way from domestic ideological challenges. Yet, the opposition between domestic and foreign is rarely that simple. As Chapter Three showed critiques of German or Italian fascism invariably can also be used to comment on fascists and fascist tendencies in Britain. Equally the anti-Stalinist literature of the period always has one eye on bolshy forces at home.

**The changing face of totalitarianism**
The presentation of the Soviet Union and of ideas associated with it in predictive fiction was far more dynamic than the presentation of fascism. Whereas the moral and political status of Hitler and fascism hardly changed throughout the war, Stalinism was on a representational roller coaster. Changes in the geo-political context, the fluctuating allegiances of some authors as well as the usual political and personal differences in approach meant that responses to the Soviet Union within predictive fiction are diverse.

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[69] "Biographical Sketch", *Robin Maugham, 1916-1981: Collection, 1932-1975,* http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/maugham.html, 19th July 2002.
[70] Maugham, p.28.
[71] Maugham, p.34.

Wartime authors frequently entertain the idea of revolution, but almost always reject it. Like most of the rest of society the writers of predictive fiction have no desire to plunge themselves into more conflict and uncertainty. The war itself undoubtedly provided enough of both and the representations of revolution usually stress its pointlessness, its destructiveness and its seemingly inevitable destination point in oppression. For the most part where authors seek to transform Britain they favour a more gradual root that will not only avoid the bloodshed but will be careful to preserve what they see as the valuable traditions and cultures of the British people.

Chapter Seven will show that many wartime utopians still drew on the political vision of the left, but as this chapter has shown none of them were attempting to mirror or recreate the Soviet Union. For some the Soviet Union represented a betrayal of the ideals of socialism or a misapplication of them. However there were concerns with the ideas of the radical left that went beyond the response to a single state. Concerns about collectivisation, about the effects on the moral order of changes to the political system and about the availability of truth outside of liberal democracy were frequently voiced. The sense that whatever the communist state achieved something was likely to be lost had implications on the way moves towards greater planning in Britain were represented as Chapter Six will detail.

Once again the predictive fiction produced during the Second World War was not simply about a particular state. The texts that challenged Stalinism were also challenging Stalinist or communist trends perceived in Britain. Furthermore, as this chapter and the last have shown, a more fundamental trend of state building and technological and artistic modernism was coming under attack from often quite disparate quarters. The Soviet Union was clearly perceived as being part of a wider modernist project. In the 1930s British supporters of Soviet Russia had clearly been enamoured of the modernism in the state: Northedge and Wells' comment that "Thinkers who idolised planning – people like HG Wells and Sidney and Beatrice Webb – went to Russia in droves to see a new civilization being planned: they saw the future as they put it, and it worked. Julian Huxley described Russia's five-year plans as expressing 'a new spirit, the spirit of science introduced into politics and industry.'"[72] By the 1940s much of this enthusiasm for planning and science was to enter the mainstream of British political life. However despite the enthusiasm for planned

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[72] Northedge and Wells, p.147

reconstruction and although many continued to celebrate the Soviet Union's perceived modernism, resistance to these ideas were also being expressed and this resistance tied in with concerns that were voiced about fascism and the fascist state. Authors perceived that something was happening to societies. It was taking different forms across the world, but it was driving people in similar directions. A dystopian totalitarianism was therefore perceived that went far beyond any single state, and just as it manifested in Russia and Germany, elements of it were also manifesting in Britain.

## Chapter Five: Jerusalem Destroyed

Predictive fiction in the 1940s was clearly shaped by the Second World War. Whereas the satirical and political fictions discussed in Chapters Three and Four could have been written in peacetime they took particular forms because of the existence of war. Chapter Two showed that the engagement with the ongoing war was even greater in the case of fictions that imagined a coming invasion. Invasion fiction provided a space in which concerns about the conduct of the war could be voiced and offered the opportunity to comment on war aims and objectives. Invasion fiction, however, gives us a partial view of responses to the war. Alongside the invasion fictions was a parallel strand of predictive fiction that imagined the destruction of civilisation and the birth of new post-apocalyptic societies. As this chapter will show, this type of fiction frequently had a far more critical, even oppositional, position on the conduct of the war. Whereas invasion fictions were frequently about how to fight the war more effectively, apocalypse fictions often questioned whether it should be fought at all.

Chapter One argued that the fear that civilisation was declining or was poised on the edge of apocalypse had become a recurring theme in British predictive fiction from around the time of the First World War. Brian Stableford argues that before the invention of the atom bomb this apocalyptic focus was a peculiarly British phenomenon. Both Stableford and IF Clarke trace this apocalyptic focus to the British experience in the First World War.[1] The experience of industrial warfare by a section of the male population and the dissemination of this experience through British culture via poetry, memoirs, novels and the oral tradition created, according to Stableford and Clarke, a culture in which a celebration of the future and progress was frequently inappropriate. While this is clearly a partial picture of British culture it demonstrates how the apocalypse fictions were bound up with concerns about war and modernity. These themes would manifest very clearly once more when writers employed the apocalypse mode to discuss their experience of total war in the 1940s.

Authors use apocalypse fiction to express their concerns about the direction society is moving in. If society continues on its present trajectory, their novels argue, decadence, death and destruction will be the result. The writers of apocalypse fiction

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[1] Brian Stableford, *Scientific Romance in Britain 1890-1950* (London: Fourth Estate, 1985), p.246.

react against different elements of contemporary society as they are drawn from diverse political, intellectual and spiritual traditions. How they choose to destroy the world in their fictions also differs, for some it is the onset of total war, for others divine intervention and still others environmental or social catastrophe. Yet what they all had in common was the belief that things needed to change and what they normally locate as the root of society's problems, namely the movement into a dangerous, irresponsible and inhumane period of modernity. If the experience of industrial warfare in the First World War inspired apocalypse fiction, the Second World War with its rapidly developing and technologically advanced ways of administering death and destruction simply multiplied authors' concerns about modernity.

These concerns about "progress" can seem out of kilter with the version of wartime politics and culture with which we have become familiar. Addison's *The Road To 1945* depicts the war as a time of ascendancy for a politics utterly committed to progress and modernity.[2] As the Introduction argued this vision has been contested and significantly qualified by subsequent historiography. However, despite its technocratic elements the New Jerusalem ideology intersects with the kinds of concerns about modernity voiced in apocalypse fiction. While many authors imagined a return to the Garden of Eden in their novels the New Jerusalemers dreamed of building garden cities; planned, ordered, and progressive, but also inspired by a romantic rural ideal. Although many predictive fictions were produced in opposition to a perceived technocratic modernity, the traditional, organic, rural ideals that they posited in their place were also endorsed in part by the planners themselves. If the Labour Party and the planners in Whitehall were building an ultra-modernist Aerodrome, they were still attempting to build it to the specifications of the Victorian country house. For all the expressions of fear at an on-rushing totalitarian modernity, the conservative, romantic traditionalism that Chapter Two identified as being central to the conception of what kind of Britain was being defended in novels like *When The Bells Rang* (1943) and *Tunnel From Calais* (1942) was widely disseminated across British society.[3]

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[2] Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975; London: Random, 1994).

[3] Anthony Armstrong and Bruce Graeme, *When The Bells Rang: A Tale of What Might Have Been* (London: George G. Harrap and Co: 1943); David Divine, *Tunnel From Calais* (1942; St Albans: Severn House, 1975).

**A response to war**

The amount of apocalypse fiction produced during the Second World War was not accidental. The conditions of war produced an understandable concern with the effects of progress and the possibility of global destruction. Stephen King-Hall notes in his argument about the politics of the war *Total Victory* (1941) that "Modern civilization is the result of progress and progress is all embracing. If it makes the peace-time life of man more comfortable, it likewise makes his Total Wars more terrible."[4] This was echoed by Olaf Stapledon in his novel *Darkness and the light* (1942), which like his earlier *Last and First Men* (1930), charts humanity's rise and fall across centuries. The novel depicts the human race experiencing a number of apocalypses, some credible to the nineteen forties reading public, others fantastical. Nonetheless Stapledon's narrative clearly makes the point that the increasing technological power being developed is a double-edged sword. "And now, in this final balance between light and darkness, the newly won Aladdin's lamp, science, had given men such power for good and evil that they inevitably must either win speedily through to true community or set foot upon a steepening slope leading to annihilation."[5]

This realisation that humanity was rapidly developing the means of its own destruction must have been profoundly unsettling for the general population. Apocalypse fiction obviously revelled in its increasing relevance, but it also frequently displayed a desperate quality as if the end of the world was genuinely on the agenda. Much of the fiction on which this study focuses has an element of the evangelical tract. Predictive fiction of all types engages, usually consciously, with political and cultural realities with the aim of reforming, transforming or revolutionising them. Apocalyptic fiction during the war often perceived an on-rushing Armageddon which it attempted to either avert or prepare its readership for.

There was clearly good reason to fear the destructive power that humanity had unleashed and to read this as the ultimate destination of a process of modernist progress. From the bombing of Guernica in 1937 the fears about mass destruction, not just of fighting men, but of civilians had achieved new currency. The sense that death and destruction could just rain unchecked from the sky had a Biblical quality that is picked by the culture of the period. Graham Greene was moved to describe what he saw as a

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[4] Stephen King-Hall, *Total Victory* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1941), p.34.
[5] Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the light* (London: Methuen and co, 1942), p.5.

"diseased erratic world" in his October 1940 essay "At Home".[6] His pessimistic disillusionment would have undoubtedly resonated with other stunned sufferers of the Blitz. Greene goes on to speculate that the world is finally going to end, brought down by physical, political and moral violence. "Violence comes to us more easily because it was so long expected - not only by the political but also by the moral sense. The world we lived in could not have ended any other way."[7] Similar despair seems also to have gripped HG Wells at various points during the war with the Wellsian hero of *All Aboard for Ararat* (1940) lamenting, "that madness had taken complete possession of the earth and that everything he valued in human life was being destroyed."[8]

Predictive fiction provided a space in which meditation on society's new and indiscrimate destructive power could take place. Many texts reveal uneasiness about the frailty of the material basis of society and often equate the physical destruction to a spiritual or moral apocalypse of some kind. The Blitz as actual or metaphorical apocalypse was unsurprisingly a frequently employed literary device in and around the Second World War. Charmers Kearney describes the bewilderment of London's initial experience of aerial bombardment in *Erone* (1943).

> The din and rush were beyond belief; everything could now be plainly seen in the glare of the conflagrations. Someone was calling, absurdly and without reason, "Put out that light." As if it mattered, as if anything mattered. Perhaps this was Judgement Day, London was to be destroyed. It seemed like it.[9]

This apocalyptic response to aerial bombardment grew from a realisation of the destructive power of modern weaponry. The Second World War saw a rapid intensification in the mass destructive potential of the military including the production of weapons which by the end of the war had clearly apocalyptic potential. These concerns manifested themselves through a variety of cultural phenomena: in the increased interest in religion and church attendance; in "the retreat from liberal optimism among the intelligentsia"; in the revival of spiritualism and in interest in the occult, and, in a different way; in the enthusiastic embracing of reconstruction as the

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[6] Graham Green, "At Home", *The Lost Childhood and other essays* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951), p.190.
[7] Ibid, p.189.
[8] HG Wells, *All Aboard For Ararat* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940), p.1.
[9] Chalmers Kearney, *Erone* (Guilford: Bibbles Ltd, 1943), p.228.

mantra of the post-war world.[10] Each of these developments in turn are inscribed and worked through in a variety of different literary manifestations. Commentators on art and literature feared for the worse. An ongoing debate in the *TLS*, *Horizon* and *Penguin New Writing* discussed whether creativity was possible at all in the middle of total war.[11] Meanwhile Neo-Romantic painters like Leslie Hurry also picked up on the apocalyptic implications of the war. Hurry's *June 1941* (1941) depicts the war as the Last Judgement, the final conflict between good and evil.[12]

Predictive fiction provided a highly appropriate place for apocalyptic concerns to be worked through in more detail. Nevil Shute's *What Happened To The Corbetts* (1939) offered a fairly accurate depiction of the effects of bombing complete with death, famine, pestilence and war. The novel demonstrates how fragile the civilisation of 1930's Britain was, showing how seemingly small amounts of damage, such as the disruption of the water supply, could result in the humiliating degradation of the people of Britain. "Some of the poorer parts are in a terrible way for water, really they are. In Chapel and in Northam, down behind, they've been scooping up the water from the gutters where it came up out of the road, and drinking that…."[13] The authorities are unable to cart water into the towns due to the continuing onslaught. Social disintegration continues with outbreaks of cholera, which is perceived to be a disease of the uncivilised.[14] This kind of fiction helped crystallise the apocalyptic fears that were already lodged in the collective psyche.

Herbert Best's novel *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* reads like a final warning to humanity to change before it is visited by apocalypse. *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* imagines humanity visiting itself with appalling degradation, degradation comparable with the events that were beginning to unfold in central Europe whilst Best wrote. In this critique of industrialised modernity we see humanity reduced to the level of cannibalism by an over-reliance on technology. As the fragile balance of supply and demand is disrupted by war, modernity especially in the West is increasingly unable to meet the basic needs

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[10] Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p.196; Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Random, 1994).

[11] "Why not war writers: A manifesto", Cyril Connolly (ed), *Horizon*, IV, 22 (October 1941), pp.236-239; John Lehmann's "Foreword" in *Folios of New Writing* No 1 (1940).

[12] David Mellor, "The Body and The Land", David Mellor (ed), *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), p.84.

[13] Nevil Shute, *What Happened to the Corbetts* (1939; London: Mandarin, 1993), p.42.

of the populace. In an extreme extrapolation of the kind of problems that Shute imagines in *What Happened To The Corbetts*, civilisation collapses altogether:

> People couldn't have been such idiots! Each nation building up its population until only the most elaborate and delicate organisation of supplies and communication could allow the land to support such hordes of people; and blindly at the very same time, getting ready to blast to bits the delicate organisation of a neighbouring nation. Hadn't they ever heard that people in glass houses should not throw stones? Oh, men can't have been so mad![15]

Best, like the other writers of apocalypse fiction, sees the problems that civilisation is undergoing as the result not of one political system, but of modernity as a whole. While Best's novel has a pacifist strain it is the creation of a modern industrial society and the potential for destroying that with modern industrial warfare that are the mistakes that humanity will pay for if it does not change. Only by returning to a more organic society based more clearly on morality and less on the machine and material possession can humanity hope to be saved.

For Morchard Bishop humanity seems almost to have an apocalyptic death wish. His novel *The Star Called Wormwood* depicts a world in which the Second World War has been endlessly replayed. God eventually becomes so disgusted by his creation that he considers raining apocalypse down on humanity as the only way in which he can prevent society destroying itself.

> "The Almighty," he said, "is at last growing weary of the human race. He thinks it is incorrigible, and is wondering whether He hadn't better cut his losses and destroy it swiftly, before it puts Him to the immense humiliation of destroying itself."[16]

HG Wells uses a similar idea in his *All Aboard for Ararat* to drive home the self-destructive stupidity of humanity. If humanity is so fixated on its own destruction, God may as well step in and bring about apocalypse. Luckily, however, Noah Lammock, Wells' champion of progressive humanity, outwits God and convinces him not to destroy everything, but rather to allow him to have the opportunity to construct a post-diluvian Wellsian utopia.

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[14] Shute, p.61.
[15] Herbert Best, *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), p.217.
[16] Morchard Bishop, *The Star Called Wormwood: An Investigation of the possible reasons for its Decline and Fall as described in the VIIIth chapter of The Apocalypse* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1941), p.164.

HG Wells was not alone in grasping the opportunity provided by apocalypse to rebuild a new society, as we will see later in this chapter. However it is clear that the conditions of the Second World War created a new context for the writing of apocalypse fiction. The proximity of, and in some cases even experience of, bodily and urban destruction gave this kind of fiction a new relevance. It was no longer difficult to imagine the apocalypses of predictive fiction as elements of them were on display outside of your door.

The relationship between predictive fiction and the conditions of war is illustrated by the frequent discussion of the film of *The Shape of Things to Come* in accounts of wartime. Predictive fiction of the kind described in this study had reached a genuinely mass audience, perhaps for the first time, through science fiction films like Korda's.[17] As an awareness of the imaginative and experimental forms associated with films and fiction of this type grew, they began to provide new modes of expression for the unsettling reality of total war. Harry Warner Jr states in his history of science fiction fandom:

> Fandom had several reasons for paying some attention to the Second World War. For one thing, it was science fiction turning into reality. Wells' *The Shape of Things to Come* had been the longest and most celebrated of a profusion of stories based on probabilities of the form that would be taken by the successor to the First World War. The public feared that the new war would cause suffering and death beyond imagination, but fans could imagine those results through long experience with stories about them. It made a genuine difference in outlook."[18]

The link between science fiction and technological modernity is obvious and well documented. In the Second World War this link became more pronounced as predictive fiction and related genres, such as apocalypse fiction and airman stories, were quickly catapulted off the page and into reality. One of the most striking things about accounts of the start of the war is the frequency with which they refer to *The Shape Of Things To Come*. Derek Stanford describes in his memoirs how a thunder storm on the third of September was construed as the first wave of a German attack after seeing the film.

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[17] Harry Warner Jr, *All our Yesterdays: an informal history of science fiction fandom in the forties* (Chicago: Advent, 1969); Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1973).

> Our recognition of this soon led us to construe it as belonging to the actual spear-head of an invasion. If so, the Nazis were acting fast; but that, after all, was what we expected from having seen HG Wells' *The Shape Of Things To Come*.[19]

The arrival of the future in so aggressive a way as Blitzkrieg, the V1 and V2 and the atom bomb allowed authors and readers to feel that predictive fiction was about to become real. The authors of the texts usually detailed the link between wartime experiences of aerial bombardment and the seeming fantastical apocalypses of fiction explicitly. For example, Shute's *What Happened To The Corbetts* is grounded so firmly in the ordinary life of a middle-class family that it reads more like documentary than the fantasy it actually was. More dramatically the remotely controlled planes that begin to destroy London in Andrew Marvell's *Three Men Make A World* (1939) deliver destruction in a way that would have been thoroughly predictable to a populace that was already schooling itself in government-inspired civil defence.

> The second night there was no raid, but they came again with the dawn. They dropped incendiary bombs almost exclusively, and for a time it looked like the whole town was going up in flames. There was no water in the mains, but the engineers blew down gaps and used chemical extinguishers. By mid-day the fires were under control but we had to work far into the night to clear the wreckage. My hands were badly blistered but so were everybody else's. There was an alarm at midnight and we all fled to a basement.[20]

Marvell's novel makes no attempt to reassure its readership about the likely outcome of incendiary and explosive bombardment. Reading about apocalypse may have been a sort of illicit catharsis but it could not have been escapist for people who spent their evenings taping up windows and listening for air raid sirens. That the future seemed to be arriving so fast and with so little that seemed positive to offer goes some way towards explaining why apocalypse was frequently welcomed as much as it was feared. The chance to blow it all up and start again seemed too good to miss for many authors.

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[18] Warner Jr, p.149.

[19] Derek Stanford, *Inside The Forties: Literary Memoirs 1937-1957* (London: Sidgewick and Jackson, 1977), p.5. For further discussion of the way in which the novel and film versions of The Shape of Things to Come influenced perceptions of the war see Bernard Bergonzi, *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background, 1939-60* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993), p.2.

[20] Andrew Marvell, *Three Men Make A World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1939), p.254.

**What did they want to destroy?**

The Wellsian visions of the nineteen thirties where science seemed capable of solving all of humanity's problems must have been re-examined in the light of the global crisis of wartime. Philip Coupland describes the nineteen thirties as a period "when belief that the current order of things was unsustainable was widespread and confidence in the ability of science to manage society and inaugurate an 'age of plenty' made the claim of Nicolas Berdyaev, that 'Les utopies sont realisables', a joy for some and a horror for others, but at that time realistic."[21] IF Clarke concurs with this, writing that "by the 1930s it was generally agreed that complex transport systems and vast skyscraper cities would be the norm for life in the future".[22] Chapter One, however, demonstrated that a far more varied and complex body of predictive fiction was produced during the 1930s than Coupland and Clarke's summations of the zeitgeist might suggest. Nonetheless Glenn Negley's bibliography of utopian literature lists the British publication of 42 new utopias between 1930 and 1939 demonstrating an on-going enthusiasm for utopia throughout the 1930s.[23]

We should be sceptical of any narrative which attempts to paint the nineteen thirties as an ideological monolith of modernity, yet it is clear that from 1939 to 1945, despite the production of a significant body of utopian fiction as Chapter Seven will show, the phrase "Les utopies sont realisables" was not obviously applicable. A dissatisfaction with the contemporary must have been easy to develop at the end of the thirties and the beginning of the forties. The rise of fascism, the bloody totalitarianism of the Bolsheviks, the capitulation of the men of Munich and the rapidly increasing power of weapons of war form only the beginning of the list of the mid-twentieth-century's political, social and technological failures and misdirections. For many it must have felt as if all of the fanfare for modernity, for technological progress and for social change had led humanity only to the brink of destruction. Authoritarian systems of government in Germany and Russia were paralleled by a growing British state machine fuelled by National Government and capitalist crisis. To some it must have seemed that the politicians had become more powerful and despotic than ever, while the poor had

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[21] Philip M. Coupland, "The Blackshirted Utopians", *Journal of Contemporary History* XXXIII, 2 (April 1998), p.257.
[22] IF Clarke, *The Pattern of Expectation 1644-2001* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), caption for illustration 52-53.

starved and the middle classes had huddled in their homes fearing strikes, inflation, and war. For contemporary observers this litany of industrial capitalism's failures may have seemed to have reached its climax with outbreak of war. At this point all of the technological and political innovations, which had promised to deliver humanity from oppression, transmuted, becoming more likely to bring about damnation than salvation.

Like other authors of predictive fiction Herbert Best attempts to imagine how far new weapons and technologies empower humanity to destroy itself in his novel *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* (1940).

> How it all started was history now, unwritten history for lack of anyone who might write or read. Basically, the preparations for offensive war had been all too efficient, and the peacetime organisation of society had grown too elaborate, too fragile to withstand the shock of such efficient forces of destruction. It was as simple as that.[24]

Modernity was not simply what enabled the bombs to fall, but also what made it so dangerous when they did. A complex industrial society was, according to Best, more vulnerable to total collapse than an organic rural community. Best takes the kinds of effects of total war that Shute describes in *What Happened to the Corbetts* to their logical conclusion. Olaf Stapledon also follows this possibility through in his *Darkness and the light* depicting what would happen if social networks and legitimate authority crumble.

> And so, like bees in a queenless hive, they floundered into primitive ways. They became marauding gangsters, or clamoured for some new, strong, ruthless and barbaric tribal order, into which they might once more key themselves. In this nadir of civilization, this widespread craving for the savage and the stark, this night of the spirit, there rose to power the basest and hitherto most despised of human types, the hooligan and the gunman, who recognised no values but personal dominance, whose vengeful aim was to trample the civilization that had spurned them, and to rule for brigandage alone a new gangster society.[25]

Whereas Shute was content to describe the effects of total war, both Best and Stapledon extrapolate radical political conclusions from their examinations of the effects of total war. While Stapledon, as a good disciple of Wells, argues simply for the need to do

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[23] Glen Negly, *Utopian Literature: A Bibliography* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).
[24] Herbert Best, *The Twenty-Fifth Hour*, (London: Jonathan Cape: 1940), p.17.
[25] Stapledon, p.5.

modernity better, more progressively and scientifically, Best's novel comes to a more unexpected conclusion. *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* argues that modernity empowers humanity to destroy itself in war only because humanity has become so reliant on modernity in peacetime. The implicit conclusion in Best's work is clearly that there should be a rejection of ever more complex social organisation and a movement towards something simpler and more sustainable.

**Start all over again**

Second World War predictive fiction articulates unhappiness and dissatisfaction in a variety of ways. These are not necessarily antithetical to the more positive People's War discourse and do not attempt to mount a comprehensive attack on it. However they express dissatisfaction with the contemporary situation both in terms of the war and in a wider sense with modernity. These alternative discourses are backwards looking as opposed to the progressiveness of the People's War. They see a solution not in the revolution but in a return to a point in the past before modernity had begun to fail. They see modernity as stagnating and declining, the war as marking an end rather than a beginning. The contemporary world has become decadent and the apocalypse of war is seen almost in terms of biblical retribution.

The existence of this ideological and emotional interest in defeat and destruction is something that has been ignored too frequently by commentators seeking to emphasise the positive aspects of the Second World War. However, as Raymond Williams notes in *Culture*, ideological conflict is not just fought out between the old and the new, the establishment and the reformers.[26] The pressures for political, social and moral change are more complex. Williams, perhaps still somewhat reductively, offers a model of ideological conflict being fought out between residual, dominant and emergent ideologies. A desire to move backward, away from the contemporary political and economic situation, obviously ties in with the kind of destructive urges that can be found in apocalyptic fiction and elsewhere during the Second World War. An ideal social experience is constructed in pre-capitalist ideology and practices and an obvious way to bring this about is simply to destroy every vestige of modernity. This flight away from modernity was intensified by the fact that during the war modernity seemed to be doing a pretty good job of destroying itself.

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[26] Raymond Williams, *Culture* (London: Fontana, 1981).

Brian Stableford argues that this urge to destroy modernity was a peculiarly British desire. British predictive fiction was far more pre-occupied with the idea of an imminent disaster than American fiction. However, even when American authors did tackle the subject Stapledon argues that the narrative always centres around "the struggle to rebuild a technological civilisation", while in Britain "such a recovery is often rejected as an option, and sometimes openly derided".[27] This is not the place to attempt a comparative study of how the war impacted on 1940s British and American representations of apocalypse. However, the recurring "rejection" and "derision" of the idea of the post-apocalyptic rebuilding of modernity does at least confirm that Staplefords description of the British disaster novel continued to apply throughout the Second World War.

Andrew Marvell's novel, *Three Men Make A World* mounts a sustained attack on modernity, consistently challenging the equation of progress with what it describes as "the machine age". The novel depicts the ultimately successful efforts of Anstey, a radical anti-capitalist activist, to destroy society's dependence on the machine by infecting the world's oil supplies with a bacteria that transforms it into a useless jelly. Anstey's plan to induce an apocalyptic oil crisis revolves around his anti-capitalist ambitions but also contains a clear anti-modernist strand. His description of the contemporary plight of the world demonstrates the alienation created by industrial capitalist production.

> I see the world now as a cinema shot of a man looking at his hands and wondering what they are for. It has killed the craftsman, the man who moulded things with his own hands and brain. The individual, the lone man tempered by his work, is gone, the man with a shop of his own, the worker with a lathe or a plough or a shovel. He's dead. That is one thing the machine has done for us. The other is that it has bedded us down with the succubus, Capital.[28]

Marvell's novel is in many ways a kind of proto-green critique of both capitalism and socialism. Arguing as many green activists would towards the end of the century that "the dynamics of industrialisation are at the heart of ecological destruction" and that "the socialist debate about whether capitalists or the state run the system is

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[27] Stableford, p.246.
[28] Marvell, p.165.

irrelevant" from an environmental perspective.[29] Orwell describes HG Wells' vision of the future in terms of "the order, the planning, the state encouragement of science, the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes," but for Marvell this kind of utopian vision will not deliver.[30] In *Three Men Make A World*, Anstey works not for more Wellsian gadgetry but for an end to machine domination. "What do we lose?" he asks when contemplating the release of the oil devouring bacteria; "The machine, it has added little to knowledge, and the application of that knowledge has mostly been damnable. It's given us a new range of brutality, but little happiness."[31]

*Three Men Make A World* is more clearly informed by the debates of the anti-capitalist left than many other apocalyptic novels from the period. What they all share, however, is that clear strand of anti-modernist thought that seeks to move away from Fordist modes of production. There is a need to rediscover some form of organic experience in opposition to a rampant and dehumanising modernity. In some ways this seems to run contrary to our understanding of ideological processes that were taking place during the war. The New Jerusalem that was supposedly being built by the progressive planners of the 1940s was not, as Beveridge wrote in 1943, about looking forward to a return to "the good old pre-war days" as people had done in the First World War. Rather, wrote Beveridge, the "British people have learned by experience that after this war they must go forward to something new."[32]

Yet the responses that we can find in apocalypse fiction suggest that the ideological dynamic was considerably more complex than Beveridge's enlightenment-inspired view of progress would suggest. While there is little support for a return to the immediate pre-war period there is considerable nostalgia for the pre-modern age. When this pre-modern age was varies from writer to writer, but it was, unsurprisingly, almost universally before the onset of industrialised warfare. Anti-modernist political interventions were not necessarily simply reactionary retreats into the past but also drew on a pastoral ideal with historic roots in the radical traditions of Blake and William

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[29] Red Green Study Group, *What On Earth Is To Be Done* (Manchester: The Red Green Study Group, 1995), p.9.
[30] George Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State" Cyril Connolly (ed), *Horizon*, IV, 20 (Aug 1941), p.137.
[31] Marvell, p.165.
[32] Correlli Barnett, *The Audit Of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain As A Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.33.

Morris.[33] Marvel's novel for example ends with the creation of a kind of agrarian anarchist utopia.

Correlli Barnett argues that pastoral ideals of this kind could even be detected in the project of the New Jerusalemers. While on the one hand they sought to build a gleaming technocratic paradise they were also influenced by the tradition of Morris which attempted to reimbue the urban environment with rural values. Barnett is obviously keen to paint the New Jerusalemers as foolish romantic dreamers when he talks about the "aesthetic vision of New Jerusalem as a sun-lit garden-city society inhabited by a race at once comely and happy."[34] Yet his analysis is partially born out by the frequent hankering after the rural idyll which manifested in various New Jerusalem projects. For example, the construction of post-war estates like Alton East and Alton West saw utopian planners trying to recapture the feel of the Victorian country house.[35] Awareness of the alienating effects of urbanised modernity was therefore apparent even to those le Corbusier-influenced planners who were most usually put on trial for their ultra-modernist, carbuncular crimes.

**Building the Ark**

The urge to imagine a world apocalypse obviously has biblical antecedents and there was perhaps reason for contemporary observers to see the world in pre-diluvian terms.[36] If the world has become morally, socially, artistically and technologically decadent it then becomes necessary to destroy it to cleanse decadence and sin rather than to go into the future on the shaky foundations of the modern. Indeed, HG Wells even goes as far to directly retell the story of the flood and the building of the Ark in his *All Aboard for Ararat.*

The use of apocalyptic terms to describe the atomising and alienating aspects of the war was not confined to fiction and can be seen in the statements collected by Mass

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[33] David Wagenknecht, *Blake's Night: William Blake and the Idea of Pastoral* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973); EP Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, 1955), pp.754-761.
[34] Barnett, p.12.
[35] Marion Roberts, *Living In A Manmade World: Gender Assumptions in Modern Housing Design* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.111-112.
[36] The fiction of Alfred Noyes and to a lesser extent all other apocalyptic writers are undoubtedly inspired in part by the cultural mythology of the flood. See Genesis, VI: 5-7.

Observation after the Blitz on Coventry. Here people understandably saw the war as very much the end of civic existence, in marked contrast to the idea of the Blitz performing its rather questionable but much feted function of bringing people together in a classless unity.[37]

> Mass-Observation volunteers visited Coventry in the two days immediately following the raid on the city of 14 November 1940. Their report caused considerable government alarm since it suggested that civilian moral had disintegrated in the wake of the raid. People were said to be extremely pessimistic, with "Coventry is finished" and "Coventry is dead" being typical responses to the attack. It was also claimed that extreme behavioural abnormalities became manifest.[38]

The apocalypse discourse, then, sees war as an end rather than a beginning. The concern with imminent destruction, revealed in the people of Coventry's sense of the finality of their experience in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, is further developed and explored in apocalyptic fiction.

The fear that society was to share the fate of the biblical decedents, Sodom and Gomorrah, is summed up most succinctly by the maverick poet and author Alfred Noyes in his novel *The Last Man* (1940).[39] In this novel he argues that declining morality has been the result of modernity and that the ultimate destruction of the race will be the inevitable result of modernity's cycle of hedonism and war.

> But, as the war went on, our enemies imposed their own totalitarian views on us in other forms. We began to talk almost with contempt of the value of individual life and to squander it almost as recklessly as we squandered material treasure,

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[37] Fielding et al argue that there are major problems with seeing the Blitz as an experience which fostered social cohesion. They note that even in London only 4% of people used the London Underground as a shelter, 9% utilised other public shelters, and 27% used private shelters, most people stayed in their homes, in bed or under the stairs (p.25). They also note that the lack of social cohesion was so extreme that "there were occasions when public shelters were guarded by men with shotguns in an attempt to ensure that only locals come in." [Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *England arise: The Labour Party and popular politics in 1940's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.25-6.]

[38] David Thoms, "The Blitz, Civilian Morale and Regionalism, 1940-42", Kirkham and Thoms, p.9.

[39] Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because "their sin is very grievous" [Genesis XVIII: 20]. It also provides a vivid literary model for the writers of apocalypse fiction "24: Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD of heaven; 25: And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." [Genesis XIX]

despite all the efforts that were made to counteract it. The gospel of "eat and drink for tomorrow we die" sprang up amongst us, and inevitably, led to other kinds of squandering too.[40]

He paints a picture of a modernity crippled by an inability to prioritise and an intellectual and moral irresponsibility. The process of war is revealed here, as in much other predictive fiction, to empower the state against the individual and to strengthen the totalitarian urges within society. *The Last Man* depicts secular chaos, where the new is fetishised at the expense of the wisdom and morality of tradition:

> For nearly half a century, the literature and art of western civilisation had succumbed (partly out of intellectual snobbery) to the subtle propaganda of the new atheism. They had been glorifying the breaking of the pledged word in the most sacred relationships of the individual human life; they had been revelling in the analytical destruction of all the foundations of morality; and sneering at those who defended them as "out-of-date", while the most leprous stigmata of degeneracy had again and again been upheld as a vital proof of new and advanced thought and original aims."[41]

Noyes' critique of modernity is sweeping in its scope, targeting aesthetic modernism, military and technological innovation, art and philosophy as well as politics and international relations. For Noyes' hero Mark Adams, the whole package of modernity is a disaster that is leading humanity only to further catastrophe:

> He saw clearly how the new intellectual and spiritual incompetence had contributed to the modern chaos, and eventually to the catastrophic end of civilisation.[42]

Orwell frequently cited Alfred Noyes as a blimpish old reactionary and it would be easy to dismiss him as the last bearer of a high Victorian faith in religion and tradition as the touchstones of morality.[43] However, while Noyes was blowing up the world, many other writers also felt the need to cleanse the world of modernity's failings by visiting it with an apocalypse. In particular, many authors echo Noyes' criticism of aesthetes and intellectuals. Homlin, the narrator of *Three Men Make A World*, describes the relief of British intellectuals that in the post-apocalyptic world they do not have to

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[40] Alfred Noyes, *The Last Man* (London: John Murray, 1940), p.141.

[41] Ibid, p.80.

[42] Ibid, p.106.

[43] See, for example, Peter Davison, Ian Angus, and Davison, Sheila, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), pp.105-7; 176; 226; 236-7; 259.

engage with the endless stream of fashionable, modern and, most tellingly, foreign ideas.

> I have met ex-intellectuals of the old world who confess to relief. The foreigner, with his disturbing innovations of thought and temperament, has receded to his assigned habitat, beyond the pale. Once more the silver sea serves us as a moat defensive against the envy (and what is worse, the cerebration) of less happier lands. No more new psychologies, no more bewildering -isms.[44]

Mass Observer Tom Harrisson describes this anti-intellectualism and anti-modernism as characteristic of much wartime fiction in his 1941 article "War Books".[45] However, his description of anti-modernist and anti-intellectual currents as the "prejudices and antagonisms of the old and the ultra-conservative" is overly reductive.[46] Anti-modernism in its various forms is in many ways oppositional to the increasingly hegemonic social democratic consensus of nineteen forties Britain. It is not however necessarily the exclusive property of the political right, indeed the left/right spectrum is highly problematic when examining the apocalyptic texts of the war.

An atmosphere of decadence and stagnation can be detected in many of the other novels of the period. JD Beresford's *A Common Enemy* (1942) comes from a different political position from Noyes' book, offering agrarian socialism rather than high Christianity as the solution to society's problems, but essentially the problems that it identifies are the same, too much mechanisation, too much sexual license, drinking, jazz music and modern dancing, and not enough hard work and collective endeavour. This kind of moralising was perhaps unsurprising coming from a clergyman's son. However Beresford's novel goes beyond simple prescriptions for clean living.[47] Beresford was a veteran writer of predictive fiction who had largely abandoned the mode after the First World War.[48] That the on-set of the Second World War made him produce three predictive fictions, which all argued against industrial society, shows that Beresford perceived total war as a profound threat to the social values he supported.

So, Beresford, like Noyes and Marvell, is unhappy with the modern world. His critique is not just of a particular political system, but of modernity in all its guises:

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[44] Marvell, p.282.
[45] Tom Harrisson, "War Books", *Horizon*, IV, 24, (Dec 1941) pp. 416-437.
[46] Ibid, p.420.
[47] Stableford, p.102.
[48] Stableford, pp.178-179.

> And were all the shifts and devices of the twentieth century, Communism, Fascism, Democracy, anything more than attempts to plant new designs on old structures, by the imposition of elaborate economic and social facades upon a civilisation the members of which were still thinking fundamentally in the old way? Nationalism, the doctrine of force, the restriction of individual liberty, still remained as the essential fabric.[49]

The solution for the world of *A Common Enemy* is not a more technical and more affluent society, it is a simpler, more egalitarian but essentially backwards looking society. A de-urbanised, de-industrialised society practising an idyllic common cultivation of land would seem to be an eccentric solution to the problems of the 1940s. However, as Beresford's hero Mr Campion notes:

> Here we were, you know, in the depths of the most widespread, purposeless, destructive, debasing war ever known, apparently sinking deeper and deeper into a horror and misery from which we could see no escape except by a complete reconstruction of our social system.[50]

These writers embrace the idea of the post-apocalyptic world as one in which society will be able to reconstruct itself and avoid all of the mistakes that had led towards the global conflict in the midst of which they write. This is why Tom Harrisson's attempt to dismiss all anti-modernism as ultra-conservatism is problematic. Writers such as JD Beresford clearly have leftist sentiments, indeed it is this leftism that drives their questioning of modernity. Anti-militarist strands of leftist thought had considerable reasons to be suspicious of technological advancements that had led not to human emancipation but to ever more destructive total warfare.

It is difficult to assess the ambition detailed in *The Last Man* of reconstructing society in the image of early monastic Christianity within a conventional political framework. A left-wing audience would undoubtedly have found Evelyn's description of Mussolini as "an idealist, and a bit of a poet" rather problematic. [51] However, the fact that the novel is centred around a discourse of rebuilding and reconstruction, of righting old wrongs and choosing alternative tasks, demonstrates the ideological complexity of expressions of anti-modernism. Noyes is committed to rebuilding society after the apocalypse but the society he wishes to rebuild is very different to that of the New

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[49] JD Beresford, *A Common Enemy* (London: Hutchinson and co, 1942), p.105.
[50] Ibid, p.102.

Jerusalemers. Noyes is very conscious of [re]building, of recreating something that he believed to exist in the past, rather than moving onward. His vision of the past is ahistorical and partial to say the least, but the dynamic of Noyes' novel is undoubtedly against "progress" and in favour of simplicity, organic society and contemplative spirituality. It represents a radical anti-modernism that cannot be accommodated within the conventional political spectrum and that can also be found in nominally leftist texts like those of Beresford and Marvell.

For the reader, the impact of these novels could not have been simply to convey their rather ill-thought-out ideas for better world government. JD Beresford's anti-democratic advocacy of liberal oligarchy would have been problematic for much of his readership.

> A nominal democracy had been tried and had failed. The new rule would be government by the few, avoiding the dangers of Dictatorship by a single mind.[52]

Even if Beresford believed that the country really needed dictatorship by a benign middle-class committee, it seems difficult to imagine that a readership so soaked in rhetoric about defending democracy from Hitler would not have encountered this idea with a degree of scepticism. It is perhaps worth noting that an apparently benign middle-and-upper class oligarchy *was* actually ruling as Beresford wrote, largely untroubled by democratic checks. Beresford's writing is rich with different political possibilities and the readership are more likely to engage creatively with the novel's ideas than to blindly accept everything in it. However, the novel does articulate ideas and experiences that relate imaginatively to readers' experience. His examination of Britain's attempts to recreate itself positively after an apocalypse would have conveyed familiar dilemmas to a readership emerging from one of the worst periods of the blitz. Furthermore the assumption that something was wrong with a world in which this kind of destruction was possible must also have resonated powerfully and tapped into a hope that things could be different.

> If it taught us all that lesson of humility I spoke of, there might be a hope. It would give us a chance to get together in a common cause, a chance to start

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[51] Noyes, p.167.
[52] Beresford, p.108.

again with a new programme. I honestly believe that the world is ripe for a new beginning.[53]

The transformation of the apocalypse into a positive chance to start again obviously resonates with People's War advocacy of social democratic planning as a way to rebuild society. However, for Beresford, the entire structure of modernity must be pulled down and the political programme of the novel is correspondingly far more radical than anything on offer in contemporary Westminster. For the reader the impact is suggestive rather than convincing, with the novel allowing the reader to explore new possibilities and to test their own political assumptions without mounting a potentially unpatriotic attack on the dominant ideology.

Articulating political solutions beyond the mainstream was a feature of much of the predictive fiction of the Second World War. The frequent adoption of some kind of theocracy in these novels is one way in which this search for alternatives was manifested. In *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* the solution is shown to be a peculiar combination of an intellectualised and liberalised Islam and an economy centred on agriculture. Best is perhaps trying to inject the secularity of the modern with a spirituality untainted by contact with the decadent West. Learning is to be encouraged, but the new society will avoid developing the level of mechanisation that allowed civilisation to be destroyed so easily.

> The great men of our land must rid themselves of riches, or none will esteem them great. Bribery, extortion, even theft, unless of the simplest necessities, will bring shame and humiliation upon the man who shows himself enriched, even though the crime itself is hidden. Charitable gifts have ever been encouraged by Islam, but yearly it becomes more difficult to find one who will accept such gifts, lest they enrich and shame him. So public services benefit, knowing neither the honour of poverty, nor the shame of wealth. Schools and colleges will flourish under their endowments, and process will be discovered and rediscovered in everything from mathematics to pottery, agriculture to astronomy.[54]

Religious charity and individual morality are being used to supplant complex state machinery and the modern welfare system. Best ensures that his ideal society improves by encouraging the individual to consume less while denying the state the power to assume any control over that individual. Liberty is equated with simplicity while

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[53] Ibid, p.11.
[54] Ibid, p.283.

decadence and oppression are connected to social sophistication and the need to build up material possessions.

These kinds of responses were understandable as reactions to assertive wartime modernity and they were not confined to predictive fiction. The spirituality of Noyes and Best was echoed in the Christian Socialism or in the social theology of Archbishop Temple's, *Christianity and Social Order*, which was bought by 139,000 people over the course of the war.[55] Even in the political mainstream the high moral tone of the Labour Party and its fellow travellers, who Correlli Barnett parodies as "New Jerusalemers", took a quasi-spiritual tone. The semi-mythic Shakespearean register of Churchill's speeches gestured in the same direction. England was something enduring, spiritual and trans-historical; it was not merely a piece of territory or just another modern state formation. Where the authors of predictive fiction differed from those in the mainstream was in part a question of responsibility. While Churchill could dream of "Merry England" and the New Jerusalemers of their garden cities, by day they had to administer the workings of an advanced capitalist country with a correspondingly complex state machinery. Those in power undoubtedly perceived the further growth in the complexity and intrusiveness of the state machinery as an inevitable consequence of the pressures of total war. On the other hand the authors of predictive fiction were free to give vent to their objections about all of modernity's unwanted innovations from jazz to fascism to the bombing of civilians.

Writers who adopted the apocalypse genre all imagine distinct and different solutions to what they identify as modernity's problems. However they were working through similar concerns, and were representing the problems of wartime society in a way that allowed them freedom from the constraints imposed on pacifist, anti-government or other radical works that could be seen as directly relating to the wartime situation. But it is wrong to represent these novels, or any predictive fictions, as coherent ideological blueprints for future societies. The speculative nature of fiction means that it operates within a profoundly different political space from an equivalent set of ideas articulated as a political manifesto or a newspaper editorial. It seems unlikely that even Noyes believed that his utopian solution to the problems of modernity, of placing communities under the leadership of Franciscan monasteries, was

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[55] Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p.218.

workable. The level at which it can be said to represent an alternative to the more credible political positions of the Second World War is in its desire to correct problems that mainstream politics chose to ignore or embrace. Indeed predictive fiction's freedom from having to provide a coherent alternative allowed it to articulate concerns that others buried because they were seen as unhelpful. If modernity was corrupt and the current order destined to crumble, this fact was not very helpful in the day to day conduct of the war. Nonetheless the fact that in predictive fiction authors were making these kinds of radical anti-modernist statements reveals that a progressive desire to "keep smiling through" and dreaming of a better post-war world was not the whole story.

These authors are not an alternative to Attlee or Churchill, nor are they even an alternative to Mosley or Sir Richard Acland, the founder of the Common Wealth party; rather their novels provide an arena for political experimentation for both author and reader. The speculative and playful nature of these texts is one of the elements that allows them to represent ideological and emotional possibilities that would normally be suppressed either overtly through censorship or official disapproval or personally by a belief that questioning the war was unpatriotic. It is important to hear these dissenting voices if we are to understand the cultural and political possibilities of a period. The People's War concept has been correctly challenged and held up as a problematic depiction of wartime culture, but this has left us without an organising concept around which to base an understanding of the period. Any attempt to replace it must recognise that there are a multiplicity of political, ideological, cultural and material circumstances and positions. Our understanding of a historical period should recognise this and avoid simply advancing the dominant ideology or its most credible, or popular, critique as a totalising representation.

The People's War concept should be understood as one component of public experience. Public opinion also fluctuated around other axes over the six years of the Second World War. This chapter has attempted to suggest one alternative around which we can group an understanding of elements of war culture. An examination of a more pessimistic and retrospective rhetoric is essential in providing some balance to the overly optimistic People's War reading of the Second World War. The war was to many people a wholly or largely horrible experience and one genuine response to this was to

throw up hands at the whole of modernity and look back to a period which seemed to promise more.

The anti-modernist critique of the contemporary culture may not have offered a logical and legitimate solution to the social and political problems that were being faced during the war. It did nonetheless represent an understandable and strongly felt way in which people interacted with wartime conditions. The attempt by people to salvage what they could out of total war and to get on with their lives was mirrored by the government's use of these positive and resilient feelings to bolster the feelings of collectivity and patriotism that they sought to encourage. Nonetheless, this resilience and urge to reconstruct should not be mistaken for a universal and unquestioning acceptance of the politics and morality of the dominant culture. This chapter has shown that for some participants in the public sphere all aspects of economic, cultural and political life were still up for negotiation. Questions were not simply being asked about the validity of Labour or Tory, left or right, but also about much more profound and radical issues. Outside Westminster the role of the state was called into question, the project of modernity was challenged, the ideal of democracy often scoffed at and even the validity of war itself contested. Even inside Westminster this residual ideology of anti-modernism was reflected and utilised in a variety of ways. While Merry England would not have been capable of fighting a total war, the vision of a simpler pre-modern era informed wartime culture and perhaps suggested to some an element of what was being fought for.

## Chapter 6: Jerusalem Despondent

The preceding chapters have argued that wartime Britain was often a profoundly unsettling place to exist. Fears about possible invasion, political, social and economic transformation and about an assertive, decadent modernity pervade the predictive fiction of this period. Some authors imagined what kind of society would result if some or all of these fears were allowed to reach fruition. Almost all of the predictive fictions discussed so far have contained dystopian elements, but this chapter will concentrate on those fictions that realise dystopia more fully.

Dystopias imagined during the Second World War revealed a fear about the growth of the state. With the possible exception of the cannibalistic chaos depicted in Herbert Best's *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* (1940), every dystopia produced during the period takes place in some variety of modernist, probably technologically advanced, and most certainly totalitarian state.[1] From the totalitarian Britain of *The 1946 MS* (1943) to the Celtic paradise poisoned by bureaucracy in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) and on to the technological insanity of *The Lost Traveller* (1943) every novel reveals and challenges facets of modernity and contemporary state formations.[2] Even Best's novel, which was discussed in more depth in the previous chapter, is essentially an anti-modernist parable. The pre-historic, uncivilised, state that humanity has been reduced to in *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* has been brought about by the development of modern industrial weapons and forms of warfare.

Wartime dystopias were frequently meditations on, and protests about, modernity and the state. There were also understandably discussions about the nature of totalitarian regimes as the many dystopian novels covered in Chapters Three and Four demonstrated. These chapters argued that frequent parallels, both conscious and unconscious, could be found in the representation of Nazism and Stalinism. Authors identified similar features in what were supposedly diametrically opposed systems and gradually began to see them both as manifestations of what Arthur Koestler called "the totalitarian principle".[3] These novels argue that a central feature of totalitarian regimes

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[1] Herbert Best, *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* (London: Jonathan Cape,1940).
[2] Robin Maugham, *The 1946 MS* (London: War Facts Press, 1943), p.45; Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944); Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943).
[3] Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (1940; London: Vintage, 1994), p.20.

are their insistence on the fluidity of truth and their refusal to allow the world to be knowable and recordable. While authors discuss the variety of oppressive features that characterise the new modern states it is this need for a verifiable reality that they are most concerned about.

These novels are not simply about painting the worst and most terrible society imaginable. The urge to write in the dystopian mode came from a need to make a political intervention and to try and prevent the dystopia coming to pass. Like invasion fiction, dystopias are warnings. They aim to serve a political purpose, to influence the individual and the collective to avoid certain courses of action. Robin Maugham's novel about the creation of a fascist state in Britain after the defeat of Hitler ends with the same kind of preachy and portentous warning that characterised the authorial interventions in 1940s invasion fiction. "Lord Murdoch and General Pointer do not exist. This story was written so that they never will exist and so that Britons never will be slaves."[4]

The political commitment of the dystopian author was frequently reflected in the heroic activism of the novel's characters. Dystopias acknowledge and explore the fact that individuals and groups of people can have an enormous impact on the conditions, not just of the people around them, but also on the rest of the natural world. This is an idea that exists at the centre of an enlightenment tradition associated with modernity. God is not necessarily discounted in dystopian fiction, yet without fail it is humanity that brings dystopia on itself. The dystopian form argues very clearly for an understanding of humanity as being in control of its own destiny. Humanity's creative power is foregrounded even though the dystopian line of enquiry is necessarily negative. Marx's comment that; "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted," can easily be reapplied as a description of the narrative structures of dystopian fiction.[5] Why bother messing about imagining a horrific future if you can do nothing about it? Writers of dystopias were consciously trying to make an intervention into the social, cultural and political circumstances that they "directly encountered."

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[4] Robin Maugham, *The 1946 MS* (London: War Facts Press, 1943), p.45.

**Who was to blame?**

Predictive fiction and in particular dystopian fiction, is a modern, collective rewriting of the traditional morality narrative. Dr Faustus' decision to sell his soul is replaced with society's decision to collectivise the farms. Yet society is not usually imagined as being able to act with a single will as if it is an individual. Most writers describe societies as complex and made up of different, sometimes radically divergent elements. Olaf Stapledon, is the exception that proves the rule as he writes about "the Western peoples", "the Chinese" or "the Norwegians" as if they were single entities acting under a uniform will. Stapledon in fact quickly transcends discrete geographical areas like nations or continents and discusses humanity in its entirety. Therefore any dystopian developments can be attributed to the race's "sluggish reptillian will for ease and sleep and death, rising sometimes to active hate and destructiveness".[6] For Stapledon the cause of dystopian developments can be traced to racial urges motivating all of humanity. Most other writers, however, are a little more specific about who they accuse of being responsible for any move towards dystopia.

Chapter Two described how the most obvious dystopian threat was represented. Yet, not all authors choose to depict dystopia being brought on the end of a German gun. So if it was not the Hun lined up on the other side of the channel who would plunge Britain into a thousand years of darkness, who was it? The inauguration of a dystopian society was not something that most writers saw Britain just drifting into. Unlike a utopia, a dystopia does not need to be actively built, but neither does it happen by chance. Dystopias are full of the greedy, the foolish and the unlucky without whom things would have proceeded without incident.

An inevitable candidate to serve as the dystopian villain was the armed forces. *The 1946 MS* explores anxiety about the role the armed forces are likely to play in the post-war world. This concern is understandable as during the war the military and security forces exerted considerable control over a variety of aspects of government policy that did not directly concern them.[7] Maugham's dictator General Pointer is a

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[5] Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p.73.
[6] Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the light* (London: Methuen and co, 1942), p.6.
[7] Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties In Britain During The 2nd World War: A Political Study* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.234.

brilliant and courageous general who plays on the public's understandable mistrust of traditional politicians after the years of depression, crisis and international chaos.

Possibly modelled on Montgomery, Pointer attempts to apply the solutions of war to peacetime government.[8] However, unlike Montgomery's brief premiership of the British section of Germany, Pointer attempts his experiment in military government in Britain. Pointer's dictatorship is supremely efficient, enduring and highly authoritarian. Montgomery commented in November 1945 that "a leader, who is primarily a soldier, when he meddles with politics loses his clear, simple military purpose."[9] This rather double-edged compliment on the slippery skills of politicians expresses both the problems and the attractions of efficient, planned dictatorships. After years of a quasi-dictatorial bureaucracy in Britain, the fear of tyranny was perhaps counter-balanced by the attractions of a leader who could provide "clear, simple" answers.

Mervyn in *Sanity Island* certainly dreads the return to ordinary oppositional politics after the war and hopes for a way in which the "superb spirit of my island" can be maintained. He fears "the solemn self-seeking coves will crop up again, the puffing, self-important men who preach their little ideologies" and hopes that they can be defeated along with "intolerant and irreconcilable minds" who pit "class against class, age against youth, new ideas against old."[10] Churchill was also keen at the end of the war to maintain a coalition government and Maugham's own direct involvement in government and his personal relationship with Churchill undoubtedly meant that he was aware of this strand of thinking in the government.[11] Maugham's dystopia explores to the fear that the army and government, having adopted dictatorial powers to fight fascism, would dispense with democracy once the war was over.

The Air Vice-Marshall in *The Aerodrome* mirrors the figure of Pointer. He also aims to transform society making it more straightforward, scientific and rational.

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[8] Peter Davison argues that Orwell thought that Pointer was modelled on fascist sympathiser Major-General JFC Fuller. Peter Davison, Ian Angus and Sheila Davison, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.17.
[9] Alan Moorehead, *Montgomery: A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1947), p.238.
[10] Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), p.308.

As I began gradually to understand the elaboration and the grandeur of the Air Vice-Marshal's plans, I realised that already we were equipped at any moment to take over the direction of the country whose servants nominally we were. In some of the key posts of administration we already had our own men: as for the other posts we could fill them at a moment's notice with officers who had already been trained for the purpose. And at the centre of this vast organisation was the Air Vice-Marshal himself. He alone was in contact with the leaders and sub-leaders of the numerous groups connected with each other through him. Nor was this all; for it was only he who could exercise complete and unquestioned control over others who, without him would certainly have disputed among themselves for pre-eminence. As it was I never knew of his authority or of his decisions being at any time questioned; and this was natural enough for, talented and resolute as were many of his subordinates, there was none of them who possessed that seemingly certain vision of the future that made the Air Vice-Marshall so uniquely able to inspire confidence.[12]
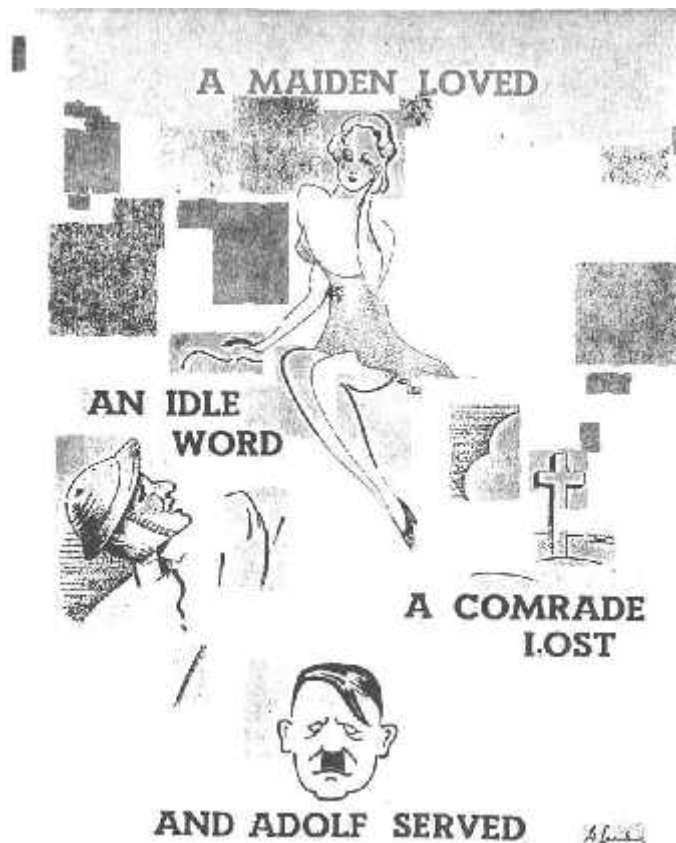
As this quotation shows the reader is not being cautioned about the raw power of the military, rather it is what Warner refers to as the Air Vice-Marshall's "seemingly certain vision of the future" that makes him such a threat. Power alone provides an opportunity, but it is always the ambition and ideological drive of men like the Air-Vice Marshall or Pointer that is really to blame.

British culture frequently constructed the war as a war against Hitler, rather than against Germany. Adolf Hitler's face frequently stared out of propaganda posters as a focal point for people's wartime hatred. Hitler was depicted, as Chapter Three showed, as an evil madman who had led the German people into war. His moustache and side parting became iconic as the poster over shows and this iconography provided a mechanism through which the enemy could be easily personified and blame for the war could be allowed to rest entirely on the shoulders of one man.

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[11] Robin Maugham, 1916-1981: Collection, 1932-1975, http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/research/fa/maugham.html, 19th July 2002.

[12] Warner, p.249.

*Figure 6.1*



"A Maiden Loved, An Idle Word", *World War II Posters*
http://www.wkac.ac.uk/poster/imagebank/Amaidenloved.htm, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2002.

This focus on Hitler led to a large number of predictive fictions which focused on the possibility of a Hitler figure emerging in Britain. Theses fictional fuehrers took a variety of forms and followed a number of roots to power. So, while the Air-Vice Marshall and General Pointer already have their army, White Ben in *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1939) and Rud in *The Holy Terror* (1939) are able to build their army and power base from scratch. In a different way Napoleon and the pigs in *Animal Farm* (1945) are able to do the same.[13] It is this clarity and ability to lead that is both admired and feared in the dictators of 1940s dystopian fiction. The recurrent focus on the power and messianic charisma of the great leader shows how little the hierarchical worldview of fascism was being challenged. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* recognised that a totalitarian system rests not on a powerful leader but on the conception of the importance of a powerful leader. During the war this distinction was never clearly articulated or understood, even by Orwell himself.

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[13] Clemence Dane, *The Arrogant History of White Ben* (1939; Bath: Cedric Chivers Ltd, 1971); HG Wells, *The Holy Terror* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1939); George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

So, despite fear about the power of the armed forces, the dystopian fiction of the Second World War does not betray a fear of a military coup in the ordinary sense. It is unclear exactly what the airforce in *The Aerodrome* represents, but it is something much closer to a political movement than might be expected from a military force with ambitions for power. The mix of opportunism, pragmatism and personal ambition that might be expected to motivate military interventions in the political sphere is largely absent in the fiction of the period. The Air Vice-Marshall, like General Pointer, is ambitious but his aims go far beyond personal aggrandisement and extend to the creation of an entirely new type of society.

> Indeed I did not think of our purpose as a conspiracy, but rather as a necessary and exciting operation. We constituted no revolutionary party actuated by humanitarian ideals, but seemed to be an organisation manifestly entitled by its own discipline, efficiency, and will to assume supreme power.[14]

The political warning in *The Aerodrome* therefore extends beyond the armed forces. Rex Warner's concern is more ideological than political. The novel asks what ideology should we fear, and then looks for a social group who might be capable of implementing it. Warner's anxiety is essentially with the growth of a technocratic modernism that he fears will squeeze the life out of a pastoral ideal associated with rural Britain. For others dystopia lay in an ever-expanding state or in the possibility of fascism or communism, but all of these different distopian fears led authors to speculate about how they might be realised.

One fear was therefore that dystopia would be brought about by Nazi invasion, another that the British wartime bureaucracy would assume a dictatorial shape in the post-war world and still another was that a British Hitler would arise to lead the nation into dystopia. Yet not all writers imagined the development of dystopia as such a sudden and direct event. Like the writers discussed in Chapter Five, many authors of dystopias perceived a pernicious creeping growth of undesirable and modern tendencies in society. Dystopia would not suddenly be born, rather it would emerge gradually through neglect and a failure to guard the really important things in life. In particular the perceived growth of a mass culture devoid of any real moral, cultural or political values created anxiety amongst writers. If the populace continued to consume modern mass-produced rubbish, the democratic liberties for which Britain fought would be submerged and left exposed to internal attack.

> Always the men serving their country were treated like fools to be humoured so that they could fight. Sometimes I wondered whether the powers were frightened to give our men a glimpse of a better world. Our men were not encouraged to think about plans for after the war. Many did not know the reason why they fought. The food for their minds came from two sources: the press and the wireless. The press provided popular magazines with indifferent dirty jokes, naked girls and trivial stories, the wireless produced crooners, monotonous jazz, second-rate comedians, tea-time music, and patronising talks.[15]

This quote from *The 1946 MS* echoes Aneurin Bevan's comment that "immediately on the outbreak of war England was given over to the mental level of the 'Boy's Own Paper' and the 'Magnet'. The Children's Hour has been extended to cover the whole of British broadcasting and the editors of the national dailies use treacle instead of ink."[16]

The concern that the population's moral and aesthetic sensibilities were being destroyed by prolonged exposure to decadent rubbish was partly responsible for the official enthusiasm for army and civilian education and cultural programs. It is doubtful whether the political and cultural education offered by the Army Bureau for Current Affairs (ABCA) and the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) actually provided the population with the ideological weapons to resist fascism. It is certainly unlikely that these activities had sufficient penetration into the population at large to ensure significant changes in the political and cultural education of society. Nevertheless, the fact that there was at some level a realisation that an active, educated and culturally sophisticated population would be more capable of safeguarding the values for which the war was supposedly fought shows that the dystopian writers were picking up on wider debates about exactly what could be counted as a win in a war of this nature.

While these debates raged in Britain, Adorno and Horkeimer were busily theorising cultural degeneration in America. Like the authors of dystopias, they express concern about the ideological dominance of the culture industry and "the rubbish they deliberately produce."[17] The mass culture that they describe reduces people to "statistics" and "suits Fascism" admirably.[18] Like Warner and the other writers of

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[14] Ibid, p.249
[15] Maugham, p.40.
[16] Stammers, p.139.
[17] Adorno and Horkheimer, p.121.
[18] Ibid, p.123; p.159.

dystopias, Adorno and Horkheimer are essentially mourning the replacement of organic human experience with the coercive, dehumanising mass ideology of modernity.

Many texts were therefore questioning the entire validity of the project of modernity. Chapter Two argued that the conceptualised England that was being defended was a quasi-feudal one. Equally the dystopia that is imagined is always very clearly centred around a modern conception of the nation state. In *The Lost Traveller*, Christopher is relieved at any authentic normality that exists amongst the manufactured biological and technological novelties of the city he visits. "Expecting a green veined pill, Christopher was relieved to find a large plate of bacon and a steaming cup of coffee before him."[19] Yet his expectation that, given the display of modernity around him, every aspect of his life would be transformed shows a deep concern about the on-rush of technology and science. Similar concerns were voiced in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) where eating fresh fruit was banned by the state before it had been processed into a synthetic food by "the caverns of the Industrial Peak".[20]

The fear that every organic and natural experience would be destroyed by the march of "progress", both in a technological and social sense, is characteristic of the period. Dystopia, in this case, seems to be the inevitable destination of a world that is being driven away from everything that the authors of predictive fiction value. This revolt against the alienation and perceived inauthenticity of the modern experience, what Walter Benjamin describes as a "world dominated by phantasmagorias", is revealing of deep-seated concerns about the movement into modernity.[21]

Authors were therefore frequently fighting dystopian developments on a number of fronts. On one hand more straightforward political concerns about the power of vested interests, the growth of the state and the danger of dictatorship were perceived and engaged with. On the other hand much more fundamental concerns about the validity of the project of modernity were being expressed in these novels. General Pointer and White Ben could clearly be resisted far more easily than jazz, the aeroplane

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[19] Ruthven Todd, *The Lost Traveller* (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1943), p.65.
[20] Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p.90.
[21] Quoted in David Frisby, 'Benjamin's Prehistory of Modernity'', Gerhard Fischer (ed), *With The Sharpened Axe of Reason: Approaches to Walter Benjamin* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p.18.

and the popular enthusiasm for "dirty jokes, naked girls and trivial stories".[22]
Nonetheless the writers of dystopian fiction were nothing if not ambitious and they set out in their novels to catalogue and oppose the developments they feared with the imaginative and rhetorical tools they had to hand.

**The growing state**

The power of the state increased during the Second World War and this power was exercised in ways that were clearly apparent to all residents of Britain. The state had taken on the power to regulate what people ate, whether they drew their curtains, what job they did and even what entertainment was made available to them. As David Morgan and Mary Evans argue this growth in the areas of interest of the state was both radical and new during the Second World War.

> The state had formerly shown little concern, and had even less influence, upon nutritional standards, household amenities, the care of children and the elderly, contraception or personal hygiene. All these matters and many more became subject to intervention or advice during the Second World War. In effect the war effort 'domesticated' the concept of citizenship by massively extending the sphere of the state into the private domain.[23]
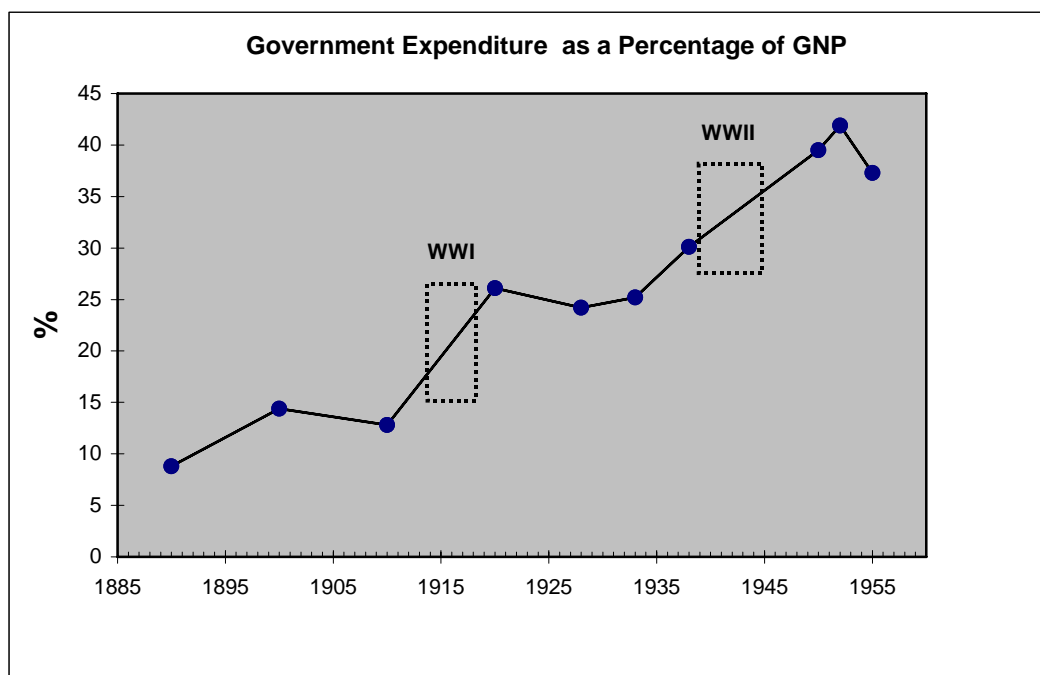
For many political commentators this control was a good thing, it made planning along the lines that Keynes and Beveridge imagined possible. It has also usually been understood as a progressive move, a way of taming capitalism and of achieving a more efficient and productive economy. Yet, if there was increasing agreement at the highest levels that as Douglas Jay said, "the man in Whitehall knows best", there was no such agreement in the period's predictive fiction.[24] Assaults on freedom of any kind were feared and many dystopian authors imagined a variety of totalitarian climaxes to tendencies that they perceived in contemporary Britain.

The growing percentage of national wealth that the state was responsible for demonstrates its increasing pervasiveness. Figure 6.2 shows the massive changes that took place in the power of the state over the first half of the twentieth century. It also clearly demonstrates the opportunity that war offered for a growth in state power.

*Figure 6.2*

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[22] Maugham, p.40.

[23] David Morgan and Mary Evans, "The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and the post-war reconstruction of citizenship", Brian Brivati and Harriet Jones, *What Difference Did the War Make?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993), p.55.

**Government Expenditure as a Percentage of GNP**

 Figures taken from Alan Peacock and Jack Wiseman, *The Growth of Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom* (Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1967), p.43.

The periods in which state expenditure expanded most rapidly were focused around the two major wars which Britain engaged in during the first half of the century. As the state prepared itself for war it brought a greater percentage of national economic life under its control. This growth in state power was easy to rationalise; fighting a modern industrial war required a greater amount of centralisation and planning than administering capitalism in peacetime. However, it was notable that while there was a small decline in the economic power of the state after each war the growth was broadly consolidated and the upward trend maintained. It is also worth noting here that the state maintained wartime powers in other ways into the post-war period. Successive Labour and Conservative administrations maintained aspects of wartime emergency powers, most notably those that limited the freedom of trade unions throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The last remnants of wartime regulation were not in fact repealed until 1959.[25] This is not to argue that the state may not have grown anyway throughout the early twentieth century but rather to point out the way in which war proved to be a vital catalyst for that growth.

Seen in this context, it is hardly surprising that there were concerns about the rapidity of change and the possibility of a growing authoritarian state. The transformation of the role of the state was incredibly swift and required a rapid

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[24] Aneurin Bevan quoted in Fielding, "The Good War: 1939-1945", p.47.

rethinking of the relationship between the ordinary citizen and their government. This was not least because the ordinary citizen was now far more likely to be in the pay of the state. The state was therefore moving into people's lives in a number of very direct ways – through a new series of personal and domestic regulations, through culture and as an employer.

Dystopian fiction provided a forum in which some of the negative consequences of social changes could be explored as they happened. In particular the fear that personal relationships would be transformed and diminished by the growth of central governmental power was repeatedly voiced. This fear of an onslaught on personal life was frequently expressed in highly gendered language. Moving men from the factory or the office into the army might be tolerable if undesirable. Moving women, on the other hand, out of the home and into the factory perhaps represented a more profound attack on what was considered to be the normal or natural order of things. A creeping encroachment of government into all aspects of life was being fought at all levels. However, while authors began this fight in the public sphere, clear fallback positions were established. The arenas for the last stand against an expanding state were to be the front door, the bedroom door and finally the private space of the mind.

JB Priestley argued in 1941 that the majority of people in the country were in favour of a "remodelling of the whole political, economic and social structure".[26] But, a reading of dystopian literature suggests that the situation was considerably more complex. The dystopias produced in the Second World War all imagine the negative consequences of a growth in the power of the state and of the political classes. Some on the left, a handful on the right and what anarchists there were, were undoubtedly articulating versions of this analysis in more conventional accounts of contemporary politics. However, their more theorised responses to this problem were generally not picked up in the dystopian literature of the period. The anti-modernist and anti-state rhetoric in dystopian fiction should not therefore be interpreted as a part of some undiscovered political movement active in Second World War Britain. Nonetheless, the critique that emerged from these works should not be dismissed as simply rantings from the sidelines. The alliance of Britain's political elite silenced many of the established routes from which a critique could have emerged. Trade Unions, voluntary groups,

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[25] Stammers, p.217.

[26] J B Priestley, Prologue to Planning, *Horizon*, III, 15 (March 1941), p.169.

artists and political parties came together to run society in a newly agreed fashion. Unity amongst the political elites should not however be mistaken for popular consensus. The dystopian critiques show that there were alternative, if marginal, discourses available.

Robin Maugham's *The 1946 MS* is particularly concerned about the way in which the apparent wartime necessity for consensus was being used to justify attacks on pluralism and democracy. Maugham locates much of the blame for this with the people who he describes as "correct, snug little men in Whitehall, who have never voyaged beyond Brighton… who sat comfortably in Whitehall writing neat memoranda in their particular topics, while men of ideals, men of guts got killed in the mud."[27] *The 1946 MS* criticised the very people who historians such as Addison see as bringing about the post-war progressive settlement. Whereas for the New Jerusalemers the state was good and the planner heroic, for Maugham the state was dangerous and the bureaucrats were strangling Britain.

Maugham's narrator has served in the army, and while the text is intensely aware of the authoritarian potential of the military it also celebrates a romantic individualistic vision of battlefield valour. The ideal of the active citizen soldier is held up against the narrow minded and petty bureaucrat. An indefinable but essential quality marked out the British will to resist tyranny and to do what we can most exactly call "the right thing". This British sense of what was right and wrong was not something that the authors of predictive fiction understood to be compatible with big government and modernist state formations. Adrian Alington, for example, celebrates the British spirit, arguing against ideology and planning. In Alington's novel, this British spirit is characterised as humour.

> The people of this island of mine are remarkable in this. They have the stuff of Humour in them to the point of genius. They have shown that to the world in the past, they show it again today. It breeds in them, men and women alike, the courage and endurance which makes them the equals of the gods, it inspires them when the evil shadow of Pomposity looms up to threaten their existence to face it and declare 'This false and dismal abomination shall not be.' So it is that in their hour of trial and agony these people are greatest. The laughter that is in their hearts conquers their pain, conquers even their fear. They would rather die than surrender their right to laugh.[28]

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[27] Maugham, p.16-17.

Alington's anti-totalitarianism is highly individualistic: Britain's strength emanates from the people, not from the state or any political ideology. Indeed any external attempt to shape the British people is likely to lead to totalitarianism. Wartime dystopias were profoundly suspicious of the planners and organisers who were attempting to build what they believed was a better world.

While the utopian fiction of the 1940s was almost universally committed to some form of planned economy, dystopian fiction was concerned about this and particularly about those who were likely to carry out the planning. Writers celebrate the heroism of the British people but express unease at the bureaucratic mess that seems to be leading them. A maze of committees, politicians and civil service departments is portrayed as the place that decisions get made unfettered by practical frontline knowledge. If in the First World War the army consisted of lions led by donkeys there seemed to be a concern during the Second World War that the lions were being led by giraffes.[29] George Orwell captured the autocratic, faceless and passionless nature of the Whitehall bureaucratic machine in his "As I Please" column in 1944. He also revealed the extent to which, during the war, the interests of Whitehall were able to gain hegemony over the rest of the British establishment.

> The MoI does not, of course dictate a party line or issue an *index expurgatorius*. It merely "advises". Publishers take manuscripts to the MoI, and the MoI "suggests" that this or that is undesireable, or premature, or "would serve no good purpose". And though there is no definite prohibition, no clear statement that this or that must not be printed, official policy is never flouted. Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip.[30]

Concerns about the growth in the power of the state focused on a number of important questions about who owned and controlled it. Better planning undoubtedly required more planners, but in whose interest would those planners work? Perhaps even more worrying was the fear that if politics is reduced (or elevated) to a science as the planners hoped then it would lose touch with the essence of humanity. Mollie, the white mare in *Animal Farm* asked Snowball whether she would be allowed sugar after the revolution:

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[28] Alington, p.307.
[29] A giraffe is a donkey designed by committee.
[30] Quoted in Paul Flewers, "*I know how, but I don't know why": George Orwell's Conception of Totalitarianism* (Coventry: New Interventions, 1999), p.26.

> "No," said Snowball firmly. "We have no means of making sugar on this farm. Besides, you do not need sugar. You will have all the oats and hay you want."
>
> "And shall I still be allowed to wear ribbons in my mane?" asked Mollie.
>
> "Comrade," said Snowball, "those ribbons that you are so devoted to are the badge of slavery. Can you not understand that liberty is worth more than ribbons?"
>
> Mollie agreed, but she did not sound very convinced.[31]

Mollie may be frivolous and foolish but her articulation of the classic demand for roses as well as bread is the first thing to expose the authoritarianism that lurked beneath the revolution planned by the pigs. Snowball's attempt to define liberty in terms of what Mollie is forbidden from doing is obviously an attack on the Bolsheviks, but it also reflected the growth of rules and regulation that Britain saw during the war. Once the state had taken the power to enforce the drawing of curtains there was very little that it could not conceivably influence. During the Second World War the British population witnessed the aggressive march of state regulation into the domestic sphere. Rationing, the blackout, the labour budget and conscription saw almost every aspect of ordinary life being redefined in relation to the state. Some writers understandably expressed concern as to whether this was necessary or whether they were experiencing the growth of a dictatorial bureaucracy in Whitehall.

Robin Maugham's narrator argues that the morass of regulation was unnecessary, and that it stifles the reawakening of a country that was sick of ineffective and cowardly political and spiritual leadership.

> The war saved our country from a slow death. The war demanded a spiritual revival. The great masses of our people yearned for a faith. But what happened? Politicians curtailed liberty, suppressed information, spread the red tentacles of bureaucracy, forbade broadcasts on the very subjects bound to arose the people's spirit, refused to reveal our aims in fighting the war.[32]

The novel suggests that the war was not in fact the "People's War", a moment of liberation and emancipation, but rather a period in which British society became shackled by a different set of rules, regulations and hierarchies.

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[31] Orwell, *Animal Farm,* p.10.
[32] Maugham, p.39.

In particular Maugham's narrator fears the centralising tendencies that were apparent in the wartime approach to government.

> It was imagined that control by the Government was bound to be better than control by the individual. But if the machinery and personnel of Government control be of a poor quality, then to change from private ownership to Government ownership is only the change from one evil to another. We should have improved the quality of the machinery and personnel of government before attempting nationalisation of large concerns; for Government control as we have seen it in Britain, though sometimes more efficient, removes the human touch one stage further away. The miner's welfare is determined by an official in Whitehall who does not understand the miner. A farmer's pig in Cumberland, a child's tooth in Dorset, are controlled from London. A vast gulf divides the governed from the governors.[33]

Maugham is perceptive about the new role that the state was defining for itself. It would be foolish to try and generalise these insights and to claim that the population at large held this critique. However, it was possible to detect unease with the growing role of the state across wartime predictive fiction.

On the left in particular many feared that liberty was dwindling. One Trotskyist group was so afraid of the onrushing totalitarianism that its leadership felt that the role of vanguard of the party and class could best be fulfilled in exile in Ireland.[34] While the fleeing Trotskyists may have been a little paranoid, they had been given some cause to be suspicious when the government cut off the paper ration from *Socialist Appeal*, the Trotskyist newspaper at the end of 1943, and Bevin introduced regulation 1AA of the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act to try to prevent Trotskyist interference in the Labour movement.[35] Comprehending changes in the balance between liberty and state power required the citizen to remain vigilant. In *The 1946 MS*, General Pointer makes a categorical assurance that "My purpose is to suppress irresponsible and dangerous agitators, not interfere with peaceful and law abiding citizens."[36] As the British Government locked up German Jews on the Isle of Mann as potential Nazi spies it gave similarly liberal assurances that the aim of internment was to protect people from xenophobic attacks.[37]

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[33] Maugham, p.42.
[34] Flewers, p.9.
[35] Stammers, p.118-120.
[36] Maugham, p.33.
[37] Stammers, p.40.

Nor was it just left wing thinkers who felt concerned about the growth of state power. The publication of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) showed a growing critique of state power from the right. Hayek writes of how planning is "the result not of a comprehensive view of society but rather of a very limited view", echoing Robin Maugham's criticisms of centralisation, and arguing that "the very men who are most anxious to plan society" were "the most dangerous if they were allowed to do so -- and the most intolerant of the planning of others. From the saintly and single-minded idealist to the fanatic is but a step."[38] Hayek's theories about the need for the free market to triumph over the centrally planned economy became vastly important in the second half of the twentieth century. What is often forgotten is that Hayek, like Orwell and many others who are advanced as uniquely prescient, emerged from a cultural and intellectual climate that shared many of his concerns. Many of the authors of predictive fiction had already travelled the road to serfdom in their imaginations and were busily mapping out exactly what that serfdom was going to look like.

Fear about the growing role of the state was not confined to those normally accustomed to thinking about complex social and economic issues. If Maugham, Hayek and Orwell were resisting the growth of a dictatorial bureaucracy others simply worried about the impositions and oppressions that they were experiencing. One man questioned about the conscription of women in 1941 complained that:

> If married women are called up home life will vanish…Men coming home on leave will find that they can only see their wives for an hour or two a day. Men in reserve occupations will come back to cold, untidy houses with no meal ready.[39]

This kind of fear clearly came out of lived experience of interaction with state power. As the need for an assertive and centralised bureaucracy grew the individual was increasingly buffeted by decisions that were entirely out of his control. As this quotation demonstrates, even home life and gender relations were being renegotiated from the top down. Changes to individuals' working lives, or to the way individuals were required to interact directly with the state was one thing, but the sense that the state was moving inside the house and interfering with family life was perceived as a far more profound disruption. The ideas of a "normal" life and of "home" and "family" are clearly highly

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[38] FA Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 61-62.

gendered and so men and women undoubtedly experienced a perceived state intrusion differently. However, for the largely male authors of predictive fiction the intrusion was entirely negative.

*The Lost Traveller's* critique of centralised state planning engages with the degendering of labour that was occurring during the Second World War and with changes that were happing in home life. Movement away from the "natural" way of organising society, the novel argues, is bound to result in a whole host of inefficient, undesirable and oppressive consequences. Moreover, changes in the roles allocated to the sexes are likely to impact negatively on both men and women. In *The Lost Traveller*, food is prepared centrally by the state rather than by a women at home, but this only serves to remove variety and creativity from Mali's working life, freeing her to perform whatever repetitive drudgery the state commands.[40] It is clear that women are gaining little or nothing by being allowed to transgress traditional gender boundaries. Women are relieved of domestic fatigue only to allow them to work longer outside of the home. For Todd the changing role of women is a symptom of the new order rather than a cause of it, the real enemy is the growth of state power. The modern innovations of vacuum tubes, women workers and dictatorship contravene a much more desirable and fundamental set of English values of individuality, self-reliance and patriarchal control.

If the state was going to become more powerful and gradually insinuate its way into all aspects of ordinary people's lives it was logical that this would eventually extend to the sexual sphere. The topic of dystopian sexual relations was one which held a particular fascination for many authors and which provides a useful case study for the way in which concerns about modernity and the growth of the state were worked through in these novels. While the movement of sex into the hands of the state had terrifying consequences, it also had an enormous erotic potential that could be explored by authors wishing to give their characters the opportunity to indulge in some state sanctioned sexual gratification.

In *Crimson Courage* women are initially seen as simply another aspect of the Scortan state which is likely to cause John problems.

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[39] Quoted in Fielding, "The Good War", p.39.
[40] Todd, p.69.

Vaguely he had heard before coming to Scorta that sometimes women were used as bait to get an inconvenient man into trouble, and he had no mind to entangle himself with either a gold-digger or a female Watcher.[41]

Sex is one of the state's weapons, and like British heroes in a host of other Second World War thrillers, John steels himself against the advances of any beautiful spy or double agent. Nevertheless the male authors of dystopias find it difficult to resist exploring the sexual possibilities of a society where the state can order anything. Likewise, their macho heroes frequently fail to resist the various loose-moralled nymphomaniacs they are lucky enough to come across. Christopher quickly adopts a "when in Rome" policy when he is offered the alluring and compliant Mali as part of his new citizenship in *The Lost Traveller.*

> Christopher was startled; he had not expected that Omar's ideas of helping him to settle down would run to the extent of providing him with a woman.
>
> "Where do you sleep, Mali?" he asked, making his voice as negligent as possible.
>
> "Here, you silly!" she replied "Where did you think I'd sleep? I told you I was a first-grade woman official."[42]

Christopher's initial shock is quickly overcome by his curiosity at the possibilities such a situation offers. His conscience does not immediately allow him to take advantage of Mali. The transformation from respectable English gentleman into state-sanctioned gigolo requires more than one invitation and some reassurance that consent is freely given.

> "Oh! Do you often have to do this? Pretty poor job, isn't it?"
>
> "It's my job," she replied, "and it's not at all a bad one - there are a lot of women who'd like to have it. It's not as though I was a second-grader and had to sleep with the citizens. I'm a first grader and can more or less choose whom I want. Anyhow, you don't seem to be very pleased with the idea? You're not one of those - you know - like the airmen?" Christopher denied the imputation with vigour, and Mali seemed to be relieved.[43]

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[41] O'Den, p.51.
[42] Todd, p.64.
[43] Ibid p.64.

What is ultimately responsible for Christopher's decision to take advantage of the woman provided for him is the accusation that he is "like the airmen". The airmen are an elite cast who are involved in the government of the state in a similar way to the airmen in *The Aerodrome*. Where they differ from the caste in Warner's novel is in their incorrigible homosexuality. The airmen are presented as effeminate, petty and spiteful, and their elevation to positions of privilege in the society of *The Lost Traveller* is one of the first and most obvious signs of its decadence.

The text is uncritical of Christopher's masculinity. He is easily manipulated by an attractive woman and an accusation of homosexuality, but this is presented as understandable and even admirable. Once again the double standard at the heart of 1940s gender relations is uncritically reproduced. While Mali is strange, amoral and mysterious for her willingness to take part in state directed sex, Christopher is simply following his natural drives, unable to act any differently and utterly without blame.

Strange and decadent though the world of *The Last Traveller* is, the text does not really see the state directed sex that takes place between Mali and Christopher as dystopian. Christopher, like many other (male) heroes of Second World War fiction, is not punished for his decision to stray from the normative values of British society. In fact the sexual dystopia does not begin until the following glorious morning when Christopher awakes and looks across at Mali.

> She still slept, all her hair scattered on the pillow round her face. He bent down to kiss her, but she woke and pushed him gently away.
>
> "No, no, my dear," she said, " you mustn't. Not in the mornings. *He* had forbidden it, saying it lowers efficiency throughout the ensuing day."
>
> Christopher restrained his desire and the impulse to be rude about *His* interference in private matters.[44]

The real revelation in this passage is that what the state gives the state can also take away. The text is far more critical of attacks on a man's right to do as he pleases than on a woman's right to do the same.

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[44] Ibid p.64.

During the Second World War the British state was in the process of entering areas previously closed to government interference. The Labour Party continued to propagandise the idea that this growth in state power could solve all of society's problems and succeeded in achieving a new settlement between labour, capital and the state in last years of the war and the first years of its post-war administration. This vision of socialism was engaged with in a critical way through literature such as *The 1946 MS.* The "New Jerusalem" vision of the British Labour Party often attracted similar criticism to that which Chapter Four described as being levelled at the Russian Communist party. Both were attacked as being overly bureaucratic, centralist, oppressive and above all as dangerously modern. Dystopian fiction satirised these tendencies and took them to their extremes. If the state begins to interfere in people's lives where will it end? Authors were sure that whatever happened further regulation which altered people's lives, domestic arrangements and relationships had to be opposed.

**Clinging to the truth**

While there were fears about the growth of the state on a number of levels, none was as powerful as the idea that people could actually come to think of these new social, political and economic arrangements as normal. While the idea of the state restructuring society around you, or telling you how to organise your home or your marriage was terrifying these could all be resisted in your mind if nowhere else. If you could do nothing to change the world, you could still know that it was wrong and hold the idea of a better way of doing things in your head. The ultimate dystopia was clearly the one in which the inhabitants did not even realise that they were in dystopia. As Orwell said "the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip".[45] The public debate about propaganda, the state's art of mass manipulation of the truth, clearly raised anxieties about whether the individual could still hope to hold on to what was real. Predictive fiction typically amplified this fear and explored ways in which a vanishing individual and verifiable truth could be resisted.

This fear about the validity of truth was not confined to obviously totalitarian states. The National Council for Civil Liberties expressed numerous concerns throughout the war about the way in which the British government was attempting to prevent freedom of association and expression, effectively clamping down on the range

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[45] Flewers, p.26.

of opinions it was possible to hold and to hear. In particular the NCCL highlighted police harassment of political groups opposed to the war such as the British Union of Fascists, the Communist Party and the Peace Pledge Union.[46] In *The Lost Traveller,* Christopher recognises that while he feels more oppressed in the country he visits, it is at least in part because these are new oppressions that he has not got used to. Todd's critique of the bureaucratic and dictatorial state was obviously intended to resonate at home.

> He could not say what he meant by freedom, for he realised that, in truth, he has not been freer at home than he was in this queer city, but there the hedging rules had been less obvious, or had affected him, personally, less than they did here. At home he had been one person in a crowd, while here he stood out as a stranger among the natives, though hardly the one Christian in darkest Africa.[47]

The realisation that at some point in the development of the dystopian regime the individual will no longer know what he wants is a recurring fear in these novels. The concern is that dystopian systems will deliberately remove all reference points leaving the individual with nothing to compare his experience to. An individual's day-to-day life can be transformed by changes to his working life, his domestic arrangements and even human relationships like family life. Yet, the fear is that this will not be enough for the dystopian system and that it will be necessary to control access to information, truth and history. Once history is controlled, the dystopia is complete as all objective reference points are removed and the dystopian system has superseded the old notion of reality with its own more convenient one. Orwell summed this concern up in the following passage from Goldstein's book:

> The alteration of the past is necessary for two reasons, one of which is subsidiary and, so to speak, precautionary. The subsidiary reason is that the Party member, like the proletarian, tolerates present-day conditions partly because he has no standards of comparison. He must be cut off from the past, just as he must be cut off from foreign countries because it is necessary for him to believe that he is better off than his ancestors and that the average level of material comfort is constantly rising. But by far the more important reason for the readjustment of the past is the need to safeguard the infallibility of the Party.[48]

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[46] Stammers, p.89.

[47] Todd, p.77.

[48] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p.221.

In this Orwell was echoing one of the key concerns that had appeared in predictive fiction throughout the war. In *The Aerodrome*, for example, Warner details the extensiveness and complexity of the machinery with which the dystopian state manufactures its truth.

> The political propaganda department, for example, employing as it did almost a third of the entire personnel and amongst them some of the best brains, was an institution of extraordinary complexity with branches covering religion, literature, morals, education, journalism, psychology, and medicine. Like everything else at the aerodrome it was under the constant supervision of the Air Vice-Marshal himself, and we saw, whenever we went to the village, evidences of its work, for it was thought desirable for the Air Force not only to occupy but also to transform any part of the country that fell within its sphere of interest.[49]

This sense that reality is something that can be manufactured sends out an ambiguous political message. On one hand the artificiality of the new hegemony created by the Aerodrome and other dictatorships reveals the arbitrary nature of all social and political systems. If the Air Vice-Marshall can transform people, does it not follow that people have no necessary attachment to the political economy of the status quo? Indeed, it is from this ability to rebuild human consciousness that the dystopian system draws its power. Orwell noted in his 1941 review of *Darkness at Noon* that it is Gletkin's "severance from the past, which leaves him not only without pity but without imagination or inconvenient knowledge".[50] The idea that human consciousness and common sense can be moulded and remoulded in this way is then a profoundly radical one.

This analysis, however, fails adequately to describe the ideological process that was operating in the dystopian critique of propaganda. Propaganda is universally presented as a modern invention. Warner's village however has no need for the complexity of state apparatus to disseminate its hegemonic values. Its values are both more enduring and more flexible than those of the modern institution that relies on propaganda. In the short term this makes the organic community weaker than the technological one. In the long term, however, the aerodrome proves to be unsustainable while the village has the capacity to adapt and reinvent itself.

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[49] Warner, p.216.

[50] George Orwell, "Review of *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler in *The New Statesman and Society*", Peter Davison, Ian Angus, and Sheila Davison, *The Complete*

Orwell, was clearly thinking about these issues during the war, noting that:

> Totalitarianism has abolished freedom of thought to an extent unheard of in any previous age…It not only forbids you to express – even to think – certain thoughts, but it dictates what you *shall* think, it creates an ideology for you, it tries to govern your emotional life…The peculiarity of the totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it does not fix it. It sets up unquestionable dogma, because it needs absolute obedience from its subjects, but it cannot avoid the changes which are dictated by the needs of power politics. It declares itself infallible, and at the same time it attacks the very concept of objective truth.[51]

Orwell, like Warner, recognised that propaganda and the manipulation of truth were creating new forms of state oppression. This was not simply the banning of certain forms of activity, in the way that the British state inhibited the movements of certain political groups. Rather the new tools of propaganda reinforced totalitarian ideology and created a space in which the most fundamentally understood truths could be renegotiated.

Dystopian writers imagined cultures in which humanity would no longer have access to a reliable version of the past. In Robin Maugham's *The 1946 MS*, Richard Wright, the narrator and hero of the novel, talks about having a moral duty to record the events that led to Pointer's Dictatorship.

> I am writing this to please myself, to keep my mind from thinking of the future, and I am writing this as a last confession. Also, if I can complete my story I shall feel relieved of my burden of responsibility to posterity.[52]

This idea that fidelity to truth and to history provided an important way to resist the onset of totalitarianism was pervasive in the dystopian fiction of the period. Like Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, many of the heroes of dystopian fiction become heroes merely by their decision to write and to write the truth. *Loss of Eden* (1940), *I, James Blunt* (1942) and *The 1946 MS* (1943) all tell the story of authoritarian government in Britain through the medium of the personal manuscript. The personal manuscript becomes the only site for dissent once the state has annexed the public-

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*Works of George Orwell Volume Twelve: A Patriot After All 1940-1941* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.356.

[51] George Orwell, 'Literature and Totalitarianism' cited in Flewers, p.11.

[52] Maugham, p.3.

sphere. The heroes in all three of these novels have some involvement with dissident movements, yet their major contribution to resistance is through their personal testaments. The idea that the truth inscribed in a manuscript might endure where an individual cannot is a powerful and recurrent theme. The centrality of writing and of telling stories as a mode of resistance to tyranny and a way of dealing with personal disruption is something that has been discussed at length in studies of holocaust testimonies.[53] Similarly, the personal, autobiographical mode could also provide an oasis of personal space and identity when the state seemed to be dissolving the boundaries between private and public. When Stephen Spender commented "you analyse your hatred of Fascism and it comes to a desire to be left alone," he was expressing this unease about the siege of the private sphere.[54] This fear of state encroachment on personal space could be seen not only in the dystopian/totalitarian state but also in Britain where conscription, labour budgets and rationing were a reality.

The care and attention that Richard Wright lavishes on the writing of his story shows ways in which writing and the individual imagination can become central in totalitarian situations. The private actions of writing and safeguarding the manuscript become Richard's reason to exist in a world where the state controls everything else.

> I have got a full block of writing paper, and as I finish each page I shall place it in the airtight steel box I've fitted under the flagstones in this kitchen, so that even if they come for me before I've finished, at least part of my story will be safe.[55]

In the dystopian system, truth, like all rationed items, becomes precious. Richard Wright risks his life to create a manuscript that he has no guarantee anyone will ever see. The modern reader of this novel is reminded of the work of Primo Levi, Anne Frank and others who continued to attempt to record their reality even when their voice had been silenced socially and politically.[56] The narrative motivation for the creation of the text is centred on a belief that the dystopian system provided a challenge to the

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[53] For example, Inga Clendinnen, *Reading The Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.33: "In devastated Europe Italo Calvino remembers that the first weeks of peace produced a 'curious narrative compulsion', as every traveller told strangers about the things which had happened to him."

[54] Stephen Spender quoted in Jose Harris, "War and Social History: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War", *Contemporary European History,* I, 1 (March 1992), p.32.

[55] Maugham, p.3.

recoverability of history and objective reality. The process of writing also provided the writer with a purpose and a sense of personal integrity. Even though all public displays of resistance may have been outlawed, the writer can still maintain a space in which the individual conscience can continue to matter.

The dystopian narrative encourages and rewards those individuals and social groups who attempt to maintain an independent and objective truth on behalf of society. Because of this, dystopian fiction is reliant on a grassroots activist culture to produce its heroes. Those who stand out against the dominant culture, the state and other sources of dystopian power provide the perspective with which the reader can identify and through which the narrative is focalised. This places contemporary responsibility on the shoulders of the reader. We, like the heroes of dystopian fiction, are asked to be vigilant, to maintain a critique of societies problems and ultimately, we are led to believe, to come up with solutions to them. While truth survives, hope of a better world survives alongside it. While the dystopian system is rarely seen to be actually defeated in the novels the understanding is always that the potential for that defeat remains.

## Resistance is futile?

> Thus inside the lager, on a smaller scale but with amplified characteristics, was reproduced the hierarchical structure of the totalitarian state, in which all power is invested from above and control from below is almost impossible. But this 'almost' is important: there never existed a state that was really 'totalitarian' from this point of view. Some form of reaction, a corrective of the total tyranny has never been lacking.[57]

Chapter Two examined the various strategies of resistance to occupation that were explored during the Second World War. The movement from external to internal foe, however, radically transforms the nature and legitimacy of resistance. In the case of invasion, a strategy could be devised to unite the political spectrum. United for nation and democracy, against Germany and fascism, the entire ideological gamut could be mobilised against an invading German/Nazi army. However, when the new, oppressive social order is created from elements within the existing society the possibility of resistance becomes much more complex.

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[56] Clendinnen, p.34, notes that Primo Levi continued writing throughout his time in the camps despite the fact that he could have been killed for doing so.

[57] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1998), p.31.

In the invasion narrative, those who fail to oppose the invasion are treated as aberrations. There may be many ways to oppose invasion, but to not oppose it at all is treachery motivated by opportunism, greed or cowardice. When the dystopia evolves in a more organic fashion it is far easier to see reasons why not to enter into opposition. In fact to oppose a growing dystopia would require forms of behaviour that contravene values that are repeatedly endorsed as British. The majority of novels conceive opposition to an authoritarian dictatorship as being conducted through political or paramilitary action. Alternatives to this are rare although there are examples of fictional assassination plots such as Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male* and of more fantastical devices such as the use of spiritual and psychic weaponry in Dennis Wheatley's novels.[58] Yet, to take arms against even an extremist and illiberal state or to build a dissident movement are forms of action that do not sit well with the normative values of moderation, restraint and lawfulness which are commonly advanced as the strengths of the British character in these novels.

Not all characters who fail to oppose the dystopian order do so because they are struggling with their law-abiding and tolerant natures. Many people accept dystopia in much the same way as they have accepted previous political systems. The perceived failure of the governments that preceded the war fuelled narrative speculations that a dictatorship or other kind of authoritarian government might not be any worse than the status quo.

> Of course a man like General Pointer doesn't want to lose his power now the war is over. Why should he? The politicians made a pretty good mess of things after the last war. I'm sure General Pointer couldn't do any worse than they did even if he did get into power.[59]

A general cynicism about politicians can easily be extended until there seems to be little purpose in defending the established order. The world of the 1940s might not even be worth defending against a dystopian future.

Flawed though contemporary Britain was, for most it was still worth defending against totalitarianism. In *The 1946 MS*, General Pointer's dictatorship is opposed by the Freedom Troops. This dissident organisation protests by using the conventional tools of dissent, for example demonstrations and petitions. However, these organised

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[58] Geoffrey Household, *Rogue Male* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939).

198

protests are quickly defeated by Pointer's increasingly authoritarian dictatorship. Labour camps are established and members of the resistance movement are detained in them. In response to this the resistance movement is forced underground renaming itself the Secret Freedom Troops or the SFT. There is no evidence that Maugham considered himself to be a revolutionary in any meaningful sense but when faced with injustice and attacks on traditional British liberties even the rather insipid hero of the novel, Richard Wright, joins the armed struggle.

The likelihood of some form of armed insurrection resulting from attacks on political liberty is discussed in various other novels of the period. Even on Animal Farm the pigs experience dissent from sections of the farmyard society when they try and expand their power.

> For the first time since the expulsion of Jones there was something resembling a rebellion. Led by three young Black Minorca pullets, the hens made a determined effort to thwart Napoleon's wishes. Their method was to fly up to the rafters and there lay their eggs, which smashed to pieces on the floor.[60]

In this echo of the Kronstadt Mutiny, the Black Minorcas go on strike to prevent the pigs from requisitioning what is rightfully theirs. The central issue that Orwell is addressing is the removal of land and other means of production from the control of ordinary people in order to place it in the hands of the party and the state. However, the reproductive aspect to the laying of eggs means that this incident has far more power than a debate about the correct level at which production should be managed. Linking in to the mythic power of cannibalistic infanticide, Orwell alludes to more personal questions about the intrusive potential of the state. Does the state have the right to exert its influence over what we do with our bodies and our offspring?

In one sense the answer in 1940s Britain was clearly yes. Conscription was a reality for much of the population with many people being asked to move and perform unpleasant and unfamiliar tasks. The fact of war and the decisions of the state compelled many families to be split up and for many people to place themselves at the disposal of the government. The Minorcas' decision to suspend their reproduction in protest at the authoritarianism of the pigs perhaps had some resonance for a population that saw a dramatic decline in the birthrate throughout the war years. Claire Fogg has

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[59] Maugham, p.27.

argued that "fear about the declining rate of population growth constituted a major strand in the debates of the 1940s, especially during the five-year period between 1942 and 1947."[61] Concern in the public sphere about the reproductive activities of population was not dissimilar to Napoleon's concern about the economic effects of the Minorcas' egg strike.

The willingness of the Minorcas to make their doomed stand against the growing hegemony of the pigs shows a faith in people's determination to fight for liberty whatever the cost. The type of stands that people made outside of fiction were considerably more complex and variable. One consideration that emerges as we try to assess representations of the nature and extent of resistance in the Second World War is the exact definition of resistance. What activities count as resistance? Where can the dividing line be drawn, for example, between passive resistance and quiescence.

One idea that is continually explored in dystopian writing is that of the failed rebellion, even of the inevitability of that failure. Just as the Black Minorcas and the Secret Freedom Troops are destined to fail in their emancipatory attempts, Ruthven Todd describes the fate of movements for political liberation in *The Lost Traveller*:

> A few years back there was serious trouble, for a renegade official started a movement among those who wished to see their rulers. The main plank in his platform, his name was Mogor, was that *He* was dead and had been so for years. Like all hot heads, Mogor had little difficulty in gathering a crowd of irresponsibles to support him, and they marched through the city to demand of Mr. Omar that *His* body should be produced. Naturally, the army soon suppressed the rising, and Mogor was executed.[62]

Yet, despite the failure of this revolt and others like it, the fact that revolts against oppression continue to take place reveals the underlying humanism of the dystopian mode. Even in a dystopian society as oppressive and hierarchical as that of *The Lost Traveller* the population continue their quest for truth and freedom. The novel's all-powerful dictator, who is only referred to as *Him*, is like Big Brother in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in that *He* does not actually exist. Again we see the importance of the concept of truth in the demand of the emancipatory movement merely to know whether

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[60] Orwell, *Animal Farm*, p.51.
[61] Claire Fogg, *Family Values: Popular British Cinema and the Family, 1940-1949* (Thesis submitted to the University of Leicester, 1998).
[62] Todd, p.68.

*He* is alive and to be allowed to see *His* body. The ability to confirm the perceived world as the real world is a central part of the challenge to the dystopian order.

The determination to write the truth back into existence can also be found in holocaust and occupation testimonies. These provided one of the only ways in which people could continue to be themselves when they were required to constantly deny their humanity, individuality and the legitimacy of their understanding of the world. Primo Levi writes that he entered the camps "hoping at least for the solidarity of one's companions in misfortune," however what he found was "a thousand sealed-off monads".[63] "The concentration system", he writes, "had the primary purpose of shattering the adversaries' capacity to resist".[64] Rebellions and resistance of all sorts did take place in the camps. However, even large-scale rebellions like those of Treblinka, Sobibor and Birkenau did not aim for a decisive liberation or escape. Rather they attempted to realise what Levi calls a "more concrete result", that of informing the rest of the world about what was taking place in the camps.[65] This commitment to passing on truth obviously serves the immediate and strategic purpose of heightening awareness of the existence of the camps. It also, however, clearly offers a way for participants in the rebellions to justify their individual sacrifices by perceiving them as part of a wider emancipatory struggle.

In fiction, and particularly in dystopian fiction, a commitment to truth and to an empirically verifiable world was not implicit simply in the act of writing, but had to be explicitly discussed. Todd's decision to centre a radical demonstration around an attempt to unmask the false gods that kept the populace in place provided a direct testing ground for the binary opposition between oppression and truth. Knowledge is shown to be power because ignorance is so clearly shown to be weakness. Even Christopher, the British visitor to the dystopia of *The Lost Traveller*, is moved to hope "that if he ever did return it would be to find a revolution had taken place and that these slaves of the State had been freed" when he sees a group of prisoners who are forced to write "I am a traitor" on a wall over and over again and then to scrub it off again because they took part in a rebellion to find out *His* name.[66] The forces of the

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[63] Levi, p.23.
[64] Ibid, p.24.
[65] Ibid, p.129.
[66] Todd, p.131.

established government fear most of all that they will be unmasked and control of the truth will pass back into the hands of the populace.

The intervention that resistance against the dystopian order makes is not merely instrumental but also symbolic. Within the active process of rebellion exists a utopian space. Mogor's rising in *The Lost Traveller* does not result in the end of Omar's rule, but it does create an enduring consciousness that the regime may not be all that it seems. The idea of objective truth is kept alive even if the overt lies of the state also continue. The very act of resistance is shown to be worthwhile in and of itself. In *Darkness at Noon* the fact that Rubashov is capable of resisting while being aware of certain defeat asks fundamental questions of readers about their commitment to truth and their willingness to resist authoritarian systems. Rubashov understands that the mental torture he is undergoing will result in a denial of his principles and a confession to the crimes of which he has been accused. However, he also resists the inevitable conclusion of his situation for as long as possible.

> He could, of course, have made it simpler for himself. He had only to sign everything, lock, stock and barrel, or to deny everything in a lump – and he would have peace. A queer complicated sense of duty prevented him giving in to this temptation.[67]

Rubashov's struggle serves no objective purpose. No one other than he and his torturer ever know about the resistance that he put up to the party's version of reality. Nonetheless, the novel is inspirational as it demonstrates the possibility for resistance and uncompromised humanity even in the most appalling of circumstances.

Many of the dystopias of the forties are pessimistic about liberal democracy's prospects. The frequent equation of totalitarian regimes with modernity encourages the idea that history is on the side of these new state formations. While the possibility of activist intervention in history is frequently examined, the success rate for emancipatory projects is not good. But, although they do not succeed in concrete terms, they continue to assert the value of critiquing and challenging oppressive regimes. Rubashov, for example, learns from his experiences. He is not simply battered into the ground but rather grows into a more sympathetic, less dogmatic character who realises the moral bankruptcy of the ultra-modernist Bolshevik ideology that he previously espoused.

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[67] Koestler, p.171.

We have thrown overboard all conventions, our sole guiding principle is that of consequent logica; we are sailing without ethical ballast.

Perhaps the heart of the evil lay there. Perhaps it did not suit mankind to sail without ballast. And perhaps reason alone was a defective compass, which led one on such a winding, twisted course that the goal finally disappeared in the mist.[68]

Yet at the same time as resistance is being demonstrated to be admirable and morally regenerative to the readers of Koestler's book, it is also being shown to be futile. *Darkness at Noon* reinvents the struggle of left anti-Bolsheviks as a narrative of personal salvation. The collective aspect of resistance is removed, as is the possibility that political action might bring rewards beyond the spiritual.

While the location of the site of anti-dystopian struggle inside people's heads shows a number of revealing things about the way in which the threats to liberty were conceived, it also demonstrates the absence of any coherent political strategy. Writers of dystopian fiction perceived the central threat of dystopian regimes not to be simply a particular form of state or economic organisation, but rather to be more generally the removal from the public sphere of politics, history and other discourses that seek to explain and organise the world. No clear perspective really emerged about what to do about this closing down of the possibility of collective and participatory truth-making.

In *The Aerodrome*, the Squire's sister resists the occupation with a mixture of quiet political agitation and noisy social transgression. While she is never likely to become an overt threat to the well-organised military machine of the Air Force, her various activities maintain resistance as a possibility.

She ceased to attend church from the time when the Flight-Lieutenant was appointed to its care, and she encouraged others to boycott the services. Indeed, I was surprised at the resolution and pertinacity which she now shared. It was almost as though her brother's death had given her fresh strength which she had decided to use, by what means she could, in attacking the organisation which could be held, with some reason, responsible for that death; and her influence with the older men and women of the village might well make her, I feared, not a menace but a decided nuisance to the aerodrome authorities. Both the Rector's wife and I advised her on several occasions to be less outspoken in her opinions; but our advice had no effect on her whatever, and the bitterness of her feelings was such that she became somewhat eccentric in her manners. She had been

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[68] Ibid, p.206.

seen to twirl her walking stick around her head and even to spit in the gutter when the Flight-Lieutenant had passed her in the street.[69]

The Squire's sister is politically active on two levels. Firstly, she is organising her constituency, the older people of the village. By asking them to engage in forms of passive resistance to the Air Force such as refusing to attend the church services that serve as its main propaganda tool, she is directly hampering its continued rule. This kind of Gandhian resistance looks ineffective at first but it is conceptually very close to the armed rebellion that other, younger, male characters conduct in other novels of the period. The strategy is to resist, frustrate and complicate the activities of the oppressor in order to open up an ever wider space for resistance. The overt nature of the Squire's sisters resistance is confirmed when she ultimately confronts the Air Vice-Marshall and is shot for this.

The second strand to the Squire's sister's rebellion, her eccentricity, is perhaps more interesting in that it seems to present no direct threat to the Air Force but concerns Roy and the Rector's wife more. The twirling of her walking stick is obviously meant to be an insulting gesture directed at the Flight-Lieutenant. In addition, however, the Squire's sister's eccentricity is an assault on the normative social values that enable the Air Force to gain control of the village. Respectable middle-aged women do not twirl their walking sticks and spit in the street, but they also do not engage in active political dissent. The authoritarian regime imposed by the Air Force is opposed by radical socio-cultural activity as well as by political and para-military activity.

Not all resistance emerges solely from a coherent movement for change. The practice in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa of tapping electricity to avoid payment was at once a gesture of defiance at a regime that exploited the impoverished people of the townships and also an attempt to improve difficult living conditions.[70] This is not to draw a false opposition between the personal and the political, but rather to acknowledge that it is possible to have types of resistance that do not engage with collective struggles and which do not even necessarily call for an end to the present system. In the context of the war, we could perhaps draw a parallel with the dealers and customers of the black market system. Undermining rationing by allowing a criminalized free market to operate was undoubtedly a challenge to the way in which

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[69] Warner, p.153.

the state operated during the war. Elsewhere, this study has discussed the way in which the growth of the state machine was questioned by many authors and critics in the period. It is perhaps possible to find further evidence for the lack of a popular support for an ever more powerful state in the extensiveness of the black economy. It is doubtful, however, that any but the most insignificant minority engaged in the black market saw their activities as any kind of serious and overt challenge to the government. Steven Fielding argues that while "the better-off grumbled" about rationing and higher taxes, they broadly accepted it as a "necessary inconvenience", while the working classes were often guaranteed more through the ration than they had been in during the low points of the depression.[71] Equally, however, it is memorable that the existence of the black economy in Soviet Russia proved to be an important weapon in discrediting the Soviet system.

Julia perfectly represents this kind of personal response to dystopia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston's description of her as "only a rebel from the waist downwards" demonstrates people's ability to divide up elements of their behaviour and subject them to different moral and social codes.[72] Every sexual encounter that Julia engages in is a protest about the invasiveness of the state, yet she is utterly uninterested in reading Goldstein's book and only follows Winston into their doomed opposition to the party reluctantly.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a product of the immediate post war period, when the Labour administration was attempting to permanently establish a series of relationships between the individual and the state that had hitherto only been temporary.[73] Neil Stammers argues, "the post-war Labour government were loath to dispense with the powers which enabled them to exercise control over individuals working lives." Nevertheless, it is possible to find a similar series of fears and personal responses to those fears registered in the fiction produced throughout the war. In *The Aerodrome*, Roy's problems with the Air Force exist largely on an individual level. He is concerned about its interference in his love life but fails to really engage with the fact that he is aiding an armed coup against the democratic government of his own country. In

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[70] Patrick Bond, *Elite Transitions: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.84.
[71] Fielding, "The Good War", p.33.
[72] Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p.163.
[73] Stammers, p.191:

*Crimson Courage*, the population of Scorta are able to exist through theft, bribes and general dishonesty. The state is not however unduly worried about these kinds of activity. The enormous internal security force that is maintained exists solely for political repression. There is a complete absence of a domestic resistance movement. Liberation is delivered by the British who bring democracy, or possibly a return to monarchy, on the end of a gun. The novel registers political dissatisfaction in entirely negative terms. Civil society disintegrates because, ironically, in an apparently collective state everybody looks out for themselves. Without the feudal ties of old Scorta, or the class relations of advanced capitalist Britain, Scortan society falls apart. Without hierarchical social structure, *Crimson Courage* argues, chaos ensues. The personal supplants the political and civilisation peels away. O'Den's analysis is rightist and rather anti-humanist, but it shows that writers were making clear attempts to explore what would happen to human social relations if the nature of the state was to be radically transformed. The kinds of responses that O'Den registers can barely be called resistance at all, but they are also very clearly not ringing endorsements of the social system under which they flourish.

Discussions of resistance and what is being resisted operate on a number of levels in dystopian fiction. Dystopias imagined totalitarian systems in the future both to critique existing systems and to challenge perceived totalitarian tendencies in Britain. The mode of resistance appropriate to each of the dystopias conceptualised was therefore significantly different. Equally, the political and strategic perspective of each person imagining a dystopia varies and therefore produces different types of responses. The dystopian novel is in and of itself a form of resistance. By making an intervention, authors hoped to change minds and to steer the debate away from the politics they depicted. Dystopian fiction also provided a way to experiment with new forms of activism and to propagandise their usefulness. Resistance to totalitarianism took, and continues to take, many forms from the intensely personal to the revolutionary expression of the collective will. All of these different interventions find a place in the dystopian fiction of the forties.

Predictive fictions ask whether there is any purpose in resisting the irresistible regime. The seemingly unstoppable growth in the power of the state both at home and abroad focused the debate around the powerlessness of the individual. However the individual is almost always endorsed as the site of moral authority and repository of

hope. States may have enormous power but individuals must continue to assert their truth in the hope of re-establishing, or even establishing for the first time, a new more humanistic order. The idea of resistance provides the only viable alternative to dystopia and is repeatedly offered to the reader of these novels as both a social duty and a personal necessity.

**Conclusion**

Dystopian fiction was a flexible tool for examining political and social changes in Britain and the world. A variety of issues could be tackled, from growing hegemony of planners in wartime Britain, to fears about the viability of truth in a totalitarian regime. Furthermore, dystopian fiction provided a space where strategies of resistance could be explored and experimented with. This chapter has argued that the growth of the state preoccupied many of the authors of predictive fictions during the Second World War. Despite the progressive ideas that motivated those who believed that they could harness the power of government, dystopian authors expressed fundamental concerns about the destination of this process. Were people going to be able to maintain any level of autonomy in the face of this growth of the power of the state? Or was the state going to gradually take over all aspects of people's lives beginning, perhaps, with their working lives and ending up with their very understanding of reality.

These concerns sound rather extreme, but, as this chapter has demonstrated, they emerged out of the political and cultural context that also produced two of the most influential critiques of state power in *Nineteen-Eighty Four* and *The Road to Serfdom*. Totalitarian regimes in Germany, Russia and a variety of other countries across the world provided one impetus for the anxiety of these authors. Another was offered by the increasing power of central government in liberal democracies like Britain. The writers of predictive fiction were not offering a comprehensive critique of the role the state was taking on, rather they were expressing concerns with processes that were still unfolding around them. Nonetheless, many authors felt sufficiently concerned about the changes they observed or feared to begin to develop ways in which to resist them.

The growth of the state provided a focus for dystopias during the Second World War. Authors felt that they were writing at a key point in history when the world was undergoing a fundamental transformation. Critiques of propaganda and the manipulation of truth suggest that like the authors discussed in Chapter Five, dystopian

authors felt that humanity had travelled too far down the road of modernity. Whereas the writers of apocalypse fiction felt that modernity would result in the destruction of civilisation, dystopian writers argued that the innovations of modernity would allow the worst aspects of contemporary society to endure and develop. It was every citizen's duty to try and ensure this did not happen. However, these authors were unsure exactly how dystopia could be averted or resisted. Nonetheless it was vital that people tried and continued to try even when hope appeared to have long vanished.

## Chapter Seven: Jerusalem Triumphant

In 1941 JB Priestley felt able to state "there is no doubt that the general mood of this country favours progressive and fairly thorough reform, a remodelling of the whole political, economic and social structure."[1] Denis Healey remembered this utopian moment when interviewed in the 1990s. Healey recalled that during the war "it was all about ideals and building a better world".[2] This kind of wartime utopianism was pervasive amongst certain sections of the population, and while some, like Herbert Morrison, cautioned the utopian dreamers that "paradise will not be handed to you on a plate", it was clear that paradise was still what was being sought.[3] The Introduction to this study suggested that the historiography of the war which privileges the "People's War" version of wartime politics and asserts that the war saw a swing to the left across society which led to a post-war New Jerusalem, has increasingly come under attack. This chapter will demonstrate that while there was a large quantity of utopian fiction produced during the war, it frequently fails to fit into the kinds of ideological templates that we might expect. Whilst there were a number of utopias that advocated planning and even socialism, very few reproduced a society that would have been recognisable to Healey, Priestley, Morrison and the other advocates of the Labour Government's manifesto.

The story of wartime utopian fiction confounds our expectations revealing a vast range of dreams being dreamed. While there are themes that we expect to encounter like planning, socialism and technology, there are also less apparently obvious concerns that reoccur. The novels discuss religion and spirituality, muse on the desirability of rural simplicity and assert their own moral codes. The fictions divide imperfectly into those that look forward seeking utopia in the future and placing their faith in science and planning and those that hark backwards to an ideal located in the past. However, the division between progressive and regressive fictions is not absolute and is frequently transgressed within individual novels. JD Beresford, for example, uses planning to deliver a rural idyll whilst Chalmers Kearney's *Erone* (1943) integrates spiritualism and science.

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[1] J B Priestley, "Prologue to Planning", *Horizon* III, 15 (March 1941), p.169.
[2] Austin Mitchell, *Election '45: Reflections On The Revolution In Britain* (London: Bellew Publishing, 1995).

Where utopian fiction offers insights into the political culture of the period is when it moves away from the blanket certainties about socialism and central planning. The complete absence of any sustained engagement with the ideas of liberty and democracy, for example, is particularly revealing. While terms such as liberty and democracy are frequently employed to prove what is being fought for, there is no real sense of an ongoing debate about the nature of a democratic society. The societies that the writers of predictive fiction imagine are frequently meritocratic, planned and organised along rational or scientific lines. They are rarely democratic and any challenges to the utopian order are usually portrayed as reactionary and negative. So despite the rhetorical endorsement of freedom of speech and democracy predictive fiction imagined utopia as a place of uniformity and consensus.

The utopian imagination is profoundly influenced by religious and spiritual ideas about morality and personal conduct. The assumption that the state had the right to regulate capital was easily re-applied to sexual and moral conduct. The utopian revolution that was envisaged by the Labour Party dominates outside the home. However, inside the front door the socialists run out of ideas and conventional moralists and clerics have the last word. Chapter Six showed that this vision was fiercely resisted in some quarters, but as this chapter will show it was embraced in others. The utopian vision of the 1940s emerges as a conjunction of socialism and Protestant self-denial. Surprisingly, for a society experiencing rationing, there seem to have been no dreams of Epicurean orgies of self-fulfilment. This antiseptic vision of utopia led Orwell to conclude "not to live in a world like that, not to wake up in a hygienic garden suburb infested by naked schoolmarms, has actually become a conscious political motive."[4]

**Progressive utopias**

Utopian fiction was clearly engaging with wider social and political currents during the Second World War. Therefore, as might be expected, the period produced a large number of utopias that operated within the framework of the socialist left. Olaf Stapledon, for example, described a society based on socialist planning in *Darkness and the light* (1942), arguing that, "a world-wide society must inevitably be planned and

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[3] Stephen Fielding, "The Good War: 1939-1945", Nick Tiratsoo, *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.46.
[4] John Freeman (attributed to Orwell), "Can Socialists be Happy?", Davison, Peter, Angus, Ian and Davison, Sheila, *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume*

organised in every detail."[5] In one strand of Stapledon's novel he outlines a world government that institutes a co-operative, ethical socialist system based on democracy and plurality. These kinds of ideas, essentially those of the internationalist left, can be found in a variety of forms across the utopian fiction of the period.

In addition to the utopian novels of the war there are also a variety of texts that fall somewhere between the political pamphlet and the genuinely fictional utopia. Most notable amongst these utopian essays is Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn*. In the essay "The English Revolution" Orwell discusses the revolution that he believed to be happening in the early 1940s:

> The English Revolution started several years ago, and it began to gather momentum when the troops came back from Dunkirk. Like all else in England, it happens in a sleepy unwilling way, but it is happening. The war has speeded it up, but it has also increased, and desperately, the necessity for speed.[6]

For Orwell a utopia was about to be realised. The essay warns that unless action was taken quickly there was a danger that fascists would destroy the possibility of socialism forever, but the opportunity and aspiration to build the New Jerusalem remains.

Orwell had a clear vision of the form that utopia would take. His English socialism was an mix of radical socialism, technocratic liberalism and picture-postcard English tradition. He wrote of the revolution that;

> It will not be doctrinaire, nor even logical. It will abolish the House of Lords, but quite probably will not abolish the Monarchy. It will leave anachronism and loose ends everywhere, the judge in his ridiculous horsehair wig and the lion and the unicorn on the soldier's cap-buttons. It will group itself round the old Labour Party and its mass following will be in the Trade Unions, but it will draw into it most of the middle class and many of the younger sons of the bourgeoisie. Most of its directing brains will come from the new indeterminate class of skilled workers, technical experts, airmen, scientists, architects and journalists, the people who feel at home in the radio and ferro-concrete age. But it will never loose touch with the tradition of compromise and the belief in a law that is above the State. It will crush any open revolt promptly and cruelly, but it will interfere very little with the spoken and written word. Political parties with different names will still exist, revolutionary sects will still be publishing their

*Sixteen: I Have Tried To Tell the Truth 1943-1944* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), p.40.
[5] Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the light* (London: Methuen and co, 1942), p.6.
[6] George Orwell, "The English Revolution" in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941), p.87.

newspapers and making as little impression as ever. It will disestablish the Church, but will not persecute religion. It will retain a vague reverence for the Christian moral code, and from time to time will refer to England as "a Christian country".[7]

Orwell's essay, like the utopian novels of the period, therefore draws very heavily on the political vision of the left, but is also clearly engaged with what is perceived as centuries of tradition. This affection for the past is an important part of much utopian fiction even when it seems to be superficially progressive and modern.

Orwell was joined by a large number of other writers who wished to express their utopian leftism through essays and other prose forms. *Penguin New Writing* and *Horizon* both published essays and short stories throughout the war that argue for leftist reform.[8] For example, Robert Pagan argues for welfare state socialism in "A Dodo in every bus":

> If we are to insist that everyone has a roof over his head and food in his belly and a chance to work, we shall not therefore insist on smoothing human society down to a dead level. We shall seek rather to free the human individual by allowing for his elementary needs. We shall seek to prevent anybody feeling too good, or not good enough, to mix with his fellows.[9]

The desire to see an end to the excesses of the capitalist money system can be found again and again in the fiction and non-fiction of the period. This willingness to rehearse the project of the socialist left clearly extended beyond the usual suspects. Writers like Viscount Samuel who were outside of the mainstream left added their voice to what seemed to be a clamour for socialistic change.

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[7] Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p.113.

[8] *Horizon* ran a series on the war and the future which featured the following articles: JB Priestley, "Prelude to Planning", HG Wells, "Fundamental Realities - Advocating a World Federal Government", Julian Huxley, "Colonies", HN Brailsford, "The Balkans", Colonel J Wedgewood MP, "Anglo-American Co-operation", AL Rouse, "Democracy", Paul Lafitte, "Social Services", Herbert Read, "The Arts", Professor Dodds, "The Structure of Education", O Burleigh, "Public Schools". The magazine also featured articles on The Church, Elementary Education, Education in the Armed Forces, the Position of Scientists in Society, Civil Liberties and Architecture. The topics which the magazine covered form a fairly comprehensive list of left-wing and liberal concerns of the day. *Penguin New Writing* was less systematic about its program, but dealt with similar issues throughout the war.

[9] Robert Pagan, "A Dodo in every bus", *Penguin New Writing 4* (1941), p.99.

> Finally, about fifty years ago, it was decided to do away, at one stroke, with the little that was left of the old economic system. Now any commodity or service, which the country is able to supply, is given gratuitously.[10]

Yet, by the 1940s socialism was a word that was straining under the weight of the different meanings that were heaped on top of it. The myriad groups that sought to claim it as their own, or to accuse others of committing it, was so vast that that it almost ceased to describe anything. The 1939 Webster's Dictionary definition proves only that virtually all 1940s utopian thinkers could be accommodated under the term of socialism.

> 1. A political and economic theory of social organisation based on collective or governmental ownership and democratic management of the essential means of production and distribution of goods; also a policy or practice based on this theory. Socialism aims to replace competition by co-operation and profit seeking by social service, and to distribute income and social opportunity more equitably than they are now believed to be distributed. [11]

Within the parameters of what could be understood as socialism there clearly existed multifarious policies and possibilities. The most significant channel through which socialist thought flowed into the mainstream of British political culture was the Labour Party. However, the official Labour Party conception of socialism could be seen as narrow, bureaucratic and at times undemocratic. James Jupp contrasts the radical left's interest in workers' control with the Labour Party vision of "the public corporation and the control of nationalised industries through a national board of experienced administrators, not necessarily representative of the workers or professional staff of the industry."[12]

Where the utopian fiction of the period attempts to imagine socialism, it frequently reflects this adoption of a state-run and technocratically-managed society. The narrator of *An Unknown Land* notes: "The essence of the Bensal system of government is a general good will. It seemed to me that the country was run more like a Pall Mall Club than anything else."[13] For Samuel, the utopian society can only be achieved once the populace has developed the sophistication of the English liberal bourgeoisie. Just as the Labour Party of the 1930s and 1940s avoided radical ideas about workers' control, Samuel's utopia argued against ordinary people's ability to

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[10] Viscount Samuel, *An Unknown Land* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1942), p.52
[11] *Webster's New International Dictionary,* 2nd Edition (London: G. Bell, 1939).
[12] James Jupp, *The Radical Left In Britain: 1931-1941* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), p.158.

manage their society. Stefan, one of our guides round Bensalem, makes the point that their system is only viable with education: "If all your people had the educational standard of your professional classes you might hope to work successfully a system like ours. Otherwise not."[14]

In some ways, the utopian vision of authors like Samuel was in line with mainstream Labour Party and leftist thought. The novel's emphasis on public ownership and control of the major industries and land is clearly part of the same political strand as *Let Us Face the Future*, the 1945 Labour manifesto.[15] This tradition of supporting technocratic solutions to societies problems stretches back through British socialism at least as far as the foundation of the Labour Party. A 1906 Fabian pamphlet states, "we have always accepted government by a representative deliberating body controlling an expert bureaucracy as the appropriate public organisation for socialism."[16] However, it is also notable how close this utopia is to that of the British Union of Fascists. Coupland describes how the BUF dreamed of an "El Dorado of abundant quality goods at low prices, high wages and shorter hours, industrial harmony and the fullest growth that technology could permit." Mosley's rhetoric "became almost Wellsian - 'Science shall rule Great Britian'" and afford, "not only the means with which to conquer material environment but… probably also the means of controlling even the physical rhythms of civilisations."[17]

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was built on this parallel between socialism and fascism. His analysis was developing throughout the 1940s. In a review of HG Wells in 1941 he noted:

> Much of what Wells has imagined and worked for is physically there in Nazi Germany. The order, the planning, the state encouragement of science, the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes, are all there, but all in the service of ideas appropriate to the Stone Age. Science is fighting on the side of superstition.[18]

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[13] Samuel, p.71.

[14] Jupp, p.213.

[15] Ibid, p.52

[16] Stephen Yeo, "Socialism, the State and some Oppositional Englishness", Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p.341.

[17] Coupland, p.259.

[18] George Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State" in *Horizon*, IV, 20 (Aug 1941), p.137.

However, this kind of critique of the rhetoric and programme of the left is rare. Even in novels that are less sure about the value of a socialist transformation of society, there is still a clearer idea of what the leftist utopia might look like than any possible alternative.

Francis Askham's novel *The Heart Consumed* (1944) attempts to imagine a social democratic state that if not utopian, at least fulfils many of the immediate aims of the New Jerusalemers. The novel traces the development of society from the nineteenth to the end of the twenty-first century. We see this development through the eyes of the ghost of a nineteenth-century gentryman. The glimpses we get of twenty-first century society show a society where the distribution of wealth and power has been greatly equalised. The novel describes how Belamus, a power-hungry university administrator, attempts to create a new leadership for society and stop the rot caused by increasing egalitarianism:

> No system can be devised whereby all can enjoy complete equality; and here we come to an interesting problem, one which I admit has caused me much anxious thought. Is the degree of equality which has been attained wholly desirable? I have watched with very great distress the decay of moral standards in this country, the break up of family life, the diminution of the population. This is general and is limited to no particular income group. I have asked myself to what can this be attributed? And finally the conclusion to which I came was that what we most lacked was a directive.[19]

This novel attempts to map out the negative consequences of a more liberal, more equal society. Yet Askham's confusing decision to narrate the story through a nineteenth-century ghost obscures the more interesting issues that he seems to be examining. The reader sees a slide into decadence brought about by a progressive shift in society, but it is unclear as to whether the alternative of Belamus' meritocratic oligarchy is supposed to be an improvement.

Chalmers Kearney's *Erone* provides another good example of how difficult it is to fit utopian fiction into the historiographical writing around the orthodox political movements of the period. In many ways it depicts what is an almost archetypal leftist utopia. The utopian world shows up the irrationality of our social system and points to ways in which we could improve it. In a typical extract the everyman character, John Earthly, describes the way in which the transport system operates on Earth where

"hundreds get killed and thousands injured every year", contrasting this with the clean and safe public cycle paths that he and his Eronian love interest are walking along.[20]

The concerns of this novel are very much the bread and butter issues of the left. The reader encounters long dissertations about class, the money system, public transport and state ownership of industry. However, the novel also has other concerns that suggest that its persuasive task is more complex than advocating a Labour vote at the end of the war. Beyond its broad advocacy of a utopian socialist society, *Erone* has axes to grind about both deep bomb shelters and monorails as the future of public transport. The first is obviously an obsession that comes out of the immediate concerns of the war. This is reflected elsewhere in the novel for example in descriptions of civilian bombardment steeped in the language of apocalyptic despair.

> Whole terraces of five-floor houses were blown to dust and rubble, and hundreds of other dwellings all around were wrecked and ruined. There was scarcely a pane of glass left intact in the neighbourhood. People were killed and wounded in heaps, and others, physically uninjured but mentally stressed to breaking point, ran about the streets in terror, many in their night attire. Human nature could stand no more - it was the culminating night for many of weeks of incessant raids. A wholesale exodus took place the following day. We knew that we also must seek rest.[21]

The attempt to imagine a utopia is therefore given an added urgency by the circumstances of war. The message is clearly that the creation of utopia is all the more urgent because contemporary society is a dystopia. What is strange in this juxtaposition of war-torn Britain with utopian Erone is the combination of the long-term quasi-metaphysical aims of the utopian and the attempt to make short term points about the conduct of the war. Charmers Kearney wrote a pamphlet just before the outbreak of war that argued for the creation of deep shelters to protect the population against the coming war.[22] This, and his other obsession with the building of monorails, dominates the novel. Yet both of these issues were at most peripheral to the mainstream leftist political agenda, and hardly a condition for the initiation of the socialist commonwealth.

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[19] Francis Askham, *The Heart Consumed* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1944), p.172.
[20] Chalmers Kearney, *Erone* (Guilford: Bibbles Ltd, 1943), p.55.
[21] Ibid, p.235.
[22] Maude Royden, "Introduction", Chalmers Kearney, *Erone*.

The central persuasive thrust of the novel is not for moves towards an egalitarian socialist Britain, but for the building of underground monorail systems in which people can hide from German bombs. The political solution is taken largely as read, while the military and scientific issues dominate the novel. What the reader is presumably supposed to conclude is that scientific progress of this kind will propel Earth towards a utopian future. This obviously has a very complex series of relationships with the mainstream political discourse of the period. At times Kearney seems to be obsessed with monorails and have no purchase on the central issues that faced the left. On the other hand, his belief in scientific progress as essential to social advancement obviously has enormous resonance with the technocratic leadership of the Labour Party.

Like *Erone*, JD Beresford's *"What Dreams May Come....."* appears to be a textbook socialist society. Many of the contemporary preoccupations of the left, such as the distribution of, and reward for, work, are dealt with in a way consistent with the mainstream socialist tradition: "Men and women never ceased to take part in the active work of the community, which was shared on equal terms by all its members."[23] Yet *"What Dreams May Come....."* has a radical and unusual vision of the end point of the socialist project. The novel depicts a social order where the concept of ownership of land and private property of any kind no longer has any meaning. "The gardens, he noticed, differed from the enclosed plots that he had known in his earlier life, in that here there was no boundary of any sort between them, wall, fence or edging."[24] While this vision of society may not have been in the minds of the architects of the Labour project in the mid-forties, their manifesto clearly proclaimed "establishment of a Socialist Commonwealth of Great Britain - free, democratic, efficient, progressive, public-spirited, and its material resources organised in the service of the British people."[25] However, as the reader discovers that this utopian society will be managed by psychic consensus it becomes clear that Beresford's utopia is significantly different from anything imagined by the Labour Party.

From a cursory reading, most utopian fiction of the 1940s essentially bears out the "swing to the left" theory. Just as *Horizon* got published, Keynes got promoted, and the Labour Party elected - left wing utopias got written. However, this seemingly logical

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[23] Beresford, *"What Dreams"*, p.122.
[24] Ibid, p.131.
[25] *Let Us Face the Future*, quoted in RB McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election Of 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p.55.

association becomes more problematic when you look at the novels in detail. Utopian fiction is generally too idiosyncratic to serve the narrow interests of a particular political party or sect. The Whitehall planners had to think about priorities, special interest groups, convincing MPs, who was going to be elected next time, whether town halls would allow the re-development to happen in their area and so on. Writers of utopian fiction, however, had to face none of these issues - to think it was enough. This is not to suggest that utopias are idealistic and politicians and civil servants realistic - ideological considerations both determine what you seek to create and how you go about creating it along the way. Yet, both the material and ideological circumstances that mediate against reform can be bypassed if desired in fiction.

**Regressive utopias**

In Mea Allan's *Change of Heart* a new political sect, known as the "Admanites" grows up in Britain after the end of the war. The Admanites "seemed eager to hark back to a sort of Garden of Eden", and work with the Town and Country Planning Association "to provide gardens for town dwellers" in order to at least create an illusion of a pre-modern existence for the contemporary urbanite.[26] This aspiration to deurbanise was not confined to predictive fiction and found advocates at the heart of government as the Barlow Report of 1940 shows. The Barlow Report was a "Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population" and amongst other things, it concluded that there should be "decentralisation or dispersal, both of industries and industrial populations" from what it described as "congested urban areas".[27]

Next to a belief in technocratic socialism, then, stood a concern about modernity and a hankering for pre-industrial England. While at times these two ideological strands appear contradictory the same individuals and agencies frequently reconciled them. The government frequently saw planning of the kind advocated by the Barlow Report and the later Scott Report (1942) as the way to ensure the maintenance of the "green and pleasant land".[28] The tools of the modern state were being considered as a way of maintaining the rural against the urban, "the steel, the concrete, the aeroplanes" were clearly not the only destination point for utopia.

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[26] Mea Allan, *Change of Heart* (London: George G Harrap and Co.Ltd, 1943), p.120.
[27] Harold L Smith, *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp.101-102.
[28] Ibid, pp.102-103.

In *The Last Man* Alfred Noyes constructs utopia around a Franciscan Monastery. "They had excellent vineyards, and fields of wheat, and plenty of experienced men and women to cultivate them... Please God they would never be caught in the mechanical wheels of the industrial system."[29] For Noyes utopia is simplicity, rural life and the opportunity for spiritual contemplation. While Noyes' vision was clearly more extreme than many others it picked up on "a love of what is loosely called 'nature'" which Orwell argued in 1944 was "very widespread in England, cutting across age-groups and even class-distinctions, and attaining in some people an almost mystical intensity".[30] Yet Orwell alleged that this version of the rural idyll had a peculiarly urban construction as "those who really have to deal with nature have no cause to love it."[31]

Chapter Two commented on the idealisation of "nature" and the rural that could be found in representations of England during the war. When it came to crafting utopias this fetish for the countryside could be given free rein and authors could create happy societies of noble savages and spiritual beings communing with the earth. CS Lewis' pre-war *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) provides an example of the enthusiasm for locating utopias in pre-modern and pre-urban settings. Malacandra is an ideal world without any significant urban formations in which everyone (or everything) knows its place and is content with it. The Sorns think, the Hrossa hunt and sing, and the Pfifltriggi make things. Their joint spiritual overseer benignly, but absolutely, rules all of them. In Malacandra Lewis creates a kind of Merry England in space. As in many of the invasion fictions, true social happiness and harmony is to be found in an organic, spiritual, but highly rigid class society. Lewis's utopia is unusual in the lack of interest it has in questions of social organisation, so we don't see in detail how Malacandran society operates. Yet, it is clear that it is hierarchical and, like the monastery in *The Last Man*, run along theocratic lines.

The pre-modern aspects of Lewis' presentation of utopia are extended in his wartime novel *Perelandra* (1943). The early feudal social relations of *Out of the Silent Planet* have been dissolved and replaced with a pre-historic Venusian version of the Garden of Eden. The novel's utopia exists without any recognisable form of state or social code other than a general female willingness to submit to men. The message is

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[29] Alfred Noyes, *The Last Man* (London: John Murray, 1940), p.270.
[30] Christopher Hitchens, *Orwell's Victory* (London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 2002), p.94.
[31] Ibid, p.94.

clearly that the ideal form of human existence can be achieved without any social or political formations. Every human innovation after the Garden of Eden is corrupted and corrupting and utopia can correspondingly be found in a return to simplicity.

It is not just the topography of pre-industrial Britain that is being sought in many of these novels, but a radically different ideological order. While in some novels this return to the earth is part of a hankering for feudal or even pre-feudal social relations, in others it is compatible with some form of socialism. In *"What Dreams May Come…"*, the future socialist society returns to an innocent quasi-primitive state with people fasting on nuts and berries and communicating psychically.[32] However, for writers like CS Lewis and Alfred Noyes a pre-industrial utopia was articulated as part of a conservative ideology antagonistic to the socialism that we can find in more progressive utopian fiction. The idea of the simple pre-modern utopia could therefore take on different political meanings when employed by different authors, but the frequency with which it was used alerts us to wider social and political concerns about modernity and urbanisation.

**God's country**

The aspiration towards some kind of planned socialist future and the yearning for a simpler more organic past existed side by side in wartime predictive fiction. At times these two strands were perceived to be contradictory, but more frequently authors attempted to find some meeting point between these ideological elements. The portrait painter and mystic Vera Stanley Alder is particularly successful in finding a way to join both technological and social progress with a mystic spirituality:[33]

> Men begin the power lesson in the physical world, with the controlling of money, property and labour. Later they gain power over the emotional world. Both these phases are unstable. Finally they gain power by using 'hypnotism', or the mental rays, thus beginning to employ either 'black' or 'white' magic.[34]

While not all futuristic utopianists are as idiosyncratic as Vera Stanley Alder, her extended predictive essay *The Fifth Dimension And The Future of Mankind* (1940)

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[32] JD Beresford, *"What Dreams May Come..."* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1941), p.162.

[33] SF Heart, "recommended reading list for wannabe hippies", *SF Heart,* http://www.sfheart.com/hippiebooks.html (4th November 2001).

[34] Vera Stanley Alder, *The Fifth Dimension And The Future of Mankind* (London: Rider and Co, 1940), p.214.

combines all of the elements that usually comprise the utopian vision. Stanley Alder imagines a society reformed along socialistic lines, humanity improved with psychically-and-eugenically inspired science and a growth in the practice and understanding of Christianity. Her writing reads like a peculiar synthesis of the ideas of CS Lewis and HG Wells, solving all of the problems faced by society, humanity and the spiritual plane through her interpretation of "the message and purpose of Deity as it speaks through science."[35]

> In those rapturous moments it was given to me to know how and when this great event would take place - the climax of this total war of Good against Evil. It will be accomplished first by individual, then by universal change of consciousness. In that vital moment we ourselves and all things will be lifted up and changed. Old things will become new; ugliness will be transformed into beauty; sickness and suffering and poverty will melt away; sorrow and separation will be no more: "For the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."[36]

While Stanley Alder combines the rhetoric of Christian tradition and social and technological advancement with particular gusto, her writing was in no way unique. Charmers Kearney's *Erone* also situates Christianity at the centre of the utopian society. John Earthly's exploration of Erone leads him to a huge building in the middle of the capital city that he initially assumes to be the centre of their civil society:

> We ascended the steps leading to the great Dome, and entered the building. The sunlight filtered through the amber-coloured glass of the windows, flooding the great internal space with soft rich golden light. Instinctively I removed my hat, I felt I trod on holy ground. I was right. The Professor had already removed his. This was not a great parliamentary edifice as I had expected, it was the Temple of God.[37]

The happiness and satisfaction found on Erone come not from the equality of wages, the scientific discoveries, the peace or even from the monorail system. The Eronians have found utopia because they have found God:

> I knew then that marvellous as was the exterior life on this giant planet, it had behind it something still more wonderful on the spiritual plane. That was what was wrong with us on Earth - we had lost our spiritual basis, almost.[38]

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[35] Ibid, p.37.
[36] Kearney, p.253.
[37] Kearney, p.89.
[38] Ibid, p.90

How radical Christianity fits into the progressive and Labour movements has been the subject of endless debate that it would be unproductive to rehash. The idea that the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marx has become a cliché.[39] Laski, a mainstream left wing figure, wrote in the 1940s that 'nothing less than a revolution in the spirit of man is necessary if we are to enter the Kingdom of Peace as our rightful inheritance"[40] Yet, Laski's biblically inspired utopianism had at most a marginal impact on the practical plans of the Labour Party. These values did emerge in other places, however, such as in the Common Wealth's Christian Socialism.[41] Just as the dreams of a rural garden city could be combined in places with the aspiration for socialism, so too could the whole tradition of religious utopianism. The predictive fictions of the 1940s reveal a rich and dynamic interaction between politics and various forms of spirituality.

This Christian Utopianism appeared in an even more metaphysical form in J Howard Whitehouse's *Visit to Utopia* (1939).

> Utopia was based upon the final truth that all progress was made in the mind and spirit of man. The disciples of Christ, for instance, were armed only with spiritual weapons. They were a tiny group in a world of violence. Yet they conquered.[42]

The utopian task was often personal and spiritual rather than collective and political. Religion's power to re-order society for the better was a frequent theme in the utopian fiction of the period and echoes in novels such as Herbert Best's *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* (1940) and Storm Jameson's *Then We Shall Hear Singing* (1942) as well as the fiction of Noyes and Lewis. The socialist hegemony that appears to dominate utopian fiction at first glance is therefore considerably less homogenous than it first appears. The religious vision of utopia was still at least as important as the secular one during the 1940s.

**Women in utopia**

The role women were to have in the utopian society is not answered by reference to the basic tenets of socialism or indeed in any straightforward way by consultation of

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[39] See for example RF Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes 1850-1900* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1954).
[40] Cited in Correlli Barnett, *The Audit Of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain As a Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.17.
[41] See Appendix Two.
[42] J Howard Whitehouse, *Visit to Utopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p.9.

the Bible. Women were in fact noticeably absent as both authors and characters in utopian fiction. So, what did the utopian imagination of the Second World War hold in store for women?

There is a clear acknowledgement in most utopian fiction that there are inequalities born out of the gendered division of labour. Rescuing the woman from the kitchen and the drudgery of cleaning is a small but frequent component of the wish lists produced in the period. "The air everywhere being clean, no fuel being burnt, and most of the domestic work mechanised, the age-long battle of women against dirt has resulted here in an easy victory."[43] However, addressing this "age-long battle of women" does not require in this case any challenge to the inequality inherent in the division of labour. Bartol, our guide in Bensalem says of his wife, "Her Duty, as with most married women, is looking after the house and household."[44] Scientific innovation therefore had an important role to play in easing the oppression of women, but men had little to offer in this area.

Women's roles are not generally seen as being socially constructed, rather they are displayed as something that which will endure even when social relations have been revolutionised in other respects. In *Darkness and the Light*:

> With the aid of communal meals, communal nurseries and labour-saving devices within the home, the mothers were freed and yet the home was preserved as the fundamental unit of social life. All girls were trained in motherhood.[45]

Stapledon, like many other utopianists of the period, was as conservative in his gender politics as he was radical in his social politics. *Darkness and the Light* shows a belief in the preservation of traditional moral values but puts a progressive and collective spin on them.

CS Lewis' utopian retelling of the story of Genesis in *Perelandra* contains perhaps the most explicit theorisation of gender roles in the utopian fiction of the period. Lewis examines the issue of gender through his human archetypes, re-inventions of Adam and Eve, who he calls the Green Lady and the King. When Ransom, the novel's protagonist, discovers the Green Lady she is innocent and accepts without

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[43] Samuel, p.63.
[44] Ibid, p.59.

question that she is and should be subservient to the King. The Green Lady says "The King is always older than I, and about all things".[46] Older is the Perelandran term for wiser and more experienced.

This vision of society as inherently and originally patriarchal is further endorsed when the devil tries to tempt the Green Lady. The devil tells stories about women facing persecution using the language of gender equality and emotional injustice to try and convince the Green Lady to transgress and abandon her ordained subservience to man and God.

> The heroines of the stories seemed all to have suffered a great deal – they had been oppressed by fathers, cast off by husbands, deserted by lovers. Their children had risen up against them and society had driven them out. ……Each one of these women had stood forth alone and braved a terrible risk for her child, her lover, or her people. Each had been misunderstood, reviled and persecuted: but each also magnificently vindicated by the event. The precise details were often not very easy to follow. Ransom had more than a suspicion that many of these noble pioneers had been what in ordinary terrestrial speech we call witches or perverts.[47]

Lewis' equates female courage and independence with perversion and black magic. The level of patriarchal misogyny in this novel seems almost out of date amongst the other representation of femininity in Second World War fiction. With the exception of the odd mysterious, beautiful and unscrupulous German double-agent the independence of women is rarely represented as such a threat. Lewis dismisses independent women struggling against being "misunderstood, reviled and persecuted" as effectively agents of the devil.

Far more common than Lewis' Christian misogyny was a more positive representation of different spheres. The feminist movement was itself split between those who, as Sheila Rowbotham says, rejected a "man-made way of living and a man-made way of seeing" and the majority of feminists to whom feminism "meant more reforms, more welfare and equal pay".[48] In other words, was feminism simply to be

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[45] Olaf Stapledon, *Darkness and the Light* (London: Methuen and co, 1942), p.136.
[46] CS Lewis, *Perelandra*, reprinted in CS Lewis, *The Cosmic Trilogy* (London: The Bodley Head and Pan Books, 1989), p.237. First published by John Lane (The Bodley Head), 1943.
[47] Lewis, *Perelandra*, p.257.
[48] Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London: Virago, 1978), p.163.

about a basic legal equality with men or to be about advancing something different and more particularly female? As Chapter Two's commentary on Storm Jameson showed this radical feminism could sometimes mirror aspects of different spheres conservatism in its insistence on the uniqueness of women. For the most part, however, the utopian authors of the 1940s were generally not amongst the most radical commentators on the issue of gender. Just as the dystopian authors discussed in Chapter Six feared that the state would interfere with women's domestic role, utopian authors repeatedly assert that a women's place is in the home. This anxiety about the changing role of women was a reaction to an increasingly assertive female populace that was leaving the domestic sphere and moving closer to the heart of the patriarchal economy.

*Figure 7.1*



Bill Carrothers, *World War II Posters*, http://carrothers.com/billyboy/posters.htm (August 12, 1999).

This picture of state sponsored assertive femininity contrasts remarkably with the patriarchal agenda of Second World War utopian fiction. The state may have found it temporarily expedient to move away from the different spheres ideology. However Lewis and his contemporaries mounted a counter-attack through culture:

> At all events what Ransom saw at that moment was the real meaning of gender. Everyone must sometimes have wondered why in nearly all tongues certain inanimate objects are masculine and others are feminine. What is masculine about a mountain or feminine about certain trees? Ransom has cured me of believing that this a purely morphological phenomenon, depending on the form of the word. Still less is gender an imaginative extension of sex. Our ancestors did not make mountains masculine because they projected male characteristics into them. The real process is the reverse. Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would be simply meaningless. Masculine is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female of organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine. Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity. All this Ransom saw, as it were, with his own eyes. The two white creatures were sexless. But he of Malacandra was masculine (not male); she of Perelandra was feminine (not female) …..On Mars the very forests are of stone; in Venus the lands swim.[49]

As John Grey would put it fifty years later "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus".[50]


Discussions of the role of women and their place in society occasionally move beyond the domestic into the sexual sphere. George Borodin's *Peace In Nobody's Time* is perhaps not the most typical of utopian fictions of the period because it has a fairly relaxed attitude to female sexuality. In *Peace In Nobody's Time* the virgin/whore binary opposition is replaced with a virgin/"tart with a heart" opposition. Women are shown to exercise their sexuality and the novel refuses to demonise them for it. However, Princess Precious, the novel's intelligent, attractive heroine remains a virgin until she marries at the end of the novel.

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[49] Lewis, *Perelandra*, p.327-8.

[50] John Grey, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships* (London: Thorsons, 1993).

*Peace In Nobody's Time* describes the attempt by a benevolent dictator to build a utopia. Brotherby, the dictator, convenes a government that includes representatives from all of the non-establishment political factions. Brotherby also employs the actress Marie Limpet as a co-opted representative for women with loose morals. Miss Fiona Platt the leader of The Christian Spinsters' Bread or Husbands League, a kind of parodic feminist group, and Mr Hale Vivarama of the Leaderelites, a satire on fascist parties, both complain;

> "I am not quite sure. Your Excellency," she remarked acidly, "whether this woman is quite the type my association would favour for bringing in reforms. But, of course, you know best."
>
> Mr Hale Vivarama was also unimpressed.
>
> "Too much lipstick, Your Excellency. What she needs is a baby......babies......The destiny of woman, their glorious destiny, to bear sons for the Fatherland."
>
> "Surely a woman who uses lipstick can have a baby?" said James reprovingly.
>
> "And I don't see how she can make sure of having sons. Anyway, I overrule your objection. The Common Man must have beauty in the house and that applies to people as well as wallpaper."[51]

Brotherby's party is called the Common Man Party and this gender specific title is perhaps revealing about what remains a rather misty utopian programme. Women in George Borodin's utopia are there to look pretty and to perform their domestic role. In his acceptance of more liberal sexuality and even in his decision to acknowledge both that women exist and that they organise politically Borodin is unlike many of his contemporary utopianists. However, his vision of women's position in the utopian society fails to engage with any of the patriarchal prejudice that existed in 1940s Britain.

The only significant deviation from the constant assertion of gender determinist polemics is in Beresford's *"What Dreams May Come...."*. The world of *"What Dreams May Come..."* is a sexless utopia where the existence of two genders is increasingly outmoded.

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[51] George Borodin, *Peace In Nobody's Time* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1944), p.87.

> Judged by the criticisms of the old world, she could not have been regarded as a type of feminine beauty. The sexual characteristics of all those who were in the room were far less marked than in what he was already beginning to think of as primitive man, and in one or two cases he was unsure whether the student was male or female.[52]

There is no apparent distinction between the male and female inhabitants of the world Beresford imagines. Men and women do the same jobs, have the same insipid personalities and look ever more alike.

*"What Dreams May Come..."* could hardly be seen as a feminist answer to the more patriarchal utopias already detailed. Beresford seeks to dissolve the issue of gender alongside all the other aspects of humanity that he dislikes or disapproves of. The utopia of his novel is not one in which the men and women of contemporary Britain could have lived. However, despite his lack of engagement with contemporary material and political reality, Beresford was unique amongst the period's utopians in deconstructing the hierarchy of gender.

## What do you do in utopia on a Saturday night?

> Has it ever struck you that in all the dreary Utopias which world prophets have devised not a single desiccated hygienically clothed inhabitant has ever thought of making a joke? In all the Erewhons and Brave New Worlds and Things to Come and Back to Methuselahs not a laugh among the whole solemn long-faced gang.[53]

One of the central problems that the reader of utopias encounters is the extremely unappealing nature of the majority of utopian societies. While the purpose of utopian writing is persuasive, most of the authors seem to be spectacularly unsuccessful in creating a world where anyone would want to live. The high minded and puritanical humourlessness of novels such as *"What Dreams May Come...."* and *Erone* hardly seem a good basis on which to persuade people that reform is necessary and desirable.

Utopian writing, for example, has little time for alcohol. In JD Beresford's *A Common Enemy*, the gains that are made by the progressive government include the prohibition of alcohol. Mallock, the caricatured rapacious industrialist, tries to repeal prohibition as part of a cynical attempt to re-introduce the pre-apocalyptic industrial capitalist system. The message in this and many other similar novels is clear. The state

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[52] Beresford, *What Dream*, p.119.

[53] Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1941), p.11.

or collective must act where necessary to prevent this kind of social degeneration from undermining the progressive political project. An anti-libertarian slant can be found repeatedly in the utopian visions of the period. The advocation of state power in the economic sphere is logically extended to individual lifestyle decisions to ensure the ultimate aims of a progressively reformed society. However, the state is only rarely required to act due to the population's high levels of contentment and total internalisation of the moral and political framework of the utopian society.

The anti-libertarianism of utopians was further demonstrated in attitudes to sexuality. *An Unknown Land* constructs a strong defence of the nuclear family. Despite the countless scientific, social and spiritual advances that have been made by Bensalem society, it is still as reliant on the nuclear family as unreformed capitalist Britain:

> To the family as an institution they attach the highest importance. They regard a family home as the only right environment for childhood. They look upon stable marriage as the chief safeguard against sexual promiscuity for which they have a profound contempt. There are no divorces; when domestic differences arise, the parties find a way to settle them, since they know that they have to be settled.[54]

It is interesting to note what the institution of the family is guarding against in this novel. The family does not exist to promote social stability or to meet the welfare needs that the state cannot or will not undertake. For Samuel the family exists to effectively socialise children and to insure against the spread of "sexual promiscuity". GM Svevdlor, a prominent Soviet commentator on family law, echoed this conception of the role of the family. He wrote that the family was "the very basis of society. The stronger the family becomes, so much stronger the society will be as a whole. By strengthening the family the state is strengthening itself, increasing its own might."[55]

This limited view of the nature and role of the family was not representative of established sociological and anthropological thinking on the nature of the family and its responsiveness to changes in the political economy. Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, originally written in 1884 and published in English in 1942, drew on available scientific and anthropological writings by authors such as Darwin and Lewis H Morgan. His observation that familial organisation is dynamic and

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[54] Samuel, p.75
[55] Inkeles, p.217.

changes in relationship to social and material circumstances could have opened a line of utopian enquiry which was noticeably not taken up.[56]

Some authors did attempt to imagine how familial organisation could be transformed in a utopian society; the trend is always away from the passionate towards the intellectual. So, while Vera Stanley Alder imagined a transformation in family organisation in her utopian programme *The Fifth Dimension And The Future of Mankind*, it was a movement towards ever greater uniformity.

> Although the personal and possessive attitude of parenthood will disappear, together with its lack of understanding, an intense interest and comradeship will take its place, together with a type of love with which we are not yet familiar.[57]

However, it is important to note that in this as in other ideas about the transformation of utopian morality, the new moral code is rarely enforced by the state. There is no need for the state or the utopian society to act as people conform universally to the moral and behavioural code. In *The Fifth Dimension And The Future of Mankind* the rejection of sexuality is explained by recourse a kind of psycho-analytic Marxism.

> It may be thought that the improvement in conditions will send up the birth-rate to staggering proportions. On the contrary, a quite other situation will arise. To begin with, the fact that for the first time people's creative and artistic instincts are being thoroughly aroused and given full scope and appreciation will tend to make them lead naturally far more continent lives. Sexual satisfaction will no longer be one of the few comforts of the poor, nor the resource of the unfulfilled lives of the rich. There will no longer be the need to breed plentifully for cannon fodder, nor for factory fodder! The old-time capitalist employer will not exist under the new system.[58]

People will exercise restraint in their sexual practices partially because they will have better things to do and partly because without war-mongering capitalism there will be no need for an ever-growing population.

In *"What Dreams May Come…"* David discusses what he has seen in utopia with the Bishop of Linfield. While the liberal Bishop is interested in what David says he argues that this vision of utopia would not attract many people.

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[56] Fredrick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1972).
[57] Stanley Alder, p.197.
[58] Ibid, p.112.

> "I admit there is something in what you've been saying - much of it, by the way, no more than a slightly altered version of Christian teaching. And your Utopia sounds a happy and peaceful one. But I know very few people who would be willing to change it for the life they are, at present, living. They would describe it, I fancy, as inhuman."

> "Yes, my own mother did," David said. "Actually 'human', in that sense, means animal. There was hardly a trace of the animal passions and appetites among the people of Oion."[59]

Beresford's dismissal of sex, alcohol and other physical pleasures, fit in with attitudes that have a long history on the left. For example, early in the Russian Revolution there was considerable discussion of radical and libertarian attitudes to sexuality and familial relations. Alexandra Kollontai wrote that "the family is ceasing to be a necessity"; however, by 1936, authoritarian policy was becoming dominant and the state moved to restrict abortion and divorce.[60] This process of "strengthening the family" intensified in the Soviet Union throughout the war and in its aftermath.

The puritanical prescriptiveness that can be found in Second World War fiction also had little to do with the actuality of familial and sexual relations as they were developing during wartime. Gillian Swanson notes that the traditional concepts of gendered behaviour and familial organisation were put under increased pressure during the war period.

> Traditional concepts of femininity were also challenged by the increasing recognition of non-familial sexual cultures in wartime and post-war Britain. The rise in illegitimate births, the incidence of venereal diseases and divorce brought the concept of a maternal femininity that was passive chaste, unworldly and tied to domestic life under pressure.[61]

The urge to defend the gender status quo against its seeming decay was therefore not confined to the politically conservative. A dynamic transformation of social and sexual behaviour occurred around the pressure of evacuation, conscription and a limited reorganisation of the gendered basis of labour and consumer power. These material changes were not simply affirmed in literature and culture but challenged, vilified and

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[59] Ibid, p.221.

[60] Alex Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp.214-215.

[61] Gillian Swanson, "'So much money and so little to spend it on': morale, consumption and sexuality", Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson, *Nationalizing Femininity:*

reinvented. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson argue that the war was, "both a catalyst for changes already in the making and an incitement of energies directed towards preserving traditional gender differences."[62]

HG Wells comments on the anti-sex tendency of utopian thinkers in *Babes In The Darkling Wood*. Gemini outlines an American naturalist's theory that sex gets in the way of progress. His lover Stella reacts with understandable ire at this suggestion and challenges the theory.

> "I don't believe very much in your great American naturalist," said Stella. " No. His attitude, Gemini, is a common male attitude. The attitude of a middle-aged bachelor who goes round the corner to a brothel and then regrets the risk and expense and waste of time, and wishes it didn't have to happen. The man pretending he's a mighty inventor, genius, administrator and all that, and that sex is a terrible interruption. If only the women would leave him alone."[63]

Wells is perceptive about the misogyny and conservatism underlying the sexual prohibition we find in utopian fiction. While the structure of the state and the economy may have been up for debate personal and sexual codes continued to be defended. Despite the apparent radicalism of utopian writers most were unable to conceive of making a break with mainstream Christian morality.

## Conflicts within utopia

The prescriptiveness of utopian fiction sets up the possibility for extensive conflict with unhappy, persecuted or degenerate minorities. However this potential conflict is never explored in any depth. The possibility that people will not submit to the socialist or primitive society or conform to the utopia's spiritual or moral beliefs is not acknowledged and thus the possibility of dissent is negated.

For most utopians, however, the idea that the state will intervene to forcibly implement its will is anathema. There is simply no need to outlaw behavioural patterns in a utopian world such as that depicted in *"What Dreams May Come..."* despite its radical otherness. The state does not need to provide a normalising framework for

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*Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.70.

[62] Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson, "Introduction", Gledhill and Swanson, p.3.

[63] HG Wells, *Babes In The Darkling Wood* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1940), p.80.

behaviour as its values have been internalised. Viscount Samuel is actually quite explicit in his critique of political systems that rely heavily on the state.

> Nor do they for a moment accept the political philosophy which sees in "the State" an element that should be dominant in human societies-something which is real in itself, great and august, entitled to general devotion and unquestioning obedience.[64]

However, reading against the grain of Samuel's work, we can see that the reason there is no need for a complex state organisation is because Bensalem experiences no crime, anti-social behaviour, problems of scarcity or international crisis. Utopias of this kind often rely on a set of internalised behavioural patterns rather than a system of social organisation, but this requires that no individual contravenes the internalised rule book.

In *"What Dreams May Come…"* decisions are made by a Council that initially appears to be a combination of a legislative and judicial chamber, but the reader quickly discovers is actually a kind of psychic union where decisions are taken by a collective consciousness.[65] It is difficult to know how to locate the psychic science fictional elements that can be found in this novel and others like *The Fifth Dimension And The Future of Mankind* within a meaningful political framework. It would be possible to see this as Beresford simply relegating his novel to the level of fantasy. His utopia is brought about by a political re-alignment, but it is also created by the human race taking control of its evolution and transforming into an asexual, psychic super-race. Whether Beresford believes that this is likely or not is irrelevant as the majority of readers would be unlikely to be politically influenced in any significant fashion by such a fantastical proposition.

It is perhaps more fruitful to examine Beresford's depiction of the "One Mind" as a metaphor for a particular conception of how a world based on more collective forms of social organisation might operate. Beresford's utopia has no room for individuality, in many ways endorsing the regimentation of the Nazi and Soviet systems.

> Look what that singleness of purpose has done for the Nazis. It's the foul purpose of brutal, indiscriminate slaughter and its object is domination. I loathe

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[64] Samuel, p.72.
[65] Beresford, *"What Dreams"*, p.130.

it from the bottom of my heart. But it's their unity and the singleness of idea that has made them so strong a force.[66]

This vision of the socialist society as one where order and uniformity dominate obviously has some negative connotations that become more apparent in one of Beresford's other wartime novels, *A Common Enemy*. In *A Common Enemy*, Mr Campion, the novel's hero, set off to establish a utopian oligarchy: "A nominal democracy had been tried and had failed. The new rule would be government by the few, avoiding the dangers of Dictatorship by a single mind."[67] This attitude towards democracy was relatively common in the utopian fiction produced during the war. Despite the centrality of the reformist tradition to the utopian imagination of the period, the more progressive democratic elements of that tradition are often ignored.

In *Erone* the word democracy is never used to describe the utopian system. The way in which industry on Erone is managed can perhaps be taken to be indicative of other aspects of the utopian system. Mr Tinnos is a manager of a very large plant that has been built through his innovation. Although he does not own the plant, it is equated with him:

> Mr Tinnos was regarded affectionately as the father of a very large family might be regarded. Behind his back they called him "Daddy" and there was not a man or girl in all the works who would not jump at the chance of doing something special to help or please him.[68]

In this technocratic and patrician conception of utopia we can perhaps find echoes of the state organisation of Britain in the 1940s. From the point at which Churchill became prime minister on 10th May 1940 the major political parties and the Communist Party declared a political truce. In addition to this, the British Union of Fascists was banned. This situation was compounded by the decision to suspend the next general election until the end of hostilities. Just as in utopian fiction, the democratic process was seen during the war as a distraction from the efficient working of the technocratic state.

The requirements of fighting a total war enabled the government to legitimise a variety of undemocratic manoeuvres. As Neil Stammers notes: "Throughout the war, government maintained that certain forms of criticism and opinion were irresponsible

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[66] Ibid, p.220.
[67] J.D. Beresford, *A Common Enemy*, p.108.
[68] Kearney, p.95.

and could reasonably be curtailed. It was pronounced illegitimate to try to influence public opinion in a manner prejudicial to the war effort, or to systematically ferment opposition to the war."[69] The government was challenged in a variety of ways, through strikes, demonstrations and through the criticisms about government policy articulated in the pages of the press and popular magazines.[70] Nonetheless, the government was empowered to defend itself by calling upon the enormous propaganda resources and other more direct forms of state power that it had built up to create a hegemony in favour the war. This hegemonic administration was underpinned by a managerial and technocratic political project. The wartime government was not simply a coalition of the political parties. Professional politicians were joined by trade union leaders, business men, and civil servants.[71] The wartime executive was comprised of a variety of representatives of sectional interests. Relatively few of its members could claim to be the direct and elected representatives of the people. Even those who had been elected had been in the Commons for so long that their mandate was becoming exceedingly threadbare.

The wartime oligarchy was no mere accident of fate or hostage to fortune. Many politicians and political thinkers were arguing that government could be more effective if unfettered by party squabbling. Labour MP Manny Shinwell noted that, when forced to work together, he and the other members of the cross-party group on post-war reform could find much common ground.

> On general political issues we were poles apart, but on the need for economic planning, Commonwealth development, the rehabilitation of industry, and on social welfare we were largely in agreement.[72]

Exactly what issues separated Manny and his Tory and Liberal counter-parts is unclear. If it was not the economy, the Commonwealth, industrial policy or the welfare state, what was left? However, it is obvious that there was a degree of ideological convergence across the parliamentary spectrum. This is not necessarily to say that the Conservatives were moving left and the Labour Party right - rather this convergence

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[69] Neil Stammers, *Civil Liberties In Britain During The 2nd World War: A Political Study* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.233.
[70] Harold L Smith, *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp.10, 12, 16, 26.
[71] G.R. Searle, *Country Before Party: Coalition and the Idea of National Government in Modern Britain, 1885-1987* (London: Longman, 1995), pp.202-203.
[72] Ibid, p.215.

could be attributed towards a growing understanding of and willingness to use the power of the state. Government intervention in the economy via Keynesian mechanisms such as increased and targeted public spending had little to do with socialism as those on the radical left would have understood it. Likewise, the rescue of a few struggling industries through the nationalisation programme did not necessarily signal a weakening in the Conservative Party's defence of the principle of private ownership. These measures were conceived as the pragmatic interventions of rational planners, rather than the beginning of a new social system.

In *Peace In Nobody's Time*, the novel's hero Brotherby "aimed only at removing inequalities and putting the Common Man in charge of his own affairs instead of leaving them at the mercy of experts and professors."[73] Yet despite the democratic ring to this statement the novel has little time for democracy. Brotherby's decision to suspend the democratic process when he becomes ruler of Bolonia is seen as a brave stroke against the bureaucrats and capitalists who have blighted Bolonian society.

> So momentous a step as the dissolution of the Legislature and the introduction of a government by decree might have been expected to rouse a storm in Bolonia; but the Bolonians have a sturdy dislike of political subtleties and most of them turn to the sports pages before they glance at the political news of the day in their papers. *The Hours* lamented in sesquipedalian prose what it termed "this unprecedented thrust at the established constitutional rights of Bolonia - a thrust that can be construed only as the first blow in the butchery of Liberty"; but no one, with the exception of a few 'Letters to the Editor' addicts, took any notice. There was only one demonstration when a handful of political maniacs marched through the administrative part of Brooze and shouted: "Give us back our Legislature." The police had no difficulty in dealing with these dangerous revolutionary reactionaries. They broke before the stern faces of authority and were peacefully conducted back to the Bourse, the National Bank of Bolonia, and the financial centre of the capital, the haunts in Bolonia as elsewhere of all true democratic ardour.[74]

Utopia is not be achieved by the participation of the populace in the political and democratic system. Rather politics is seen as something distasteful, corrupted and corrupting. Brotherby's utopia is a utopia of the ordinary. "In the meantime Bolonia knew peace, prosperity and happiness. Crops and families multiplied; more motor-cars dashed about ever wider roads; a great new State cemetery, known as Brotherby's Pride,

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[73] Borodin, p.106
[74] Ibid, p.94.

was opened; the football season was extended to last all the year round."[75] Once the utopia has been achieved it is necessary to lay politics to rest. Brotherby admits himself to an asylum and allows his dictatorial and political tendencies to be removed. Nonetheless, the novels message is clear, if you want to get things done, you have got to do without democracy. This parallels the wartime government's attitude to democracy who, Neil Stammers argues, "were involved in a process designed to stifle forms of political opposition more or less continuously throughout the war."[76]

A consistent factor in all of the conceptions of the utopian world is the remoteness of the political process from the populace as a whole. Societies are established, planned and administered. They are not challenged and changed for better or worse. The 1940s conception of utopia is the society in stasis. Unchanging and unchangeable, once utopia has been achieved it can never be questioned. "*What Dreams May Come …*" is explicit in its denial of the possibility of any kind of creative, positive or even tolerable dissent.

> It was the case of a young man who had become separated, through suffering the illusion that he had a personal importance quite apart from the community. He became critical of our life and wanted to change it for something that he said would be much better, more exciting and adventurous... It was becoming impossible for us to communicate with him so we shut him off altogether... When he was separated from the influence of Mind and no longer supported by our thoughts, he very quickly weakened and died.[77]

A young person lusting after excitement and adventure can only be contained through complete exclusion and ultimately through death. The widespread refusal to admit that challenges to utopian systems have any validity is highly revealing about wartime political culture. Perhaps the rapid changes that advanced capitalist countries had been through during the twentieth century, changes exacerbated by war, led people to nostalgically dream of a time when nothing would change. Yet, the unchangeable, unquestionable nature of utopian societies closely mirrored a new kind of relationship being built up between the state and citizen in 1940s Britain. Over a fairly rapid period the political climate transmogrified until the state had edged into every area of the individual's life. The citizen of the late 1940s burnt government coal, was educated by

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[75] Ibid, p.121.

[76] Stammers, Neil, *Civil Liberties In Britain During The 2nd World War: A Political Study* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.68.

[77] J.D. Beresford, *"What Dreams May Come..."* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1941), p.112.

the government, sought medical help from the *National* Health Service and watched and listened to the government sponsored recreational media. The ordinary citizen did all of these things with very little input into the running and organisation of these services . Furthermore, all mainstream political commentators agreed that this corporatisation of society was a good thing and utopian fiction largely echoed and magnified this sentiment.

Utopian fiction can be explorative and playful, the genre provides the opportunity to examine what future societies would look like and to experiment with alternatives. During the 1940s however, authors of utopian fictions frequently seemed to be so sure of their own convictions that they ignored or attacked the possibility of objections to their ideas. Utopian politics was portrayed as an exact science in which, if the correct design of the society could be achieved, the population would ultimately accept without disagreement. The idea that politics is about negotiation with different groups all with divergent interests is not really entertained. In their own way the writers of utopian fiction all felt that they were right and all who stood against them were simply wrong. Plans and uniformity triumphed over pluralism and diversity.

**Was any of this going to happen?**

From the perspective of the early twenty-first century the 1940s utopia does not look like a very enjoyable place to live. Whether some version of socialism or a medieval revival of some sort were on offer the absolute confidence that authors had in their prescriptions frequently led to the development of a puritanical, uniform and highly authoritarian society. On the other hand, capitalist exploitation, modernist decadence and secular anxieties were banished in 1940s utopias. Nonetheless, the ultimate test of all of these utopias was whether they were likely to have any political effect. Did the authors of 1940s utopias have any understanding about how social change was achieved, or were they simply happy to dream?

In his typically blunt, but perceptive way, George Orwell outlined the fundamental problem with utopian thinking in his 1941 essay "Wells, Hitler and the World State".

> What is the use of saying that we need federal world control of the air? The whole question is how we are to get it. What is the use of pointing out that a World State is desirable? What matters is that not one of the five great military powers would

think of submitting to such a thing. All sensible men for decades have been substantially in agreement with what Mr Wells says, but then sensible men have no power and, in too many cases, no disposition to sacrifice themselves.[78]

It is all very well saying what you want, but the real issue is how you propose to go about getting it. If radical social change just required a workable and egalitarian blueprint, the world would have achieved the socialist commonwealth many times over. However, in Orwell's words "sensible men have no power". So what vehicle is envisaged as being capable of bringing about the perfect world?

One way in which social change could definitely be brought about was through the power of imagination. Utopian fiction did not aim to be simply predictive; it also aimed to intervene in the current political debate. Because of this it was not a requirement of the utopian form that it engaged with the issues of how the utopian society could be brought about at all. It could, for example, simply hold up the utopia as an inspirational example. However, most utopian fiction has at least a half-hearted stab at explaining how all the problems were solved. A common utopian device was to claim that the utopia grew out of the contemporary social and political order or one very like it.

> We here are only just ahead of you in time, and our history is very much the same as yours - we are in fact Earth's prototype. Because of that we can be of all the greater help to you. At one time not long ago this planet was torn with strife and revolution - divided into many countries each with its own jealousies, its own money and economic system, armies and navies formed and built and used against each other.[79]

This rhetorical strategy sharpens up the contrast between the contemporary reality and the utopian alternative. Most importantly, it shows that the utopian world is within our grasp. It is not an impossible fantasy, but an achievable reality, if we follow the prescriptions of the author. In other words, the very text itself is part of the vehicle by which the ideal society is to be built. Utopias have first to convince you that they represent an ideal world and then they can think about instructing you about how to help bring about that world.

This does not mean that all utopias are a call to political activism in the conventional sense. In a novel like J.D. Beresford's *"What Dreams May Come..."* a

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[78] Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State", p.135.
[79] Kearney, p.185.

conventional political party or movement does not bring about social change. The novel advocates the kind of agitation that we might initially associate with political activism. For example the novel's hero David goes out preaching pacifism to soldiers and arguing with influential individuals about the need for radical change. However David repeatedly stresses that the change that needs to be made is essentially an individualistic one. The novel urges its readership towards something more in the nature of a religious conversion than a political awakening.

> Life in the land of Oion was a continual progress, not in the old spatial phrase "upwards", but as Kamak had said 'outwards' by a perpetual enlargement of thought due to the increasing understanding and assimilation of the common fund of wisdom.[80]

Some novels, such as *Sanity Island,* do examine models of political activism. In *Sanity Island* the country is delivered to a kind of utopia through the power of laughter. This rather strange literary conceit is used to counterpoise European ideologies with a supposedly un-ideological and British inspired good-humoured liberalism. What is interesting in this novel is the way the paraphernalia of the political extremist is transferred onto the unlikely shoulders of the liberal Humorous Rearmament movement. Hobhouse, the eccentric English revolutionary, builds a movement for change based on an anti-ideological platform. However, the way he does this is through organising public meetings and rallies, handing out leaflets and generally propagandising for his cause. The central dilemma in this novel is whether decent people should organise against the ideological minority who were trying to destroy their happy, untroubled, ordinary lives. Silve, the leader of the women's section of the Humourous Rearmament movement, articulates this utopianism of the ordinary:

> All of us, rich or poor -what does it matter, surely we all want the same thing. We want a sane safe world for our children, we want security for our own little homes. Why should we bear children into a world which men have made mad through their own stupidity? We should refuse to do it, all of us, until we have laughed our men-folk into sanity. We've got the power, let us use it. Women of Merida, join with me. Let's make our country Sanity Island.[81]

*Sanity Island* is an unusual novel. Most utopian fiction is primarily concerned with the goals rather than the processes of political organisation. The pejorative way in

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[80] Beresford, *What Dream*, p.135.
[81] Alington, p.139.

which "utopian" is used in social and political discourse perhaps reflects this.[82] A utopian is counterpoised with a pragmatist, somebody who makes practical plans about how to achieve a particular aim. A utopian is often seen as a hopeless dreamer with no clear plan about how to achieve his or her aims. True to form in 1940s utopias the amount of time devoted to how the utopia was brought about is usually very limited. Utopian authors frequently take the reader through journeys of spatial exploration to the extent that many of the novels almost become travel books for the utopian tourist. Yet, the reader rarely experiences a temporal journey in which historical factors that could bring about social change are explored.

James Jupp said of the radical left during the 1930s and 1940s that it "was primarily oppositionist. Its vision of the future society was either Utopian or based on an abstract notion of the Soviet Union which bore little relation to the reality."[83] If we ignore the rather pejorative way in which Jupp uses the term "utopian" we can see some parallels with the writers of predictive fiction. While there is little reproduction of idealised versions of the Soviet Union in the fiction of the 1940s, there is significant reproduction of the ideas and values of the wider socialist left. Nonetheless, there is a lack of sophistication and intellectual rigour in most of the utopias produced in the period. Very few authors subject their vision to any kind of critical scrutiny. Utopian societies do not have to deal with any major problems or significant dissent from their values. They are born fully formed and exist as perfect and uniform societies untroubled by any external or internal crisis.

Jupp explains the lack of sophistication of the radical left in part by his brief survey of the availability of Marxist texts and literature during the period. Making the point that much of Engles' work was only recently published in English, Marx was seen primarily as an economist, Luxemburg was almost unknown and Gramsci was untranslated. Marxism and other radical socialist-inspired theories had made virtually no impression on the academy. The radical movements were therefore hamstrung by a lack of ideological clarity.

This lack of theorised alternatives to the status quo was also an issue for non-Marxists. Keynsian reformism, which was to dominate political and economic life for

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[82] The OED defines utopian as an ideology that "that conceives, proposes, or advocates impracticably ideal projects or schemes for social welfare etc."

the next thirty years, was still in the process of being theorised and expounded during the war, while Hayek's *The Road To Serfdom*, with its reassertion of laissez-faire utopianism, only emerged towards the end of the war. During the 1940s the political economy of the world was in flux and the intellectual analysis that would purport to explain both the pre and post war situations was still being developed. This lack of a coherent and critical intellectual climate can clearly be seen in the naivety of much utopian fiction. However, the failure to explore possible problems in the achievement and administration of the utopian society also had some roots in the centralist authoritarianism that could be found in the wartime approach to government and the post-war enthusiasm for planning. Like the planners, the utopian authors were certain that they knew best, even when their ideas seem cranky and half formed.

The intellectual climate in which authors wrote explains some of the character of 1940s utopian fiction. The political economy of the country and the world clearly also affected the type of futures that were aspired towards. The authors discussed in this chapter saw a role for their self-consciously political fictions in a world in which ideologies were clashing for supremacy, in which liberal capitalism was in flux and in a country that had experienced rapid changes in political and economic life. The instability of the wartime world offered a breadth of opportunities for authors who had an interest in predicting the future and made the production of predictive fiction seem particularly germane to the moment.

While the political, intellectual and economic climates all impacted on the writing of the war, the utopian genre itself also helped to determine the political tone of the fiction produced. The utopian form pushed authors into being absolute in their prescriptions; it is not a genre for the tentative and the undecided. The act of describing an ideal society is an act of political advocacy that is potentially undermined by over-complexity. If these novels were about exploring democratic debate in future societies they would to some extent cease to be utopias and become more complex works of political fiction. This is not to say that the authoritarian tendencies of 1940s utopias are not revealing, but rather to recognise that the form itself shapes some of the ways in which authors' politics are expressed.

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[83] Jupp, p.125.

The utopianists of the 1940s knew very clearly what they did not like; like the radical left, their utopian urges were oppositionist at root. It is easy to catalogue their concerns with modernity, capitalism, moral and racial degeneration and changes in the gender balance of society, yet the ideas that emerge to replace this list of the disapproved are frequently half-formed and contradictory. Anthony Crossland observed in 1942 that the coalition had led to a "vague Utopian radicalism, un-canalised and anti-Party, potentially anti-democratic, Fascist, Communist or anything else."[84] This individualistic and untheorised radicalism is clearly manifested in the utopian fiction of the period. The corporate nature of the state and indeed of the entire political and cultural climate of the 1940s and the lack of any significant social movements outside of this hegemony, goes someway to accounting for both the diverse nature and the relative political unsophistication of the utopian texts of the 1940s. This is not to suggest that utopian writing is ever an uncritical reproduction of political theory or a manifestation of a social movement. Had Gramsci been translated it is unlikely his writing would have been used as the basis for a utopia. Yet in a changed political situation, a more sophisticated public debate may have been possible, and it is likely that the utopias would have reflected that and contributed to it.

The utopias of the Second World War were not turned into reality in the aftermath of the war. However it is possible to see them as part of a cultural debate that did lead to a fundamental shift in the way Britain was governed. Utopian fiction closely engaged with the social and political trends that were given expression in the wartime and post-war governments. At times utopian fiction appeared to be reflecting the aspirations of the New Jerusalmers advocating socialism and planning, but on closer inspection it becomes apparent that utopian writing also offered resistance and at times greater radicalism than the political mainstream. On balance the defining features of Second World War utopian fiction were an advocacy of economic planning and a social conservatism driven by an underlying desire to move away from the contemporary reality of the war, the memories of pre-war slump and a feared weakening of the accepted normative values of sexual and moral culture.

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[84] Jefferys, *Crossland*, p.16.

## Conclusion: Jerusalem Reconsidered

Steven Fielding boils down his assessment of the historiography of the period to the simple question "did Britain have a 'good' war or a 'bad' one."[1] The question that Fielding identifies attempts to both ascertain and evaluate the effect that the wartime and 1945-51 governments had on the economy and culture of post-war Britain. Interesting though this question is, it reveals a tendency to view the war retrospectively. "What did the Second World War ever do for us?" is the unspoken question behind much historiography. This thesis offers an alternative approach by viewing the future from the perspective of the Second World War.

Ideas about the future were essential to the conduct of the Second World War. The uncertainty of war meant that every thing was up for renegotiation and that the future of the nation itself was in question. Fears about invasion mingled with hopes for a better world and also with nostalgia for the past. This study has uncovered a substantial body of source material that enables us to recapture some of these wartime ideas about what the future might hold. The predictive fictions of the Second World War reveal a wealth of imagined futures that go far beyond the much-trumpeted New Jerusalem offered by the Labour Party and its supporters. While no comprehensive and well-disseminated alternatives to the Labour Party's utopian vision emerge, a multitude of ideas, critiques and possibilities are articulated both in wartime literature and throughout wartime cultural life. The frequent failure of these responses to fit into established political categories has often meant that they have been ignored. However, the predictive fiction of the Second World War offers the opportunity for these alternatives to be considered in detail and on their own terms.

Predictive fiction is an imaginative mode of writing which invites authors to speculate creatively and to expand and develop their responses to social and political conditions. It should not be viewed as a source that directly represents the views that made up wartime society or any particular section of it, but rather as a contemporary analysis of Britain that is interesting in part because of its inevitably flawed and partial perspective. If nothing else predictive fiction offers us alternative viewpoints and demonstrates that even within the public sphere there exist a vast range of possibilities. The dominant discourse which sees the war as a "People's War" heading towards a

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[1] Steven Fielding, "The Good War: 1939-1945", Nick Tiratsoo, *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939* (London: Phoenix, 1998), p.27.

planners' New Jerusalem is not represented in any simple or obvious way. Even those authors who are sympathetic to socialism interact with mainstream Labour Party and government politics in idiosyncratic and often critical ways. Beyond these leftist utopias stand a range of possible futures that reflected other social processes not contained within the boundaries of conventional politics. Discourses about religion, modernity, individuality, familiar relations, spirituality, invasion and apocalypse complement and challenge the more easily contextualised discussions of socialism, fascism, dictatorship, planning and democracy.

An examination of wartime predictive fiction therefore contributes to our understanding of the Second World War. It also informs the way in which we see the literature of the war and the development of a British tradition of imaginative writing. In the period after the war the texts that are discussed as predictive fiction in this study would have been labelled as science fiction. During the Second World War, however, this term was not in popular usage as a way to describe British fictions. Wartime predictive fiction draws on a large variety of established genres and is suggestive of a range of influences ranging from Swift and Verne to Wells and Gernsback. The war offers perhaps the last period in which novels of this kind could be produced and considered outside of the genre ghettos of "science fiction" and "fantasy".

The existence of the body of fiction uncovered in this thesis also demonstrates a gap in considerations of wartime literature. Many previous accounts of wartime fiction have assumed that writing was unhappy about speculating on the future and so took a tentative approach reporting only on snippet of the now in a documentary style. As this study has shown a significant number of texts exist that challenge these assumptions and yet are integrally connected to the period and the fact of war. Wartime predictive fiction is very clearly "war writing" even though it frequently fails to fit into the forms and registers that we would normally associate with this term. The text inevitably springs from the society and culture around it, even when it superficially seems to be imagining something quite different to that society.

The predictive fiction of the Second World War therefore picks up on a long-standing tradition of, largely British, imaginative fiction and uses this tradition to discuss the contemporary concerns of the war. Previous commentators on wartime literature have failed to discuss predictive fiction because of the documentary bias in their studies, while the few commentators on British predictive fiction have largely

omitted the war from their studies. This study therefore fills a gap in the understanding of both wartime and predictive fiction. However, the fictions discussed would not be served best by being considered in purely literary terms. The authors, for the most part, wrote in order to make a political, moral or intellectual point. They wrote in response to trends that they observed in society, politics and culture and bent the literary mode of predictive fiction to their needs. They wrote, in other words, about the world as they saw it and, as this study has shown, by doing this they played a role in important debates that were going on in British society during the war.

This thesis has uncovered and analysed forty-six texts published between 1939-1945 that can be classified as predictive fiction. These have been sub-divided into a number of sub-genres organised by theme. Novels that deal with potential invasions, with imagined fascist states, with forms of socialism and communism, with the end of the world, with dystopian worlds and countries and with utopia have all been examined. While no two novels are the same, themes have emerged that can contribute to an understanding both of this genre and to the period in which they were written. While there are clear differences in both narrative and political approach, authors writing across these sub-genres raised concerns about the state, modernity, science and morality that inform our picture of wartime culture.

Invasion fiction imagined what was for many the most obvious dystopian future for wartime Britain. Early in the war some authors clearly feared the possibility of invasion and wrote pamphlets and novels to try and avoid this possibility or even to prepare the British people for it. However, as with other forms of predictive fiction, the type of response inscribed in fiction changed and developed in relation to the wider social, political and military situation. So, as the threat of invasion diminished and public fear about it subsided, the type of invasion fiction produced altered. The aim of the authors of predictive fiction was not in fact to predict the future, but rather to use possible futures to influence the present. Most authors who wrote fictions about future invasions were not worried about the possibility of a successful invasion of Britain. Rather, they wrote to bring home what was happening in the countries that had experienced Nazi invasions in other countries or to discuss the nature of Britain and the war and even to propagandise about the impossibility of a Nazi victory.

After the First World War, novels that imagined invasions had usually been employed to pacifist ends. However in the Second World War they once again became

more bellicose with little room being offered for anti-war rhetoric anywhere in predictive fiction. Novels that failed to commit to the war in an explicit way had to tread carefully or risk censorship. Some authors opted to create imaginary countries or spaces that could be invaded to free themselves of the immediate constraint of having to talk in a patriotic register about the survival of Britain. Most novels however are happy to defend Britain. What is defended is a conception of Britain that is highly gendered and class determined. The action of the novels usually describes men drawn from the social elites defending their country and their women. Some female authors resist this conception of women's role in war, but the over-riding vision of the wartime citizen is a male, ruling class one. Furthermore, what is being defended is usually a highly rural, even quasi-feudal, conception of Britain. It is also regionally specific with the rural south country of England serving as a cipher for the entire nation. The social and topographical character of this region is imagined as free from modernist trappings, whilst its Nazi invaders are contrastingly portrayed as ultra-modern.

Anti-fascism was only part of the political conversation being conducted in wartime Britain. Authors utilised the idea of fascism in a variety of ways, not only to build support for an anti-fascist war effort, but also to challenge unwanted policies and practices at home. Fascism was not simply resisted in wartime predictive fiction, but was rather used as a target for satires and critiques, as a place from which inspiration could be sought and as a point of comparison for domestic politics. Fascism was not simply portrayed as evil, and nor were the murderous racist elements of the ideology foregrounded in the way that the twenty first century reader would expect. One thing that 1940s predictive fiction reminds us of is how differently fascism was perceived during the war as opposed to after it.

Many authors imagine societies that had elements in common with the fascist state. For some the act of imagining was satirical, critical and analytical, but others include ideological components often associated with fascism in their utopian dreams. For some, like HG Wells, this attraction to fascism demonstrates an underlying respect or sympathy for the perceived strength and efficiency of the movement. However, the utilisation of ideological elements associated with fascism does not denote an attachment to fascism in most cases, but rather demonstrates the fluidity of ideological boundaries in 1940s Britain. Eugenics, for example, was still mainstream science and frequently advanced by those with left-wing loyalties. The widespread belief in eugenics in predictive fiction therefore does not reveal the existence of widespread

fascist sympathies, but rather alerts us to the fact that the 1940s conception of fascism was different to that of the early twenty-first century.

The complexity of wartime responses to fascism often meant that the novels themselves contained contradictory ideas about what this modern state formation actually was. The fascist state was feared because it was felt that it was a new, more powerful, form of state organisation, albeit one that was frequently ruled by foolish and corrupt leaders. Just as Britain is portrayed as traditional in invasion fiction, fascism, its antithesis is described as modern and new. Yet, while this modernist state is depicted as powerful, it is also frequently described as an unpleasant and insecure place to live. Some authors recognise that this ruthlessness and oppressiveness betrayed the systems weakness and instability, because it demonstrates that even domestic populations never fully accept fascism as the natural order. But, despite the general willingness to criticise fascism authors were frequently either unaware, or unwilling to represent, the atrocities that were actually committed by fascist regimes during the period in which they wrote.

Just as predictive fiction responds to fascism in a complex way, socialism and communism are also depicted in a multi-faceted way. The changing political and strategic position of the Soviet Union meant that mainstream presentations of the state and the ideology it claimed to practice were in flux throughout the war. Was socialism a form of totalitarianism or democracy's greatest ally in the war against fascism? As the Soviet Union became more important to the war effort, and as a form of "war socialism" took hold in Britain the red scare tactics of the right in the pre-war period became less credible. Whereas before all forms of socialism had been seen as threatening, increasingly some were perceived as part of a British democratic tradition. Others however were seen as just another form of totalitarianism and anti-socialist critiques of these kinds often echoed the critiques of fascism.

Although the Soviet Union had been to some extent rehabilitated by the political mainstream a minority of left wing writers were starting to question the nature of the state during the war. The Soviet invasion of Finland had a similar, if less profound, effect on certain leftists to Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968 in forcing them to reassess the nature of the state that they saw as the ultimate expression of their beliefs. Yet although there was some ongoing sympathy and respect for the Soviet Union amongst a wider audience very few wished to imitate its example. Whilst a minority of authors expressed a belief in revolutionary changes as the way that

socialism would be brought about, for most this idea remained an anathema. Predictive fiction's search for a New Jerusalem was to be a measured and gradual one. Sudden changes were perceived as likely to lead to oppressive, inefficient states with the wrong sort of person in charge.

Authors generally agreed that a movement towards socialism would create profound social and cultural changes. Yet, as with depictions of the Nazi state, the novels show that if these changes are pushed too far the basic rules of reason and common sense will be transgressed. On one hand, communist states could be seen as powerful because they could set aside the rule of law and the other limitations of democratic government. On the other, the need to oppress the populace shows that these systems are not accepted as normal by the populace. Liberal democracy is sometimes shown to be old fashioned and ineffective in comparison to communism and fascism, however it is usually ultimately endorsed as the natural system under which human beings should exist.

While some wartime fictions work through a variety of possible futures for Britain and humanity others question whether there is actually going to be any future. The longstanding British tradition of producing novels about the end of the world was given added poignancy during the war. The closest fiction comes to opposing the war is in these meditations about the potential destructiveness of modern warfare. The wartime realisation that humanity was now in possession of the means of its own destruction was extensively explored in wartime predictive fiction. The possible destruction of society is advanced not just as a point of pacifist rhetoric but also as a warning for people to turn away from current practices. In fiction however this warning is rarely heeded allowing authors to enthusiastically grasp the opportunity to rebuild society. When the dust has settled authors generally choose to depict their ideal post-apocalyptic future as a rural, pastoral utopia.

The fears about modernity that are frequently expressed in predictive fiction appear to contradict our understanding of the ascendancy of the progressive planners during the Second World War. Yet when we look at the beliefs of the New Jerusalemers in detail it becomes apparent that they also shared concerns about modernity and frequently developed plans that were influenced by their romantic attachment to a perceived traditional society. However, although the New Jerusalemers may have dreamed of a pastoral idyll they were still left with the task of administering an

advanced industrial capitalist country and this meant that they had considerable constraints placed on their room for manoeuvre. Authors of predictive fiction faced no such limitations and correspondingly were free to give full vent to their frustration with modernity.

During the Second World War dystopia was almost invariably imagined as an ultra-modernist totalitarian state that combined the worst elements of fascism, communism and bureaucratic British capitalism. The trends that were observed were amplified and extended into the future in dystopian fiction. The fact that it was modernity that was frequently being opposed meant that many dystopian fictions expressed a certain pessimism. If dysopia really is "modern" then it seems likely that history is not on the side of liberal democracy and that little might be able to be done about it. This is not to say that authors did not seek out potential culprits for bringing about dystopia. For some it was important to watch the armed forces, for others Hitleresque demagogues lurked somewhere in Britain and awaited the right conditions to emerge, while for others the perennial standbys of politicians and intellectuals were wheeled out to lead imagined societies into their dystopian future. In most cases however it is not a particular group or individual that will single (or mob)-handedly bring about dystopia. Rather, dystopian novels chart a pernicious creep towards a dystopian modernity. This modernity is portrayed as unnatural and oppositional to tradition English values. Modernity had transformed society and war and the fear was that it would eventually transform families and individuals themselves.

In the political sphere the fear of an advancing modernity was expressed through an opposition to planning. Far from being seen as progressive and scientific, many dystopian authors perceived the growth of planning as the beginning of tyranny. This fear is gendered, as the idea that women might come under the control of the state, rather than their men, is advanced as a particularly terrifying possibility. Even more terrifying is the fear that the propaganda and ideological tools of modernity offer the opportunity for the state to control people's minds and to undermine the very idea of truth and a verifiable reality. Dystopian fiction celebrates the possibility of maintaining a verifiable truth and entrusts its activist heroes to do so in whatever way possible.

Dystopian fiction always depicts struggles and resistance. While the dystopian society is rarely overthrown the fact that characters are able to continue resisting in difficult personal circumstances is a call readers to adopt an active and responsible

citizenship. This activism is frequently highly assertive and radical and yet it can seem to contravene a number of values that are endorsed elsewhere as positive, for example tolerance, moderation and lawfulness. However, at the core of all of these novels is a moral and political belief in truth and in doing what is understood to be right. The individual conscience is repeatedly endorsed as the site of moral authority in opposition to the state and other forms of collective organisation. Despite the danger, unfamiliarity and uncertainty of making a stand against totalitarianism, dystopian fiction is unwavering in its conviction that this must be done. Resistance may take many forms, but injustice and totalitarianism must be resisted even if the only likely outcome is death.

Varied though 1940s utopias are, they have certain features in common. The emphasis on conformity and consensus as a social and civic ideal is particularly noticeable. So too are the repeated endorsements of some form of technocratic socialist economy and the novels' reliance, even insistence, on a strict and essentially Protestant moral code. The technocracy that was imagined by most 1940s authors, was not however the concrete towers of an assertive modernism, but rather something that modelled itself on a rural past. The planned garden cities of the New Jerusalmers were just one manifestation of this. The utopian vision of the 1940s frequently combined radical progressive elements with a hankering for a more religious and less morally complex past. These regressive elements appear on one level to be out of step with mainstream leftist discourse, however as the Barlow and Scott reports in the early 1940s showed that there was a hankering for a rural idyll even at the heart of the technocrats vision for the future.

For women, the male utopianists of the 1940s imagined a changed world: a world in which much of the drudgery of housework would be removed by technological or social innovations. What was not imagined, however, was very much change in the balance of power between men and women. Women would continue cleaning and cooking but these would generally be much easier tasks in the new utopian society. Traditional personal and sexual morality and codes of behaviour are endorsed and enforced by most utopian fiction. While the organisation of the state was up for debate the most conservative moral codes were endorsed by utopian fiction. Despite the perscriptiveness of utopian societies few authors imagine that these societies are likely to experience any internal conflicts. Democracy is rarely depicted in operation in the novels because there are never any conflicting viewpoints. Where conflicts exist within

utopian societies they are always portrayed as a negative assault on utopia and never as a positive and constructive part of the society. The consensual nature of wartime party politics in some ways mirrored this perception of democracy as something that was ineffective and dispensable. The authors of utopian fiction, like those in the political mainstream, frequently preferred forms of organisation that were planned, albeit to rather different plans, to those that were controlled by the popular will.

The predictive fiction of the Second World War tells the story of wartime Britain from a new perspective. Concerns that can be found elsewhere are echoed in different registers and examined in different ways than in other historical sources or even in other wartime fiction. The freedom that the form offered to work through the most fundamental social and political questions in highly individual ways means that it offers a new window into wartime culture. These are neither entirely personal perspectives nor part of the official public record, but rather part of the wider public conversation that was being conducted during the war. The depth and complexity of these fictions forced authors to work through their responses to social and cultural conditions in a more thorough way than we could expect in any other medium. Uneasiness with modernity, for example, becomes amplified into the retrogressive pastoral utopianism that was frequently articulated in the novels.

That the Second World War was not the "People's War" in any simple, straightforward way is now widely agreed upon. Predictive fiction does not suggest any totalising category to replace this idea of the war as a popular, radical, patriotic upsurge towards the New Jerusalem. The fictions discussed in this study do however offer a multitude of themes around which wartime consciousness gathered. The war was clearly experienced as many different wars by its participants. Predictive fiction reveals that these many wars were also expressed in a number of visions of the future and analyses of the present and the past.

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## Appendix One: A Quick Reference Guide To Wartime Predictive Fiction

The following is a guide to the novels around which this study is centred. It is not a fully comprehensive list of every piece of predictive fiction I read but it does provide a quick reference guide to those texts which are drawn from between 1939 and 1945 and which reoccur throughout the study.

**Adrian Alington, *Sanity Island* (1941):** Satire on political factions on the island of Meridia. Meridian civilisation is ripe for a change but the extremisms of communism and fascism (The Strong Men) are dour and unappealing. Luckily a new movement springs up under the leadership of the British consul which reinvigorates the country around the demand for "humourous rearmament".

**Mea Allan, *Change of Heart* (1943):** After the war ends in defeat for Germany an international commission decide that a United States of Europe is the only way to curb German expansionism. Most Germans welcome this as it is accompanied by a planned economy that immediately delivers fresh fruit and silk to the impoverished German masses. Ex-soldier Fritzel Krauffner remains unimpressed by what he dismisses as the bribery of a mongrel government. He embarks on a quest to discover what is going on in Germany and ends up working for both the United States of Europe and the Nazi underground. His dream of becoming the next Fuhrer is eventually ended when he accidentally kills his son with a gun and begins to question the value of violence and war.

**Anthony Armstrong and Bruce Graeme, *When The Bells Rang: A Tale of What Might Have Been* (1943):** Retrospective examination of the invasion crisis of 1940 and 1941. Rural England is defended by the Home Guard who ultimately combine with the regrouped British army to push the German's out of the country.

**Francis Askham, *The Heart Consumed* (1944):** Told from the perspective of the ghost of a gentry man from the mid nineteenth century this novel follows the progress of a country house from 1840 to 2070. The house is transformed into a university in the social democratic state of the future. The main strand of the narrative, in what is a rather strange and focusless novel, follows an attempt by the chancellor of the university to

breed and educate a new master race who can form the basis of a new oligarchic ruling class.

**JD Beresford,** *A Common Enemy* **(1942):** The passage of a cosmic body too close to the earth causes all sorts of natural catastrophes which destroy European civilisation as we know it. After the cataclysm the British nation is reorganised as a utopian, de-urbanised oligarchy under the leadership of Mr Campion who was previously a middle ranking civil servant.

**JD Beresford,** *"What Dreams May Come..."* **(1941):** As a young boy David learns to escape the unhappiness of his life with his passionate mother and alcoholic father by dreaming about an alternative world. As he grows older he realises that his dreams are qualitatively different from other peoples. He is in fact slipping forward in time to live in a future society. The novel switches between David's experiences in both time zones. As he becomes more enamoured of the genderless simplicity of the future world David begins to propagandise the values he finds in this future world. However his message of pacifism, vegetarianism, chastity and spirituality ultimately leads to his imprisonment. David dies in prison although by that time he has built up enough of a following to carry on his evangelical mission in the 1940s.

**Herbert Best,** *The Twenty-Fifth Hour* **(1940):** Traces the decline of civilisation under the pressure of total war. Europe is eventually reduced to cannibalism while America is ravaged by a deadly disease. British Army Officer Hugh Fitzharding and American paediatrician Ann Shillito join forces to discover whether any vestiges of civilisation remain. The novel ends with the discovery of a broad minded, progressive Islamic state that has been established in Africa.

**Morchard Bishop,** *The Star Called Wormwood* **(1941):** Stable boy Harry Clarke is shot by accident in 1839. On arriving in heaven the celestial authorities realise that he is not dead and enlist the aid of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Coleridge and Clarke return to Earth in the year 2839. A war is raging between Grande Bretagne (a union between Britain and France) and Laestrygonia (a kind of mix of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia). Coleridge guides Clarke through the new world showing up the futility of war and the class and economic systems. While on Earth Coleridge works on a report for God who is considering bringing about the apocalypse. The novel ends with Clarke and

Coleridge being killed once more in an air-raid and the suggestion that Coleridge's report probably recommended that destruction of the world was the best option.

**George Borodin, *Peace In Nobody's Time* (1944)**: Brotherby is a down at heel undertaker with a vision of how the state of Bolonia could be organised for the benefit of the common man. His ideas are generating little interest until he receives the support of Skrump, a powerful movie mogul. Skrump is looking for a tame political party to get closer to the Bolonian princess who he wants to star in one of his films. This witty satire winds through various twists and turns taking on Hollywood, fascism, communism, capitalism and almost everything that comes in its path. Ultimately, Brotherby succeeds in bringing about a kind of socialist revolution at which point he checks himself in for treatment at a mental institute that specialises in dealing with dictators.

**Gordon Boshell, *John Brown's Body* (1942):** Unremarkable air raid warden John Brown is transformed into an all powerful symbol of British resistance to Nazism when he receives a direct hit from a German bomb. He walks slowly across first Britain and then Europe on a mission to kill Hitler. As he passes people become convinced that a People's War style anti-fascism coupled with socialist transformation is necessary.

**Douglas Brown and Christopher Serpell, *Loss of Eden* (1940):** Serious and impressive examination of the way in which a German Nazi hegemony is created in Britain. The novel explores various modes of resistance to the occupying powers without giving any easy answers.

**Erroll Collins, *Mariners Of Space* (1944):** Romantic science fiction that displaces the conduct of the war onto spaceship battles in the future. Earth serves as a crude metaphor for Britain, Mars for Germany and Venus for Italy. Overall a rather unimaginative novel which does have the saving graces of a decent grasp of the adventure story and a few moderately amusing satirical passages.

**Thurlow Craig, *Plague Over London* (1939):** The Japanese government enlist the aid of a criminal mastermind to unleash biological warfare against the people of Britain. Thankfully, the British secret service, aided by a number of keen amateurs, is more than equal to the task of foiling this dastardly plan.

**Clemence Dane,** *The Arrogant History of White Ben* **(1939):** In the mid-1950s a long-running war is about to draw to a compromised close. No one has emerged as absolute victor and a new world order is about to be born. Bothering, a prominent diplomat and industrialist, has visions of maintaining Britain's imperial greatness, but fails to impose this vision on the government. Meanwhile a scarecrow named White Ben is magically brought to life and begins to travel throughout Britain building up a following for his indistinct, fascistic anti-crow crusade. Bothering and others decide to use this strange new demagogue to gain control of power. However, once White Ben assumes power after a revolution he proves to be very difficult to control. White Ben institutes massive pogroms in which hundreds of thousands of people are accused of being "crows" and starved to death. The novel ends with White Ben returning to his prior existence as an ordinary scarecrow and his unpleasant and machiavellian lieutenants Illico taking control of the state.

**David Divine,** *Tunnel From Calais* **(1942):** Fiendish German plan to invade Britain via a channel tunnel is foiled by a group of amateur sleuths. The action all takes place on the south coast and revolves around the country house of a local aristocrat and upper middle class social circle.

**Bruce Graeme,** *Son Of Blackshirt* **(1941):** Tony Verrell, son of the legendary adventurer Blackshirt, is demobbed from the army after an armistice is agreed. He and his friends quickly get mixed up in a series of adventures around an old country house and the rightful heir to the Rowen fortune. Strangely, this novel fails to really engage with the post-war world, assuming that everything will pretty much fall back into place. It is however very positive about the new roles that women are taking up during the war. This new type of woman is typified by the plucky Penny who sleuths and adventures alongside Tony admirably.

**Neil M Gunn,** *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* **(1944):** Art and Old Hector are transported from a rural Gaelic nation on the eve of a modern war to the Green Isle of the Great Deep. The Green Isle is a version of paradise but a paradise that has been taken over by centralising planners. God sleeps while the rationalist philosophers rule paradise. Art and Old Hector accidentally begin a rebellion against this planned totalitarianism. Old Hector is tortured and Art eventually caught, but luckily God wakes up and saves them, interrogates the dictators and restores paradise to its former pastoral ideal.

**Storm Jameson, *Then We Shall Hear Singing: A Fantasy in C Major* (1942):** A Nazi invasion of a small country known only as the Protectorate is followed by a series of biological experiments to transform the country's men into unthinking automatons. A small group of peasant women come together to support each other in difficult times. This female affinity group gradually generates the seeds of resistance through which the Nazi occupation is overthrown.

**Chalmers Kearney, *Erone* (1943):** While listening to the radio everyman John Earthly is transported to the planet Erone (Uranus). On this planet he discovers a Christian socialist utopia. The novel presents a wide-ranging, but rather dull, picture of the socialist society. In particular, however, transport issues dominate. Monorails, cycle paths and safe walkways are the central urban features of the new technocratic paradise. Returning to Earth, John is inspired to campaign for the construction of a network of deep air-raid shelters which can also contain a monorail system. Unfortunately the authorities in the most part will not listen and the novel ends with John returning to *Erone* and a vision that one day Earth will be like Erone.

**Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (1943):** Set in a fictional neutral country in the middle of a raging war, the novel details the emotional, psychological and political trials of student revolutionary Peter Slavek. Peter escapes from his country where the Movement has transformed into an oppressive dictatorship. The novel deals with the issues of war and revolution on a metaphysical level asking ultimately what direction history is taking Peter and the rest of humanity in.

**Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (1940):** This is a thoughtful meditation on revolutionary morality**.** An old and previously respected party member is arrested for subversion by the revolutionary government he helped bring about. He re-examines his values and those of the revolution while he is tortured and eventually executed.

**Marghanita Laski, *Love on the Supertax* (1944):** Society heiress Clarissa tries to adapt to the new conditions of the "People's War". The class system seems to be breaking down and Clarissa and her family have fallen on hard times. Clarissa rebelliously begins dating the exotic communist Sid only to discover that she will never be accepted in his world. Eventually she rediscovers her class consciousness and begins

a relationship with Sir Hubert the leader of the aristocratic underground. The novel ends with the plans for counter-revolution being hatched.

**CS Lewis,** *Out of the Silent Planet* **(1938):** Interplanetary travel is given a Christian twist by CS Lewis. Ransom is kidnapped and taken to Mars only to find out that it is a simple world built on the old fashioned Christian values in which he believes.

**CS Lewis,** *Perelandra* **(1943):** In the second part of Lewis's Cosmic Trilogy, Dr Ransom travels to Venus to witness the birth of a world. He is able to provide a counter-balance to the devil in this worlds Garden of Eden. Partially because of this the new Venusian race do not fall in the same way as humanity.

**Andrew Marvell,** *Three Men Make A World* **(1939):** The discovery of a serum capable of destroying the world's oil supplies leads to a global catastrophe. The first half of the novel deals with the intrigues that develop around the control of the serum and the moral and political problems associated with its release. Once it is used civilisation quickly crumbles although people generally have few regrets about this. A new society is gradually built in which the good life is possible because the alienation of urbanised and industrialised capitalism no longer exists.

**Robin Maugham,** *The 1946 MS* **(1943):** A successful war against Nazi Germany produces a military hero but allows the same uninspiring politicians to remain in control. General Pointer decides to use popular antipathy to the government and political crisis to justify his military coup. The narrator recounts the story from his first acquaintance with Pointer on the battlefield, through his involvement with the resistance to the dictatorship and ends with him being arrested and presumably killed.

**HV Morton,** *I, James Blunt*, **(1942):** Well realised depiction of a German army of occupation in Britain. James Blunt is a progressive anti-Nazi who describes the various oppressions and problems that he and the rest of the British people face under the jack boot of Hitlerism.

**Robert Nathan,** *They Went on Together* **(1941):** America is caught unaware and rapidly invaded. The narrative focuses on young teenaged children fleeing the invasion while their world gradually collapses around them. Left on their own they become more self-reliant and begin to explore their sexuality. Meanwhile the American forces regroup

and start to fight back and turn the tide of the war. The novel ends with the teenagers reunited with one of their mother's. Their story's happy resolution and their newfound maturity are clearly meant to parallel the military and political transformation that America is about to undergo.

**Alfred Noyes, *The Last Man* (1940):** A new super weapon wipes out the vast majority of the human race. Three survivors replay the conflicts of the Garden of Eden before Mark Adams and Evelyn Hamilton join a surviving utopian community organised around a Franciscan monastery.

**Daniel O'Den, *Crimson Courage* (1940):** John Sligo, the child of a family intimately involved in the running of pre-revolutionary Scorta, returns to the nation to work. Raised by the British he quickly finds life in quasi-communist Scorta intolerable and sets about fermenting counter-revolution aided by the British Embassy.

**George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945):** Orwell's classic satire on Soviet Russia in particular and bureaucratic dictatorship in general.

**HF Parkinson, *They Shall Not Die* (1939):** The discovery of the Sulis Serum seems to offer eternal life to some of the population. Those immune from death and disease are sterile but slowly develop into a new ruling class. However, the book shows that nothing lasts forever when the immortal elites discover that while their bodies might live eternally their souls do not.

**Mervyn Peake, *Titus Groan* (1946):** The castle state of Gormenghast has remained unchanged for endless centuries. However, the quasi-religious traditions of the state are challenged and ultimately destroyed by the Machiavellian social climbing of Steerpike the kitchen boy.

**Vita Sackville-West, *Grand Canyon* (1942):** After Britain's defeat in the war against Nazi Germany many British refugees retreat to the United States. Life appears to be returning to normal until a massive air attack and spate of fifth column sabotage overwhelms the United States. Mrs Temple, a middle aged woman, joins a mixed group of American and foreign residents of a hotel as they try to escape the conflict in the Grand Canyon. They discover a micro-utopia at the bottom of the Canyon and suppose that they must have died on their way down to the Canyon floor. The radio

intermittently reports on the state of the war. The novel ends with a massive earthquake that draws a (temporary?) close to the hostilities.

**Viscount Samuel,** *An Unknown Land* **(1942):** Shipwrecked sailors searching for Francis Bacon's New Atlantis discover the utopian state of Bensalem. A planned economy is administered by a cultured populace who have achieved still further perfection by undergoing a medical procedure which uses a vacuum cap to increase the size of their brains. The narrator is taken by the Bensals to various neighbouring states which provide opportunities for satires on fascism, communism and British liberal democracy.

**Graham Seton,** *The V Plan* **(1941):** Cunning Brits outfox the Nazi's by invading Northern France through a tunnel under the channel.

**Nevil Shute,** *What Happened To The Corbetts* **(1939):** The Corbetts escape bombing raids on Southampton and make their way to Northern France. Leaving behind urban chaos, they bravely make their way across the channel in their yacht maintaining vestiges of their bourgeois existence determinedly against all odds.

**Olaf Stapledon,** *Darkness And The Light* **(1942):** Stapledon traces two possible paths for humanity over the next few thousand years. In the story of the darkness the race degenerates and ultimately becomes extinct. In the story of the light humanity works through more and more utopian social systems before ultimately evolving into a new, more advanced, species.

**Ruthven Todd,** *The Lost Traveller* **(1943):** Christopher is transported to a strange and unearthly country by a bomb blast. He quickly makes his way to a strange and dystopian city-state ruled by an unseen dictator known as *Him*. Christopher spends some time trying to fit into the state but is quickly catapulted into opposition. He discovers that *He* does not exist and that *His* assistant Omar is the real ruler of the city. Christopher is caught and sentenced to hunt for an extinct bird as his punishment for his refusal to submit to the state. Eventually, he is transformed into the bird (a Great Auk), and is captured and killed.

**Hendrik Willem van Loon,** *Invasion* **(1941):** Nazi and Communist fifth columnists conspire to bring about a successful invasion of the United States of America. Luckily

honest hard working American farmers and small towns folk make short work of the invading German paratroopers.

**Rex Warner,** *The Aerodrome: A Love Story* **(1941):** A typical romantic English village is transformed by the arrival of fascist modernity in the form of a new air base. Roy, a young resident of the village, uncovers both the hypocrisy that lies behind village and the revolutionary plans of the air force. The air force is poised to take over the government of the country when its leader the Air Vice-Marshal is killed.

**Wells, HG,** *All Aboard for Ararat* **(1940):** Noah Lammock is a progressive journalist who is visited by God. They argue about humanity and God's record so far. God considers winding up the human race but Noah convinces him that a second flood would be more appropriate. God creates a flood to give humanity a new chance and the novel ends with Him and Noah sailing on the Ark towards Ararat to begin building this new future.

**HG Wells,** *Babes In The Darkling Wood* **(1940):** Two radical lovers have their idealism shattered and then rebuilt against the background of the build-up to the Second World War. The invasion of Finland by the Soviet Union forms the pivotal event of the novel, forcing the heroes to question their principles. However, even with the betrayal of the revolution and the horror of total war, the Wellsian belief in socialism and progress is ultimately asserted.

**HG Wells,** *The Holy Terror* **(1939):** Rud is a charismatic and brilliant young leader drawn from a lower middle-class background. Whilst at university he discovers that he has a gift for rhetoric and begins to assemble a group of like minds around him. They then plot to take over the fascist "purple-shirts" movement, deposing its faintly ridiculous Mosley-esque leader in the process. They then set about transforming the "purple-shirts" into the Common Sense Party that espouses the familiar Wellsian values of technocratic progress. They eventually succeed in uniting the world into a new utopian state in the aftermath of war. As the new world is built other member of the core-group of the Common Sense Party recognise Rud's growing dictatorial tendencies. Luckily, a progressive doctor who recognises that his contribution to the creation of the new world is now over, kills him.

**Dennis Wheatley,** *Strange Conflict: A Black Magic Story* **(1941):** A band of international adventurers led by the Duke De Richleau battle the forces of darkness. Throughout the novel it is revealed that Hitler and the Axis power are drawing their strength from demons and Voodoo priests. The adventures ultimately confront and defeat the powers of darkness in their stronghold of Haiti.

**J Howard Whitehouse,** *Visit to Utopia* **(1939):** Short novel about a traveller in utopia. He finds a pastoral Christian ideal where everyone is joined in collective spiritual endeavour. The novel also contains some vague gestures towards a form of socialism or at least collective welfare provision, however this is not explored in any depth.

## Appendix Two: Common Wealth

During the party political truce of the Second World War, parties refused to stand candidates against each other in by-elections. The electorate, however, had not as clearly declared an end to politics as those in Westminster. At by-elections electors often looked for protest candidates to express their concern about the direction of the National Government. Perhaps chief amongst these protest candidates was the left of centre Common Wealth led by Sir Richard Acland.

Common Wealth was formed from the merger of two progressive pressure groups (The 1941 Committee and Forward March), which Correlli Barnett sees as typifying the New Jerusalemist enlightened establishment that gained ground during the war.[1] However, this conflation of Common Wealth with the progressive planners who increasingly gained hegemony throughout the war fails to tell the whole story. What exactly Common Wealth stood for is a source of as much confusion and mythology as any controversial element of wartime politics. Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo perhaps describe it most accurately when they say:

> Although the Common Wealth welcomed all, its appeal was almost entirely directed at the middle classes. In meetings up and down the country, Acland would ask them to exchange their obsession with rank and status and join in the organisations three guiding principles: the common ownership of industry and land; vital democracy and morality in politics. This was socialism with a high moral Christian tone.........In a number of ways, this approach met with success. At a peak in 1944, Common Wealth had over 300 branches and claimed membership of some 12,000, a fifth of which were in the armed forces. It tended to be strong where Labour was weak (the wealthy suburbs of London and the Home Counties, the South, the South-West and North-West) and weak where Labour was strong (the working class districts of industrial conurbations). Members were overwhelmingly middle-class with perhaps nearly 3/4 drawn from the professions.[2]

However DL Prynn has focused some attention on the party's embrace of anti-democratic meritocratic politics, "to some left-wing critics it looked very much like a bureaucratic society run by a technocratic elite 'on behalf of' the industrial workers."[3]

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[1] Correlli Barnett, *The Audit Of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain As A Great Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p.24.

[2] Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, *England Arise: The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940's Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.55.

[3] DL Prynn, "Common Wealth - A British 'Third Party' of the 1940's", *Journal of Contemporary History*, VII, 1&2 (Jan - April 1972), p.175.

However this view of the party is problematicised by McCallum and Readman's observation that Common Wealth election addresses invariably contained,

> Much talk about vital democracy and hostility to the domination of Party Whips. Some candidates promise to hold weekly meetings in their constituencies, if elected. There is also a tendency towards proportional representation.[4]

Tom Meldrum a Fabian and Common Wealth activist saw Common Wealth, probably along with much of the electorate, as a Labour substitute. "It was essentially a Socialist Party...... The Common Wealth party was to the right of Labour and the left of Liberals."[5] It is easy to see how, for someone like Meldrum whose political outlook was defined primarily by Parliamentary politics, Common Wealth could be seen as a washed out version of Labour that could be supported by socialists while the Labour Party was out of action.

McCallum and Readman differ fundamentally with Tom Meldrum in his reading of the party as a centrist party. They claim that it was to the left of the Communists and quote a number of Common Wealth PPC's party election addresses which typically contained statements like "Vote for us. It will do a Labour majority good to have Socialists on its left" and "Labour stands for 10 per cent Socialism; Common Wealth for 100 per cent."[6]

For still others Common Wealth represented a turning away from the state socialism that the Labour Party embraced. While DL Prynn has argued it is not possible to see the Common Wealth programme as necessarily more empowering than the Labour programme, it is certainly true that Common Wealth was more interested in co-operative forms of common ownership. These elements of the party's programme were seized upon by its advocates in places like the Cairo Parliament and were perhaps used to articulate a radical critique of Labourism that was not implicit in Aclands conception of the party. David Edgar and Neil Grant associate an anti-statist critique with Common Wealth in their play about the Cairo Parliament which was assembled in part from oral history research that they had conducted.

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[4] RB McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election Of 1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), p.110.
[5] Tom Meldrum quoted in Austin Mitchell, *Election '45: Reflections On The Revolution In Britain* , p.15.
[6] RB McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election Of 1945*, p.109.

RICHARDSON: Mr Speaker, the proposer has tried to argue that there is no alternative to his proposals to create a centralised state bureaucracy, which would own and control every shop and market. Well, there is an alternative. It is common ownership. This is not a matter of the secretaries of the big unions sitting on a *(He checks a note.)* National Distribution whatever. It is a matter of the workers themselves controlling the fruits of their labours. It is in essence a Christian principle that we in Common Wealth have always fought for.[7]

Ultimately, like many vague and spontaneous political movements, the contradictions within Common Wealth, along with the peculiar nature of the British Parliamentary system were responsible for its downfall. Common Wealth promised a great deal, but the high moral rhetoric of Acland perhaps allowed for too many variant readings. Common Wealth was too many different things to too many different people to be able to survive with along with the resumption of politics as usual in 1945.

The confusion in the historiography surrounding the Common Wealth is particularly interesting as it demonstrates effectively the problems of using the left/right spectrum as a way of understanding all politics. Common Wealth was institutionally and ideologically different from any other leftist movement. To see it as the last gasp of radical liberalism is in many ways accurate, but this should not be seen as a denial of its radicalism. The solutions it proposed were in many ways far more socially transformative than any that the Labour or Communist Parties came up with in the 1940s. Like the predictive fiction of the Second World War, Common Wealth points to the fact that the mainstream political parties did not fully represented the ideas and aspirations of the British population. There is room for a serious examination of Common Wealth from the perspective of those whose activities made up its existence. This idiosyncratic and unique political movement should not remain as a footnote in studies of Labour Party politics.

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[7] David Edgar and Neil Grant, *Vote for Them* (London: BBC Books, 1989), p.55.