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Author as Arbiter of Reconstruction in Inter-War
Britain, 1919 - 1945*

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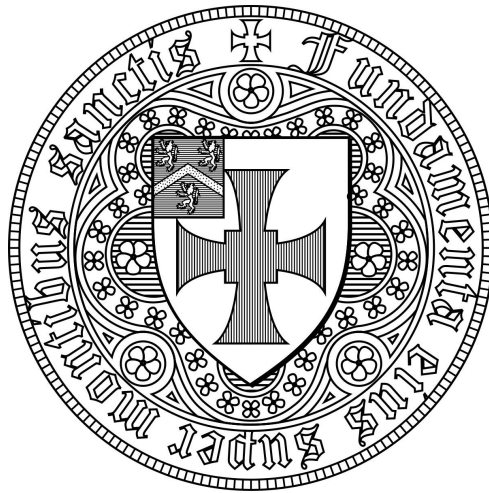
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THINKING THROUGH THE 'PRESENT MAD
MUDDLE': THE AUTHOR AS ARBITER OF
RECONSTRUCTION IN INTER-WAR
BRITAIN, 1919 – 1939



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ABSTRACT

*This thesis argues that British authors of the 1920s and 1930s used the novel form as a means by which to think through ideas of post-war reconstruction. The corpus of novels covered in this thesis—Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy* (1929), Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* (1923), Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936), and George Orwell's *Coming Up For Air* (1939)—were written by authors who were also (or were primarily) editors, activists, essayists, or journalists. Through an historical approach that takes into account the para-texts that exist parallel to each 'main' work, a specific lineage of thought is considered through the lives of authors and thinkers who were 'historical witnesses' (observers and recorders) of their times. In other words, the thesis is less concerned with these works' place in the modernist literary movement or how each individual work may fit into an author's career (i.e. how *Antic Hay* may be an example of intellectual development leading to *Brave New World*) than with the historical engagement, exchange, and debate in the post-war years that lead to the production of a number of works which sought to exorcise the horrors of war and imagine the future.*

*Each of the novels considers reconstruction in some fashion: *No Enemy* works as a means by which to reconstruct Ford's memory of the war and redevelop his ability to write (i.e., a pursuit of resolution through art); *Antic Hay* looks at contemporaneous urban planning, suggests a connection between the great fire of London and the end of WWI, and propagates a mindfulness towards building and dwelling; likewise, *South Riding* considers social planning in the fictional north-east of England, attempting in the vein of *Middlemarch* to show the complex tapestry of the life of an entire community in the midst of change; finally, *Coming Up For Air* explores the pessimism with which the inter-war years were wrought, not only because of another, impending world war but the nostalgic realisation that a pre-war order was forever lost.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Statement of Copyright	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Dedication	vii
INTRODUCTION	9
CHAPTER I: The ‘Precariousness of Ordered Life’: Reminiscence as Reconstruction of the Self in Ford Madox Ford’s <i>No Enemy</i>	28
i. ‘An Invisible Barrier in my Brain’: Shell Shock and Narrating the Trauma of War	32
ii. The ‘Serious Book and Difficulties of Categorisation	45
iii. <i>No Enemy</i> : An Attempt to Reconstruct ‘Ordered Life’	61
CHAPTER II: ‘Sermons in Stone’: A Moral Exploration of Architecture in Aldous Huxley’s <i>Antic Hay</i>	72
i. ‘The Novel of Ideas’ from Menippus to Huxley	76
ii. ‘He Offered Them All These Things’: Wren’s Plans for the City of London	86
iii. ‘The Problem was Very Troublesome Indeed’: A Moral Quandary	98
CHAPTER III: ‘We Are Members One of Another’: Winifred Holtby and the Impetus for Social Change in the Nineteen-thirties	109
i. <i>Virginia Woolf</i> : Works Both ‘Moral and Persuasive’	115
ii. ‘Not Man, Not Woman’: The Philosophy of ‘Old Feminism’	125
iii. ‘Europe’s in a Hole, Millions on the Dole’—The Great Depression	134
iv. <i>South Riding</i> : A Drama of English Local Government	145

CHAPTER IV: 'It'll Never Come Again': The Failing Project of Reconstruction and Premonitions of War in George Orwell's <i>Coming Up For Air</i>	156
i. The State of 'Reconstruction' in the late Nineteen-thirties	161
ii. The Pamphleteer v. The Novelist	173
iii. Prophecies of Crisis: A Modern(ist) Eschatology	178
EPILOGUE	189
Bibliography	193

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

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R. L. Trogdon
Durham

In Memorium

Prof M. John Higby

1936 - 2012

INTRODUCTION

*So in this hour of crisis and dismay,
What better than your strict and adult pen
Can warn us from the colours and the consolations?
The showy arid works, reveal
The squalid shadow of academy and garden,
Make action urgent and its nature clean?
Who give us nearer insight to resist
the expanding fear, the savaging disaster?*

W. H. Auden, 'August for the People'¹

Things happen through ordeals. When somebody is subjected to an ordeal things cannot stand still. Either one or other of two things must happen. Either the person subjected to the challenge fails to meet it and goes under, or else he reacts victoriously and produces some sort of creation. I believe that there is some spark of divinity in every living creature which makes any of us capable of any one of these creative acts at any time, and I think this is the most illuminating of the many possible approaches to the history of civilisations.

Arnold Toynbee²

THIS thesis is about overcoming the trauma of The Great War and also about conceptions of reconstruction in its aftermath. British authors of the nineteen-twenties and thirties wrote almost invariably in the shadow of war. When reflecting upon these decades in 1941, Hubert Nicholson said that if 'the Twenties were post-war [...] the Thirties were pre-war'.³ Indeed, at its broadest conception, the thesis to follow concerns itself with how this generation

¹ W. H. Auden, 'August for the People', *The English Auden: Poems, Essays, and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), p. 157.

² Arnold Toynbee, Letter from Toynbee to Arnold Wilson, 16 Nov. 1931, Bodleian Library, Toynbee Papers, Box 3.

³ Richard Overby, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 2.

of authors were affected by the circumstances ‘fate had [...] forced upon’ them, occupying a Janus-faced position which considers how both the memory and premonition of war integrated itself into their writing, altering literary works through episodes of crisis, not least over a perceived ‘break’ with life before the war.⁴ A rosy-tinted image (or myth) of the years before 1914 exists in some manner to this day. When imagining the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War, it is easy to picture a world of firm beliefs: the father at the head of his family, the King at the head of the nation, God in his heaven; the formality of high starched collars, tall silk hats, and frock coats; sea-side holidays and bicycling jaunts through the countryside; displays of aristocracy with dazzling ritual and archaic-sounding titles; the ‘garden of England’ forever in bloom, with heavy boughs of forsythia, delphiniums, roses, and peonies lining public ways; material progress marching swiftly along, bringing novel technologies such as the telephone, gramophone, wireless, airships, motorcars, electrical light, and submarines; a new world of energy and power bursting forth after the success of the Great Exhibition of Paris in 1900 that clashed with established ways. However, under the smiles and insouciance, there was, in fact, anxiety and tension. The old economy based on land and a society based on those who owned land was in conflict with industry and teeming, developing cities. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the call of the Industrial Revolution uprooted populations from their agrarian roots, expanded, enriched and impoverished society. Peace in Europe in 1914 was a fragile thing. If England had not gone to war with Germany in 1914, she might have been faced with a civil war in Ireland and a general strike from her industrial classes who were left out of a rising tide of prosperity. Literature, too, for some years before outbreak of war, bore an undercurrent of dissatisfaction and predicted conflict on a colossal scale. Poem XXXV in A. E. Housman’s ‘A Shropshire Lad’ (1896) illustrates the duality of life at the *fin-de-siècle*:

On the idle hill of summer,
Sleepy with the flow of streams,

⁴ Aldous Huxley, ‘Accidie’, *On the Margin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 23.

Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like a noise in dreams.⁵

Housman's picture of an idyllic Sunday evening in summer, a day of rest, is interrupted by the 'steady' beat of ensuing upheaval, and the 'dream' which is invoked bears the undertones of nightmare. A little over a decade later, E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, published in 1910, the year of George V's accession to the throne, illustrates the frustration found with the overpopulated streets of London, the destruction of beloved architecture to make room for housing of the masses, and the slow creep of the metropolis into the countryside. At the close of the novel, Helen and Margaret Schlegel discuss what they perceive as a deterioration of life around the world:

'I hope it will be permanent', said Helen, drifting away to other thoughts.

'I think so, there are moments when I feel Howards End peculiarly our own'.

'All the same, London's creeping'.

She pointed over the meadow—over eight or nine meadows, but at the end of them was a red rust.

'You see that in Surrey and even Hampshire now', she continued, 'I can see it from the Purbeck Downs. And London is only part of something else, I'm afraid. Life's going to be melted down, all over the world.'

Margaret knew that her sister spoke truly. Howards End, Oniton, the Purbeck Downs, the Oderberge, were all survivals, and the melting pot was being prepared for them.

Logically, they had no right to be alive.⁶

By 1914, the 'melting pot' of Europe was on the boil. On 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to throne of Austria-Hungary, was assassinated in Sarajevo. His death created a diplomatic emergency between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbia, which led to the shoring up of old alliances throughout Europe. Tsar Nicholas II ordered the Russian military to prepare itself to defend the Serbs, and Germany mobilised troops in retaliation.

⁵ A. E. Housman, Poem XXXV 'On the Idle Hill of Summer', *A Shropshire Lad* (1896; rpt. London: The Bodley Head, 1917), p. 51.

⁶ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910; rpt. New York: Everyman's Library, 1991), p. 355.

Subsequently, the German Emperor Wilhelm II initiated the plan developed by Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen to invade France through the poorly defended nations of Luxembourg and Belgium. The United Kingdom, sworn to protect Belgian neutrality, began to muster its military might for war as well.

On 4 August 1914, King George V, through the undiminished 'prerogatives of Henry VIII', sanctioned the proclamation of a war against Germany.⁷ 'Total war' erupted across Europe between the Triple Entente alliance of the British Empire, the French Third Republic, and the Russian Empire and the Central Powers of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with Italy as a part of the wider Triple Alliance. Japan and the United States of America ultimately joined the Allies and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria the Central Powers. Nearly six million British Subjects entered active service throughout the war, many of them through conscription, which was enacted by the Military Service Act 1916.⁸ The Empire rallied around the 'mother country' as well; nearly eighty thousand Africans, one and a half million Indians, and thirty thousand men from other Dominions were eventually involved in a war 'of which they understood nothing against an enemy who was also unknown to them'.⁹ Troops marched to battle under the, largely unchanged, drill exercises of nineteenth-century warfare. However, the battle of the Somme in 1916 signalled a shift in the mentality of the men who willingly came forward to defend their King and Country. The early poetry of Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell, who wrote with an Edwardian innocence, gave way to 'poets who saw in war only horror and suffering', such as Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves.¹⁰ Walter Benjamin described the terror which wrought this change by reflecting upon the fact that 'a generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in

⁷ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 2.

⁸ Before 1949, when the British Nationality Act 1948 became law, the term 'British Subject' referred to anyone who was what we now understand to be a *de facto* 'citizen' of the United Kingdom or British Empire, including those born into its dominions or naturalised by law, indicating those individuals who owe obligations or allegiance to the crown: i.e. being subject to laws created by an elected Parliament in the name of the Crown.

⁹ Taylor, *English History*, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body'.¹¹ Over ten million soldiers and nearly seven million civilians were killed in four years. On 11 November 1918, Parliament met to ratify the terms of the Armistice, during which session, Prime Minister Lloyd George declared, 'I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end all wars'.¹² His statement proved merely a false hope, for in twenty year's time Europe found itself once again on the brink of war. Nevertheless, The First World War has never diminished in the cultural memory of Britain, with 'Armistice days, poppies, and war memorials in every town and village in Europe'.¹³ The records of the Imperial War Museum document the existence of over forty thousand memorials in Great Britain alone, and in recent years, vast numbers of remembrance ceremonies have marked a century passing since 'the war to end all wars'.

However, this thesis is not about the ways in which the spectres of war have remained a part of the national consciousness in the hundred years hence but about its immediate aftermath. In *Margin Released*, J. B. Priestley wrote that 'the First War cut deeper and played more tricks with time [than the Second World War] because it *was* first, because it was bloodier [...] a great jagged crack in the looking-glass'. One world, he adds 'ended in 1914 and another one [...] began about 1919, with a wilderness of smoke and fury, outside sensible time, lying between them'.¹⁴ Similarly, Valentine Wannop, in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, described the war as a 'crack across the table of History' in which 'all connection with everything of every kind that has gone before seems to have been broken'.¹⁵ Richard Aldington, in *Death of a Hero*, reflected that 'adult lives were cut sharply into three sections—pre-war, war, and post-war [...] many people will tell you that whole areas of their pre-war lives have become obliterated from their memories. Pre-

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 84.

¹² Taylor, *English History*, p. 114.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁴ J. B. Priestley, *Margin Released: A Writer's Reminiscences and Reflections* (London: Heinemann, 1962). p. 29.

¹⁵ Ford Madox Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up—, Parade's End* (1926; rpt. London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. 551.

war seems like prehistory'.¹⁶ The idea of an indelible break with the 'pre-war' order was a dominant trope across the hundreds of war novels published after the war. While British society did not, in actuality, encounter the 'last stages of the end of civilisation' in the nineteen twenties and thirties, the reiteration of a trope of crisis set the scene for collective apprehension about the future.¹⁷ The prevailing sense that the Western World was in a state of decline infiltrated political, social, and economic discourse: uncertainties about the extent to which the Treaty of Versailles would maintain peace, new political orders (totalitarianism, communism, fascism), the economy (depression, the status of capitalism, and to what extent governments should intercede), and the condition of humankind (eugenics, birth control) all plagued the general populace. Not everyone was resolved to this 'fate'. Arnold Toynbee in *World Order or Downfall* (broadcast on BBC radio in 1931) said that the 'doom of civilization' was 'a call to action', not 'a death sentence'.¹⁸ The authors who were chosen for this study share Toynbee's stance as a common philosophy of 'reconstruction', believing as he is quoted in the epigraph of this introduction, that in the face of crisis one must react 'victoriously' and produce 'some sort of creation'.

In the light of this discussion of a changing social order in the early twentieth-century, this thesis argues that British intellectuals of the nineteen twenties and thirties used the novel form as a means by which to play with, or think through, ideas for post-war reconstruction. The corpus of novels covered in the chapters to follow—Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction* (1929), Aldous Huxley's *Antic Hay* (1923), Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936), and George Orwell's *Coming Up For Air* (1939)—were written by authors who were also (or were primarily) editors, activists, essayists, or journalists. They are referred to collectively as 'intellectuals' because of their plurality of roles and professions and to imply that they were neither 'authors' who wrote solely in a fictional form, nor were they 'academics' with an

¹⁶ Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (1929; rpt. London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 224.

¹⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

orthodox university career (though Huxley did once attempt to procure a post at Balliol College, Oxford). This is a view borrowed from Stefan Collini who posits in his work *Public Moralists* that the term intellectual ‘refers to function and identity rather than occupation or belief’.¹⁹ The word ‘play’ is used in reference to both the form and function of these texts. ‘Play’ suggests recreation, engaging in a game, or simply a lack of overt ‘seriousness’. The word ‘ludic’, from the Latin *ludus*, a word which was both the name for the equivalent of a primary school in Ancient Rome and a term used to mean ‘play, sport, or training’, illustrates well the manner of playfulness invoked here. Games, however ‘playful’, depend upon limits and rules in order to work and can be teaching tools to foster teamwork or a set of physical or mental skills. With this in mind, one can consider the ways in which these texts are comic or absurd in their commentary on the inter-war years, or in their consideration of the ideal and to what extent this stance is beneficial. When an audience may dismiss an openly didactic approach, ‘ludicrousness’ acts to ‘sweeten’ a text’s moral considerations. Julius A. Elias discusses this concept in his book *Plato’s Defence of Poetry* as one which was existent in the ancient world as well. He wrote that, ‘in certain ways, the “weak defence” of poetry is familiar enough. All it requires is recognition of the need to sugar the pill of unpalatable or difficult truth for those lacking in energy, intellect, or interest sufficient to master an available truth’.²⁰ The idea of ‘play’ is clarified further by considering the essay form, alongside the novel, as a parallel act of ‘thinking through’.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘to essay’, which is from the French *essayer*, is ‘to put to the proof, try (a person or thing); to test the nature or excellence of’, and an ‘essayist’ is a person ‘who makes trials or experiments’.²¹ These experiments may have conclusive results, yet those results are understood to be open to reinterpretation or disproof. The essay form as it existed in the inter-war years was a space in which to try out an idea and to follow it to its logical

¹⁹ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 29.

²⁰ Julius A. Elias, *Plato’s Defence of Poetry* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 237.

²¹ ‘Essay’, v. & n. *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online, third ed. Oxford University Press).

conclusion. Writing an essay does not preclude its author from composing a work that contradicts previous exploratory writings. In other words, however confidently written, there is always an element of contingency in these works. Their contents could be expressed in a tone ‘which was now didactic, now reproachful, now cajoling, but was always in some sense confident’.²² Yet while the essay form lends itself well to formal, deductive ‘proof-making’ for ideas, the novel allows an author to set those ideas into motion, to *dramatise* them and create characters that have to *live* with their ideas. Furthermore, a novel typically has a plot (although irregularities regarding this assertion will be explored) which allows for an orientation ‘to a beginning and to an end’, fulfilling what Frank Kermode argues is a ‘need in the moment to belong’.²³ Kermode wrote on the function of literature in a crisis in *The Sense of an Ending*, wherein he claimed that ‘men in the midst’, or people in the midst of catastrophe, ‘make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle’.²⁴ Likewise, literature of ‘reconstruction’ performed a consoling function in establishing where society stood post-war. He continues by arguing that ‘fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agent of change’.²⁵ From this position, considering fictions as an agent of change, this thesis approaches its considerations of the novel form as a vehicle of ‘reconstruction’.

‘Reconstruction’ as a term to describe the post-war literature considered within this thesis is used partly because of the word’s specific association with post-war endeavours to rebuild areas devastated by conflict, and it is also borrowed from terminology used at the time, for instance, the subtitle of *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction*. The word also embodies many various meanings and resonances: re-construction necessarily means an act of renewal out of

²² Collini, *Public Moralists*, p. 57.

²³ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1966; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

loss. In simple terms, even for instance, the destruction of a home by fire, which necessitates the need for physical reconstruction, causes alienation (or displacement), despair, the need for endurance and renewal. How much more so does a war that affected millions have impact and require these traits? If one looks at the listing for ‘reconstruction’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one will find a multitude of uses for the word. It is, in its most-straightforward understanding, the action or process of physical reconstruction (or rebuilding). This basic definition is considered in Chapter 2 through an exploration of architectural philosophy after the war. Reconstruction may also mean the restoration of economic stability or rebuilding of an area devastated by war. The term is specifically used in this meaning, for instance, with reference to ‘Restoration Era’ America, when the southern states were undergoing a process of re-joining and re-assimilating into life as a part of the ‘Union’. The *OED* quotes Shurz’s *History of America* (1901) as having said ‘as to what is commonly termed “reconstruction”, it is [...] the whole organism of southern society that must be reconstructed’. Some intellectuals in the nineteen twenties and thirties thought that the same was required in England after the First World War. If taken broadly, ‘reconstruction’ can elicit such a plethora of interpretations as to become almost meaningless as a concept. While it is, indeed, a malleable term, ‘reconstruction’ deserves some form of delimitation in order to make it workable as a concept for discussion in the pages that follow.

‘Reconstruction’ did not begin with the Armistice and end with the outbreak of the Second World War, nor was ‘reconstruction’ somehow absent from pre-war life. A long cultural fascination with the ebb and flow of civilisation meant that epoch-defining moments before the war cast forth calls for reconstruction as well. The death of Queen Victoria, for instance, caused a great deal of anxiety at the turn of the century as an emblem of a passing age into an unknowable future.²⁶ Reconstruction in Britain also had official, government resonances during the war, as the first ever Ministry of Reconstruction was founded under the premiership of Lloyd

²⁶ A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians* (London: Hutchinson, 2005), p. 12.

George in 1917. Under the remit of the Ministry were a range of political and social aspects of nation well-being including governmental administrative reform, the role of women in society (especially after a war-time service when women were allowed greater freedom in choice of work), the post-war economy, housing, and demobilisation. The process by which demobilised troops were to be re-incorporated into British life, and its workforce, was a source of concern for a government who feared the rise of strike action and unrest. The official programme of 'reconstruction' was put on hold during the economic recession of 1921, but of course, this was not the end of reconstructive ideas and endeavours. This thesis, in its contention that reconstruction continued throughout the nineteen twenties and thirties interrogates the way in which authors used the novel form to explore and express ideas of reconstruction and in what way it was manifest in writing.

One of many points of departure, as it were, for this thesis came from the recognition that, in addition to bearing a common outlook on society in this period, the writings about the subject of literature by the four authors who occupy the chapters ahead contained a unity of vision about what writing should *be* or *do*. The literary *telos* that is shared by these authors is that the novel, and writing in general, should, and inherently does, have a purpose that is more than mere satisfaction in its own form. For instance, Winifred Holtby, in her critical work *Virginia Woolf*, argues that even the most straightforwardly aesthetic work cannot escape some moralistic overtones, regardless of the purpose of its creation. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to interrogate the extent to which the novel form functions in a formal sense as a vessel that carried the ideals of reconstruction. This group of authors were never formally associated like the often-discussed Bloomsbury Group, though most of them knew one another, corresponded, or did exist on the fringes of the Bloomsbury cohort. Of course, those authors who happened to weekend at Garsington Manor or live within a certain postal district were not the only people writing in this time. Huxley lived abroad for most of his life; Holtby and Orwell frequently retreated to the countryside owing to their poor health; Ford preferred living close enough to

London to remain in contact with its social goings-on but not close enough for unexpected callers to show up on his doorstep. Despite living on the periphery, one would be met with vehement disagreement if attempting to claim that the editor of the *English Review* or the author of *Brave New World* were somehow on the periphery of the creation of, and discussion about, literature written in English at this time. In the same way that someone who remains at home may distance themselves from politics or their own society, an expatriate may remain firmly attached to their culture. The collectively titled ‘arbiters of reconstruction’ do not speak from somewhere located, inexplicably, ‘outside’ society, nor is it useful to assume that criticism, in however broad a sense, requires the critic to be somehow marginal in order to gain a critical perspective. The figures with which this work deals were closely attuned to the political, societal, and intellectual circles of their day.

Although they were, indeed, active within society, it is also not the purpose of the argument that follows to suggest that Ford, Huxley, Holtby, and Orwell were particularly influential forces who changed the course of England after the Great War politically or socially. Many of their works remain in print (and some have done so since their initial publication); however, proportionally more of what they wrote has been confined to the dustbin of history. Though they may not have been on the borderlines of the literary scene, they were, in some ways, onlookers. Ford discusses, with characteristic self-aggrandisement, how he might take the place of Proust, when recalling in *It Was the Nightingale* that he ‘wanted the novelist to appear in his really proud position as an historian of his own time. Proust being dead, I could see no one who was doing that’. ‘My subject’, he continued, ‘was the public events of a decade’, and ‘the world as it culminated in the war’.²⁷ Likewise, Huxley’s character Gumbriel Senior in *Antic Hay* offers a similar approach, quoting St Peter Damianus, who wrote ‘*Hora novissima, tempora pessima*

²⁷ Ford Madox Ford, *It Was the Nightingale* (1933; rpt. London: Heinemann, 2011), pp. 180, 187, 195.

sunt, vigilemus’ (‘In these last days, the worst of times—let us keep watch’).²⁸ Instead, the word arbiter is employed because of its multiple delineations, which offer a more nuanced appellation than simply calling the author an ‘authority’, ‘expert’ or ‘intermediate figure’. The word is derived from the Latin *arbiter*: *ar* = *ad*—to + *bētere, bītere*, to go, or ‘one who goes to see’, or one who looks into or examines. Therefore, it is a word that not only refers to a person who holds a certain amount of authority (through the understanding that vision is a type of knowing), but one who employs that authority in a specific way through settling a debate. This may be as formalistic as in a legal setting (*e.g.* a judge in an ‘arbitration’), more common, as in a sporting match (an umpire), or it could be the more chic *arbiter elegantium/elegantiae* (a trend-setter or ‘arbiter of taste’). The Oxford English Dictionary cites P. Holland’s 1601 translation of Pliny’s *History of the World*—‘as a deputed judge or arbiter delegat to determin of mans health, and the preseruacion thereof—as an example of the word when applied to one who seeks social betterment.’²⁹ While Holtby may have been undecided as to what form her cause for reformation would take, she was decided that she wanted it. In a letter to her mother, dated 1933, Holtby expresses the desire to be an agent of social change, having written: ‘what *is* my ambition & dream? I don’t know. I want there to be no more wars; I want people to recognise the human claims of negroes & jews & women & all oppressed & humiliated creatures; I want a sort of bloodless revolution to come to breakdown all snobberies & money standards & limiting vulgarities. And I would like to be used as one of the instruments by which these things are done’.³⁰ Arbiter is an accolade which can be given to the way in which Holtby’s life work (as a lecturer, journalist, and editor) functioned, as well as her writing. Owing to the manner of her engagement, *i.e.* observing her world and mingling with its people, her work took on a sympathetic view of the ‘human situation’ and the need for social change in the midst of

²⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Antic Hay* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923), p. 22. Huxley mistakenly attributes this quotation to St Peter Damianus, yet it is the opening line of Bernard of Cluny’s poetical satire *De Contemptu Mundi* (1557).

²⁹ ‘Arbiter’, n. *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online, third ed. Oxford University Press).

³⁰ Letter from Winifred Holtby to Alice Holtby, 25 May 1933, (Winifred Holtby Collection, Hull History Centre, L WH/5/5.3/09/01a).

economic depression and inequality. This stance allowed a form of watching and learning that fostered a convicted but open stance intellectually and politically.

E. M. Forster rightly acknowledged in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), that ‘we need a vantage post’ for the discussion of the novel form, ‘for the novel is a formidable mass, and it is so amorphous—[there is] no mountain in it to climb’.³¹ It is therefore worth briefly considering the manner in which this thesis will approach such an expansive topic. The chapters to follow do not discuss the works that have, for the most part, been canonised—such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Exemption of the latter of these two works, for instance, can be excused because of its date of composition and publication do not fall within the remit of this study. Instead, this work is the revival of an old mode: a portrait of an historical period rather than a formal history of the inter-war years—the illumination of particular aspects of the past, which attack the subject in unexpected places. This is not an history of the idea of reconstruction but rather an intellectual history of those people who were dealing with reconstruction knowledgeably and imaginatively, and it attempts to recover what some of the writers of the early twentieth-century were thinking in their own terms, rather than fitting discussion into a neatly-demarcated theoretical reading. In fact, the approach taken specifically opposes a narrow view of ‘Modernist Studies’, by which a work’s substance is measured by fitting neatly into this genre, or an over-arching reliance upon a theoretical stance. While the authors in the following four chapters may easily each have been subject to a different mode of contextualisation by ‘theories’ of trauma, imperialism, oppression, or national identity, it is the position of the author that theoretical sieves fail utterly to understand what happened historically or to sympathise with the victims of the war or to think seriously about the ideas, however applicable today, of the authors. The decline of ‘high theory’ and the need to base critical enterprise on a more concrete and intimate knowledge of the world allows for a more direct historical enquiry. The new and almost unimaginably violent experience of the war

³¹ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1941), p. 14.

profoundly challenged the capacities of conventional literary forms, and ultimately of language itself, to represent the life and death of the times. Tracing war writing's reciprocal relations with broader developments in the literature and culture of its time allow for the ideas discussed in the chapters to follow to be understood as a part of human activity rather than somehow autonomous expressions. Furthermore, this is not merely a work of contextualisation or a sociological positioning of historical figures. Biography has a profound but limited ability to illuminate particular thoughts, and it is a critical understanding of the arguments through writing, as writing, that is the focus of discourse ahead, an approach which refrains from pressing for a reductively historical reading based on 'contextualisation' but one which responds to texts by recognising the tonality, style, and formal aspects of compositional performance, a necessity if, from where we stand in relation to these texts today, we are not to miss their quiddities. It is also worth noting, that though the thesis may owe a methodological approach to the field of intellectual history, this is primarily a literary history, and it is fundamentally through writing that reconstruction is approached. The presumption, from the outset, is that a close relationship exists between literature and history, and it is argued that this relationship becomes especially acute in times of crisis, when the impetus for action and the imaginative acts that consider what form this action might take, become interdependent. The intellectual life of a period is continuous with, not separate from politics and economics.

Studies of literature in the early twentieth century customarily, and unsurprisingly, deal with some facet of 'Modernism(s)', or the 'Modernist Movement'.³² However, as David Ayers recognises, 'the use of the Modernist model as a periodising [*sic*.] device in the English context has tended to conceal as much as it reveals'.³³ The works discussed in this thesis often sit uneasily adjacent to this category, and indeed, much of the literature produced in this time has only a cursory relationship with 'Modernism'. This thesis is not particularly concerned with

³² See Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) for a delineation of the plurality of 'Modernisms'.

³³ David Ayers, *English Literature of the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 1.

discussing any of the texts to follow in regards to their categorisation as ‘Modernist’. That is not to say that there are not modernist qualities about some of the works discussed (*The Good Soldier*, for instance, is considered Ford’s most ‘Modernist’ work), nor does this preclude any interrogation of genre. However, Jay Winter makes a major claim when he writes that for some authors ‘far from ushering in modernism’, the Great War ‘reinforced romantic values’ and encouraged ‘traditional elements’ in literature.³⁴ While, as a standalone comment, Winters’s argument is too broad to be of much analytical use, it does acknowledge the breadth of writing which was created outside of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and others within the vanguard of ‘High Modernism’. Often, in the chapters to follow, discussions of genre or classification form the basis of discussion about an author’s competing faculties as an essayist, ‘pamphleteer’, activist, or novelist. However, the discussion pointedly avoids becoming a taxonomy of ‘reconstruction’, recognising that ‘the richness of characterisation and fineness of discrimination needed to do justice’ to varied and complex works of literature are ‘unlikely to be encapsulated in the rigid conceptual boxes of some purpose-built vocabulary’³⁵ For instance, Winifred Holtby recognised in herself a disposition split into a ‘reformer sort of person’ and a ‘writer sort of person’. One of the benefits of avoiding this form of discourse is to reach beyond the narrow and reductive confines of definition and to approach texts as works of writing (*i.e.* considering how they function as *literary* texts, regardless of their genre).

The excerpt from W. H. Auden’s poem, included in a birthday letter to Christopher Isherwood in 1935, which serves as one of the epigraphs to this introduction, offers more than a battle cry against ‘the savaging disaster’. Samuel Hynes suggests that the poem ‘asserts a direct relation between literature and action in the public world; writing becomes a mode of action’.³⁶ The writing of a ‘strict and adult pen’ encourages a form of writing that is moving, reacts

³⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 221.

³⁵ Collini, *Public Moralists*, p. 7.

³⁶ Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 13.

urgently, and is ‘concerned with ideas, moral not aesthetic in its central intention’.³⁷ Auden felt that in a time of crisis, it was imperative that the latter mode of writing would retreat behind a literature of ‘intention’. The spectrum of literature from the ‘aesthetic’ to the ‘moral’ was explored further in two of Auden’s works: *Psychology and Art To-Day*,

There must always be two kinds of art, escape-art, for man needs escape as he needs food a deep sleep, and parable-art, that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love...³⁸

and, *The Poet’s Tongue*,

The propagandist, whether moral or political, complains that the writer should use his powers over words to persuade people to a particular course of action, instead of fiddling while Rome burns. But Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice.³⁹

The delineation made in the latter quotation between the didactic and propaganda is a useful one for this thesis and it echoes well the sentiment of ‘August for the People’. Poetry, or literature in general, can take the form of ‘parable-art’. Parables provide a form of teaching through love, not ideology, and in a time of crisis, it is the ‘strict and adult pen’ that must take on this role. In this way, literature can remain an art form but provide a social role as well.

Decisions about which authors to include in this study were critical as well as pragmatic, and only the novel form is discussed in this thesis as a means by which to centre the work, rather than an attempt to suggest tacitly that other forms of literature do not engage in the intellectual activities discussed. In other words, a focus on the novel form and four practitioners of this art is not a pointed act of exclusion of other mediums of writing or writers. A great body of historical

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ W. H. Auden, ‘Psychology and Art’, in *The Arts To-day*, ed. Geoffrey Grigson (London: The Bodley Head, 1935), p. 20.

³⁹ W. H. Auden and John Garrett, *The Poet’s Tongue, An Anthology of Verse* (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1935), p. vi.

and scholarly writing about memory and mourning as a result of battle and the politicians, activists, scientists, doctors, and businessmen (among other professions and unaffiliated people) who worked towards reform after the Great War already exists, and this thesis does not intend, nor shall it claim, to repeat or add to this. The deeply-rutted field of post-war studies does not necessitate another re-telling. Phrases like ‘The Lost Generation’ and ‘The Men of 1914’ have long been employed to designate the lasting effect of the war, and Vincent Sherry justly asks ‘what can one possibly add to—or take away from—the nearly sacral character of these formulae?’⁴⁰ While one may feel reticent about the one’s ability or claim to stand on the shoulders of giants, a familiarity with their work allows for an informed positioning of the thesis to follow.

Amongst the earliest studies written about the literature of the First World War was Bernard Bergonzi’s *Heroes’ Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (1965). This work focuses largely on ‘canonical authors’, particularly poets who served in the trenches of Belgium and France and in general provided foundations upon which this field of study was subsequently built. Along with Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* (written a decade later in 1975), Bergonzi makes a compelling case for the unique abundance of literary endeavour during and after The Great War. One criticism of these works, however, is that too much emphasis is given to ‘officer-poets’ while ignoring ‘middle-brow’, working-class, uneducated, or women authors. When Fussell describes the prevailing literary attitude before the war, his narrowness of subject-matter is readily evident: ‘one read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented the worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language. [...] One lolled outside on a folding canvas chaise, or swam, or walked in the countryside. One read outdoors, went on picnics, had tea served from a white wicker tables under the trees’.⁴¹ It does not take a great historical knowledge, or indeed any contextualisation, to recognise that Fussell’s ‘one’ referred to

⁴⁰ Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 6.

⁴¹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 23-24.

what in today's demotic language would be called a 'privileged' person—most likely white, male, upper-class. Although it is of course only natural to begin the study of a particular event, person, or field at its roots, critics have rightly broadened their sights in regards to the authors and type of literature worthy of study in relation to the First World War.

Drawing on the many works appearing in the intervening years, Samuel Hynes's *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990) embodies a broader remit by assessing women authors as well as literature from other theatres of war outside France and Belgium. His work, especially on *No Enemy*, extensively supports discussion on Ford Madox Ford in Chapter one. Hynes also warns against a narrowing 'of another sort—the steady settling of memories into what he describes as a 'collective narrative' or simplified 'Myth of the War'.⁴² Some revisionist historians have gone further to suggest that 'collective narratives' tend less towards myth than utter misrepresentation that work to obscure historical realities. While it is important to understand the limitations of 'myth', it is also worth noting the impact that myths have. Both reconsideration and recognition of myths are important to this thesis. One such myth is that 'neither the Somme, nor the Great War generally, has ever faded into 'ancient history', or rather that even a century later, the Great War is still remembered as 'the central influence on the emergence of the modern world'.⁴³ Jay Winter describes how immediately after the war many survivors felt as though 'familiar, busy city streets could seem only long boulevards where the ghosts walk now' as the spectre of war had affected a 'whole generation and its authors'.⁴⁴

Bergonzi, Fussell, and Hynes all, for instance, asserted the concept of a pre-war idyll and the idea of a 'rupture' between pre and post war life, as discussing in the opening of this introduction. However, it can be argued that there was no 'wholesale change' to material conditions with the war—there was already apparent a great deal of unrest before the war owing

⁴² Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 195.

⁴³ Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 186.

⁴⁴ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 17, 144.

to the rate of wage increases not matching inflation. The war is often presented as a ‘watershed’ moment (in life and in literature), yet whether this was strictly true or not, it was so dominant a trope, and used by authors in this study, that it is taken as read.⁴⁵

In *Modernism, History, and the First World War*, Trudi Tate compares the literature of Britain, America, and Europe as a continuous endeavour. Tate argues, along with other critics in the past thirty years such as Allyson Booth and Vincent Sherry, that the war did not occasion a break in the development of modernist and avant-garde literature—though this problematically suggests that modernism is somehow separate from war experience. Sherry suggests that ‘the grammar and vocabulary through which the war was constructed in Britain, in particular, represent an idiom whose coherence reaches deep into the major traditions of intellectual liberalism’ which was already present in Britain rather than made manifest by the war itself.⁴⁶ An apocryphal notion that there was a ten-year gap in literary writing after the war has also been both reinforced and challenged by critics. Although participating in a complex process of negotiations with the marketplace, as Lawrence Rainey has argued, the apparent novelty of modernist literature ensured that sales were limited.⁴⁷ To some extent the marketplace value of literature warps the view of how much was written at the time. The notion of a literary ellipsis is closely linked to the idea that the experience of war was incommunicable. Analysis of these challenges naturally focuses on published fiction, autobiography, and memoir, but in assessing the encounter of words with a time of upheaval and change, there is good reason to examine more immediate, unrevised forms of writing in diaries, letters, and journals. There is much to be learned from writing *not* suited or intended for publication. More recent critics, such as Allyson Booth and Randall Stevenson also assert the language gap between home and the front and look

⁴⁵ Andrew Frayn, *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 12.

⁴⁶ Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 323.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

to 'literature' that was not suited to or intended for publication, an approach from which this thesis draws.⁴⁸

Randall Stevenson's recent study, *Literature and the Great War*, published as a part of the Oxford Textual Perspective series, looks at all genres of Great War writing in an effort to reconsider the relative merits of the period's literature. Interestingly, one aspect that Stevenson adds to studies of war writing is considering an older generation of authors who lived through the war but did not fight in it, supporting his argument that the dates of the conflict are a useful descriptive measure for a study of literature but do not set temporal limits on the relevance of the subject. In a similar vein, Paul Addison in his book *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975) casts his critical eye back to the nineteen twenties and thirties to explore the way in which the inter-war years began a radical shift in political power, dramatically expressed in Labour's electoral victory in 1945 under the premiership of Clement Atlee. Within those studies of the progress or deficiencies of the inter-war years, there is a spectrum of optimism or pessimism attributed to the time. Martin Pugh's *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (2008) and Richard Overby's *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation: 1919-1939* (2009), a book which needs little explanation of its subject matter beyond its title, are two recent examples of the different outlook one can build of this era.

There is an unfathomable amount of writing about the early decades of the twentieth century and the two wars that shaped the course of the world's history in this time. One could expend many more pages in consideration of what has been written already, and of course it is at once necessary to demonstrate knowledge of the field (and the point of departure for the subject of the thesis) but also to press on with the matter at hand. The position taken in this thesis is to reserve a preference for beginning *in media res* with some expectation that readers are familiar with the corpus of poetry, prose, and drama in the established canon of First World War writing.

⁴⁸ Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 32-34; Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-18* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Furthermore, one hopes that this approach will be understood as an attempt to eschew the common pitfalls of this subject matter. That is, to lead discussion away from the well-trod depths of poetry and the trenches and discuss works that are largely forgotten and therefore of new interest and useful remove from the canon. Poets such as Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Wilfred Owen have come to dominate the literary studies of the First World War. Their works are occasionally useful to and are drawn into discussion in this thesis, yet most of the poetry of the war was not about reconstruction. It was stirring and patriotic and later memorialising, like a great collected epitaph for the dead. Sassoon wrote with fervour that 'War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise, / And fighting for our freedom, we are free'.⁴⁹ His view that 'they are fortunate who fight' endured well into the war. Graves portrayed the violence of the war in epic language: 'I looked, and ah, my wraith before me stood, / His head all battered in by violent blows'.⁵⁰ E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* still insisted on the values of poetry over prose in the English language⁵¹, but Ford Madox Ford believed in the potential power of prose: 'creative prose *is* poetry; the novel is narrative poetry and displaces nothing'.⁵² For him, poetry is not simple a matter of form and metre, but of quality of language. The space afforded in the novel form means that a contrast can be established between 'rest and action, uncertainty and confirmation, for combatants and civilians, enables a clearer understanding of the rhythm of war experience', which supports the *telos* of the authors considered in this thesis that the novel is a space well-suited to thinking-through reconstruction.⁵³ However, the most compelling and simple reason to avoid even a cursory review of First World War literature is the sheer mass of writing available. It is difficult to know where to begin. It is difficult to know where to end.

⁴⁹ Siegfried Sassoon, 'Absolution', lines 3-4, in *Collected Poems 1908-1956* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Robert Graves, 'The Morning Before the Battle', lines 9-10, in *Complete Poems*, eds. Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 15.

⁵¹ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927), pp. 16-17.

⁵² Ford Madox Ford, 'An Answer to Three Questions', in *Critical Essays*, eds. Max Saunders and Richard Stang (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002), p. 206.

⁵³ Frayn, *Writing Disenchantment*, p. 14.

In the preface of his book, *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey confronts a similar concern about the proliferation of writing in the Victorian Age, having written that ‘our fathers and our grandfathers have poured fourth and accumulated so vast a quantity of information that the industry of a Ranke would be submerged by it, and the perspicacity of a Gibbon would quail before it’.⁵⁴ While the prospect of discussing ‘reconstruction’ after the Great War is, upon embarking, a feat akin to ascending Parnassus, the chapters are organised in order to narrow this focus in each chapter to provide a single *exemplum*: the psychological, architectural, societal, economical, and political manifestations of ‘reconstruction’ in literature. This thesis is organised chronologically by date of composition of the works considered: *No Enemy*, *Antic Hay*, *South Riding*, *Coming Up For Air*. However, this decision of ordering by composition rather than by publication only affects the placement of *No Enemy*, which was written in the years immediately following the Armistice (completed in 1919) but was left unpublished until 1929.

Accordingly, Chapter I will explore the writings of Ford Madox Ford, from roughly the outbreak of the First World War until 1930, as examples of ‘literature of reconstruction’. Reconstruction here is delineated and explored in a broader context than that which is purely ‘bricks and mortar’ or the desire to return to a ‘pre-war order’. Alongside his physiological convalescence after the war, Ford also struggled with an inability to recall his experience of the war in a manner that would allow him to write about it. Therefore, the chapter will initially discuss reminiscence as a form of reconstruction. For Ford, this exercise took many years to complete, and before beginning to write *Parade’s End*, Ford wrote several works which he considered to be varyingly successful in their ability to set out his story of the war. Max Saunders recognises this post-war period as one in which Ford underwent a period of digestion, as it were, of his war service: ‘so devastating and disrupting an experience takes time to assimilate, master, and reconstruct’ (Saunders, p. 196). This is true in a wider literary sense in that not only *Parade’s End* but most of the ‘classic’ prose about the war was not written until the late 1920s: *viz.*

⁵⁴ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918), p. v.

Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves's *Goodbye To All That* (1929), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet On The Western Front* (1929), and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of An Infantry Officer* (1930). In the dedicatory letter at the opening of *No More Parades* (1925), part two of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End*, Ford says that 'few writers can have engaged themselves as combatants in what, please God will yet to prove to be the war that ended war, without the intention of aiding with their writings, if they survived, in bringing about such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities'.⁵⁵ The chapter will go on to discuss Ford's aspiration to write a work which 'should end wars as possibilities' and the political and intellectual viewpoints which shaped this desire.

When *Antic Hay* was published in 1923, an advertisement taken out by Chatto & Windus in the *Times Literary Supplement* predicted that the book would be 'one of the peep-holes through which posterity will squint at London just after the period of the Great War'.⁵⁶ Chapter two will examine this early, relatively unknown work of Aldous Huxley's as an example of how post-war intellectuals conceptualised the ideal way of life. It is a discursive 'novel of ideas' which juxtaposes a method of moral examination with law-giving moral instruction. In 'a chaos of Portland stone that is an offence against civilisation', the young London set are afflicted with an 'accidie' which is intensified by the distracting entertainment provided by the new mediums of film and sound recording.⁵⁷ Coinciding with the first exhibition by The Architecture Club, of which Huxley was a member, and the bi-centenary of the death of Christopher Wren, 1923 was a year of great public interest in architecture. The character Gumbriel, Senior, constructs a model of Wren's plan of London and claims its vision is essentially moral rather than aesthetic. Given the chance to rebuild 'the very mind-set of the people' after the war, this novel offers a chance to

⁵⁵ Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades, Parade's End*, vol. I (1925; rpt. London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. vi.

⁵⁶ Anonymous, 'Review of *Antic Hay*', *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, England, 13 December 1923) p. 860; Issue 1143.

⁵⁷ Huxley, *Antic Hay*, p. 136.

revive an ancient concept of morality that went hand-in-hand with the *eudæmonic* pursuit of a good, worthwhile life.

Chapter III will consider *South Riding* as a novel which attempted to reconcile, in Holtby, the ‘reformer-sort-of-person’ with the ‘writer-sort-of-person’: two competing faculties of her character, mentioned briefly above, as she described them in a letter to her friend Lady Rhondda near the end of her life. *South Riding* is a novel with a cast of nearly two-hundred characters, which attempts a holistic vision of the local government and the people in it, recognising that any corporate action in a community, whether it is against ‘poverty, ignorance, isolation, mental derangement [or] social maladjustment’, begins with the deceptively ‘impersonal’ resolutions of a county council. Likewise, the chapter will suggest that it was through the novel form that Holtby most successfully found a way to dramatise the difficulties of attempting to affect these social changes. She believed that literature should and could do something to help people through the ‘present mad muddle’ and recognised that works such as H. G. Wells’s *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* (1931) and G. D. H. Cole’s *The Intelligent Man’s Guide Through World Chaos* (1932) were often the sources people trusted for information on social conditions (and how to alter them) in the inter-war years rather than looking to the political leaders of the country.⁵⁸ As a result, despite being a prolific journalist with a wide audience, she chose the medium of imaginative literature because a ‘novel can teach about sympathy, understanding and co-operation as well, or better, than a political tract or a deputation to the Prime Minister’.⁵⁹

Chapter IV will begin with an examination of the inter-relation between Orwell the pamphleteer and Orwell the novelist. Similar to Ford Madox Ford’s conviction that he should serve as an ‘historian of his own time’, as discussed in Chapter I, Orwell felt that it was his mission when writing ‘to reconcile [his] ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public,

⁵⁸ ‘The present mad muddle’ is a phrase used in correspondence by a Mr A. E. Caswallon-Evans to Winifred Holtby, which is discussed in greater detail in chapter three and also borrowed for the title of this work.

⁵⁹ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding: An English Landscape* (1936; rpt. London: The Reprint Society, 1949), p. 180.

non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us'.⁶⁰ This enigmatic statement comes from an essay entitled 'Why I Write' (1946) in which Orwell considers, amongst other matters, the way in which a political purpose can be reconciled with 'problems of construction and of language'. The forces of the age, to which he refers, can be divided into two broad classifications (along which this chapter will also be divided): concerns over changes in literature and over a looming social 'crisis'. Orwell responds with a pessimistic outlook to both of these 'forces'. He felt that literature of the 1930s was written with a consciousness of a shift away from the 'High Modernist' works of the 1920s (though without using this terminology to contextualise this change). This impression was owed partly to Orwell's sense of writing in the shadow of literary 'giants', such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, and also to a perceived change in the manner of literary works being produced, *i.e.* a shift from form to content. Secondly, works of the 1930s in general contain an imminent forewarning or prophecy of catastrophe, formed through an observation of the 'social emergency' of the period, not least related to the premonition of another war with Germany. Alongside various secondary sources, a range of essays by Orwell will be considered within this chapter. Each of these works deals with various considerations of the function of literature, in a widely defined sense, in a 'changing climate' of the late 1930s which facilitates a later examination of one of the forgotten early novels, *Coming Up For Air*.

Within these chapters, reconstruction is considered broadly (*i.e.* reconstruction of individual well-being, physical rebuilding, societal reform, and the failings of the 'peace project' to prevent another war) but remains the focus of discussion. In each of these instances, there exists a duality of writing out, or exorcising, the harrowing memories of the war and also a desire to express an impetus for change in the future. The works considered embody a corpus of source material about the experience of The Great War and the recovery of British society in the

⁶⁰ George Orwell, *George Orwell: Essays*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 6

nineteen-twenties and thirties. Besides the four main authors who are considered in the chapters to follow, a wide range of other practitioners of the written word are utilised in order to account for the immense variety of literature written before and after the war. However, the notable bias in the inclusion of secondary sources or authors is to support discussion of Ford, Huxley, Holtby, and Orwell rather than to delve into overt readings of various other texts for their own sake. This thesis contributes to the field of novel studies and criticism on First World War literature through a combination of previously overlooked approaches and by applying these to works that are often forgotten in studies of the Great War. Through an historical approach that employs the para-texts that exist parallel to each main work, a specific lineage of thought is developed through the lives and works of authors who were 'historical witnesses' of their times. In other words, the work to follow presents an historically-minded engagement, exchange, and debate of the production of literary works in the inter-war years which sought to act as a means of catharsis and innovation.

CHAPTER I

THE 'PRECARIOUSNESS OF ORDERED LIFE': REMINISCENCE AS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF IN FORD MADOX

FORD'S *NO ENEMY*

*Adult lives were cut sharply into three sections—
pre-war, war, and post-war. It is curious—perhaps
not so curious—but many people will tell you that
whole areas of their pre-war lives have become obliterated
from their memories. Pre-war seems like pre-history.*

Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero*¹

*Beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched the merest
film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos. One had come
from the frail shelters of the Line to a world that was
more frail than any canvas hut.*

Ford Madox Ford, *It Was the Nightingale*²

The short, introductory paragraph to the twelfth chapter of *Good-bye To All That* (1929) withdraws momentarily from Robert Graves's narrative. Placed between an history of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and their arrival in France with Graves in tow as a fledgling Special Reserve Officer, this passage serves as one of the occasional instances of authorial self-consciousness in this work and an example of the sort of tension found in rendering the Great War in words. He recalls here how 'in 1916, when on leave in England after being wounded, I began an account of my first few months in France. Having stupidly written it as a novel, I have

¹ Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (1929; rpt. London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 224.

² Ford Madox Ford, *It Was the Nightingale* (1933; rpt. London: Heinemann, 2011), pp. 47-48. Hereafter referred to as *IWTN*.

now to re-translate it into history'.³ Later, Graves explained that he felt he had 'distorted' his memories 'with a plot' and that writing in this way did not prove successful in ridding himself of the 'poison of war memories'.⁴ Though also preoccupied with how to represent the war, Ford never wrote what became recognised as the conventional first-person account of one's experience in the war. Instead, Ford's depiction of the war remained silently suspended between his two reminiscences *Return to Yesterday* (1931) and *It Was the Nightingale* (1933). The former concludes with the outbreak of war and the latter opens with Ford's discharge from the British Army. Likewise, his attempt at narrating the war falls 'betwixt & between' auto-biography and fiction, eschewing direct confrontation with combat but nevertheless demonstrating the need to facilitate reconciliation with the lasting trauma of war. This chapter will explore the writings of Ford Madox Ford, from roughly the outbreak of the First World War until the early thirties, as examples of 'literature of reconstruction'. Reconstruction, as it is considered here, takes on a broader yet more individualistic meaning than physical rebuilding or societal reform. Instead, Ford was concerned with a perceived loss of his technical ability to write and the need to reconstruct a sense of self. Alongside his physiological convalescence upon his return to Britain, he struggled with an inability to recall his experience of the war in a manner that would allow him to write about it. Ford's exercise of recall took many years to complete, and before beginning to write his seminal work on the war in four parts, *Parade's End*, Ford wrote several short works which he considered to be varyingly successful in their ability to set out the story of his service. These include, *inter alia*, *The Marsden Case* (1923), 'True Love and a G. C. M.' (1919), and *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction* (1929), which remained unpublished for a decade after its composition in 1919.⁵ Samuel Hynes predicted (in hind-sight) that had *No Enemy* been published at the time when it was first written, 'it might have had imitators, for it was the first post-war

³ Robert Graves, *Good-bye To All That* (1929; rpt. London: Penguin, 1957), pp. 79.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵ Samuel Hynes writes in *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), see p. 298, of the ten-year gap before the 'flood of war books', saying that 'English publishers were persuaded that their readers were tired of war writing, or at least of writing of a realistic, anti-monumental kind, and books that are now considered classics of English war literature were refused publication'.

book to deal imaginatively with the *formal* problems involved in rendering the war'.⁶ More generally, Max Saunders recognised this post-war period of writing as one in which Ford underwent a period of digestion, as it were, of his war service, saying that 'so devastating and disrupting an experience takes time to assimilate, master, and reconstruct'.⁷ A wider literary period of adjustment occurred as well. In addition to *Parade's End*, most of the 'classic' prose about the war was not written until the late 1920s: *viz.* Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Graves's *Good-bye To All That* (1929), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933), Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet On The Western Front* (1929), and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of An Infantry Officer* (1930). While in France, Ford was already considering a purpose for any post-war writing he might live to compose. He wrote 'rather hurried notes' to Joseph Conrad in 1916 out of a 'desire to record' saying that he was 'being shelled to hell' and 'did not expect to get thro' [*sic.*]'.⁸ Later, in the dedicatory letter at the opening of *No More Parades* (1925), part two of *Parade's End*, Ford wrote that 'few writers can have engaged themselves as combatants in what, please God will yet prove to be the war that ended war, without the intention of aiding with their writings, if they survived, in bringing about such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities'.⁹ This chapter is about Ford's attempt to obviate future wars, the process by which he recovered from the trauma of his service, and the lasting effect this had on his writing. The chapter begins with a discussion of Ford's inability to write after he was wounded and shell-shocked in the Great War and the process of reconstruction that shaped his writing after returning to Britain. This moves into a section which studies attempts at categorisation of Ford's works and his own apprehension of 'novels with a purpose'. Finally, the third section of the

⁶ Samuel Hynes, 'The Genre of *No Enemy*', *Antaeus* 56 (Spring 1986), 125-142, p. 137.

⁷ Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Vol. 2 The After-War World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 196.

⁸ Letter from Ford Madox Ford (FMF) to Joseph Conrad, 7 August 1916, *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Richard M. Ludwig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 96-97.

⁹ Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades, Parade's End*, vol. I (1925; rpt. London: Everyman's Library, 1992), p. vi.

chapter focuses on close readings of *No Enemy* and considers whether this work, as a cathartic act of 'writing-out' Ford's war experience, is able to reconstruct 'ordered life'.

I. 'AN INVISIBLE BARRIER IN MY BRAIN': SHELL SHOCK AND NARRATING THE TRAUMA OF WAR

In Ford Madox Ford's 1915 essay, 'An Englishman Looks At The World', he described the moment when he first read the fateful headline: 'AUSTRIAN HEIR MURDERED IN SARAJEVO'.¹⁰ Ford was standing on the platform of the railway station in Berwick-upon-Tweed reading the 'London papers' on 20 July 1914 waiting for a train to take him to Duns. He wrote that he wished for the essay to recapture 'the British psychology immediately prior to the outbreak of the present war'.¹¹ The 'British psychology' of this moment, in Ford's estimation, was one of serene detachment. The press was not concerned with the growing tensions abroad and instead devoted itself to society gossip. Ford wrote that 'we do not, as a rule look for newspapers during [July and] August'.¹² Instead, the concerns of the 'London season' and the 'natural order of the [social] year' occupied his mind, under which there lurked the suggestion that it was not terribly sporting for the troubles in Europe to affect Great Britain during its long and languid summer vacation where all that the people seek is 'brighter skies and a rest'.¹³ What Ford was able to recall most distinctly was the lack of any strong impact the announcement had upon him. Though there was likely to be a 'large war' as a result of the assassination, he admitted that it was the day-to-day preoccupations of life that were at the forefront of his mind, having written: 'the fact is that I did not speculate as to war at all. It was one of the impossible things that we left out of our calculations altogether'.¹⁴ Therefore, the significance of this day was attributed to it retrospectively. During that moment in Berwick-upon-Tweed, 'the topography of the Border country' was of more interest than the resentment of the Slavic nations towards the

¹⁰ Ford Madox Ford, 'The End of A World' excerpt from *Return to Yesterday, Memories and Impressions*, ed. Michael Killigrew (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 223.

¹¹ Ford Madox Ford, 'An Englishman Looks At the World', *War Prose*, ed. Max Saunders (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992), p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Austro-Hungarian Empire or the growing aggression of ‘the Kaiser’. The essay ends with Ford’s assertion that ‘the reader will by this time be aware that I am describing truthfully and as carefully as possible the frame of mind of the average Englishman of July 1914’.¹⁵ Whether his assertion may be taken as a general ‘frame of mind’ is uncertain, but this essay does provide a glimpse into Ford’s mind-set at the outset of the war as one that was inward looking towards activities at home rather than unrest abroad. The three, brief sub-sections to follow centre upon the author’s life ‘pre-war’, during the ‘war’, and ‘post-war’, offering a chronological tracing of the development of Ford’s intellectual thought through the early twentieth-century, which mirrors, befittingly, Richard Aldington’s partition of life for his generation quoted in the epigraph of this chapter.

I. PRE-WAR

In the pre-war years, Ford’s views on literature were more a reaction to what he perceived as ‘social degradation’ than a coherent philosophy of literary practice.¹⁶ In 1909, Ford published an essay entitled ‘The Passing of the Great Figure’ in which he recorded a perceived moral and intellectual decline in recent history. Carlyle, Ruskin, Mill, Newman, Arnold, Tennyson, and Eliot were considered ‘the last of the priests’ who represented ‘social stability, moral consensus and intellectual reflection’.¹⁷ The passing of these stalwarts of culture signalled, for Ford, a shift in English society. Technical and pedantic specialists such as economists, scientists, and bureaucrats took up the mantle of their omniscient expertise. Likewise, in the literary world, a newly literate reading public came into existence and ‘the desire of those who cater[ed] for it [was] not to

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ford Madox Ford, ‘The Passing of the Great Figure’, in *The Critical Attitude* (London: Duckworth, 1911), p. 118. This work is a compilation of a series of essays also entitled ‘The Critical Attitude’ that were published in the *English Review* from 1908 to 1909.

promote thought but to keep [them] entertained'.¹⁸ Conversely, the 'Great Figure' had 'commanded respect—he insisted upon it—not because he was going to give pleasure by the beauty of his words or the music of his periods, but because he was a sort of moral alchemist. He cared comparatively little whether or not he was going to give pleasure; he was going to solve the riddle of the universe', yet now Ford lamented that 'with each cheapening of the modes of production the public has seemed to read rottener and rottener books'.¹⁹ This essay may be overly simplistic in its historical reading, not least for its lack of recognition of the way in which these thinkers influenced Ford himself or the lack of any evidence that the 'reading masses' only ever read entertaining works. However, it offers a valuable reading of Ford's development of thought in this period through its overt disdain for modern writing and intellectual activity and nostalgia for a lost time and figures who embodied its values.

The 'passing of Great Figure(s)' left Ford discouraged over 'the vulgarization of art, the self-interested pursuit of profit, the adulteration of manufactured goods, the decline of excellence', criticisms which echo strains of Carlyle and Ruskin, but he lacked the same ideological perspective—'he possesses no comprehensive vision, no moral authority, no proposals for reform'.²⁰ Where Matthew Arnold could enjoin his readers to 'see life steadily and to see it whole', Ford lamented that 'we may contemplate life steadily enough to-day; it is impossible to see it whole'.²¹ One of the reasons Ford felt as though life could no longer be viewed whole was as a result of the absence of a prevailing intellectual standard. For example, the disorder resulting from an unregulated press is an issue that concerned both Ford and Arnold. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold introduced the case of a Nonconformist spokesman who tried to counter the editorial opinion of the *Saturday Review* by citing the intellectually suspect *British Banner*, as though one were equivalent to the other. Arnold responded by writing that 'the

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁹ Ford, 'Literary Portraits—XI: Mr R. A. Scott-James and "the influence of the press"', *Outlook*, XXXII (22 November 1913), p. 719.

²⁰ Ford, 'The Passing of the Great Figure', p. 120, and Michael H. Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 52.

²¹ Ford, 'Function of the Arts', *Critical Attitude*, p. 28.

speaker had evidently no notion that there was a scale of value for judgements on these topics', a criticism which one may take as an early attack on Relativism.²² This was a way for Arnold to demonstrate the hardship of sustaining rational discourse without an 'authoritative centre' against which spurious arguments could be tested.²³ Ford contemplated a similar issue when saying that 'divergent views find to-day such an easy expression that the mind at all inquiring is perpetually driven now in one direction, now in another [...] And this produces in the public mind a weariness, a confusion that leads in the end to something amounting almost to indifference'.²⁴ While Arnold recognised a similarly increasing distortion, he never doubted that there was a 'scale of value', however obscured beneath the prevailing cultural chaos it may have seemed. In other words, he still depended upon and recognised the authority of a publication such as the *Saturday Review*, regardless of whether he was in agreement with all that the magazine published. Ford, on the other hand, had no confidence in such persisting values. Where Arnold's point was that 'universal truths' in the form of authority must be separated and redeemed from vulgarity, Ford suggested that 'truth' had lapsed altogether, leaving the modern world in a state of social agnosticism. This discussion goes some way towards illustrating the declining assurance and conviction of the intellectual class in pre-war Britain. It is, therefore, not historically correct to attribute a confusion and decline of 'order' solely to the trauma of the Great War; however, one may question the ways in which the conflict exacerbated the already extant 'crisis of knowledge' in the pre-war years.

Owing to a declining assurance in the literary and intellectual life of the country, Ford surrendered to the position of a sceptic. The principal *telos* of Victorian art, in Ford's estimation, was an ambitious moralising. While he recognised that the 'Great Figure' of moral permanence provided social well being when their outlook filtered into literature, he felt that it was

²² Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 148. Relativism being considered as any doctrine or theory suggesting that knowledge, truth, morality, etc., are relative to situations, rather than being absolute.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

²⁴ Ford, 'Great Figure', pp. 119-120.

‘antagonistic to the artistic process’.²⁵ Therefore, while the passing of these ‘Great Figure(s)’ might have signalled a decline in society (or in social morals), their methods were the same that caused literary stagnation.²⁶ Ford’s ‘sceptical individualism’ during the pre-war years, caused a retreat from Victorian modes of moralising, rhetoric and sentimentality and a withdrawal from ‘mass culture, widening democracy and the political crises of a declining liberalism’.²⁷ The process was almost territorial: ‘as traditional values were jeopardised, there was a retreat to the surer, if not more modest, zone of the self’.²⁸ Michael Levenson contends that Ford always maintained a desire and tendency to place himself in the midst of two generations of writers. He did this largely through publishing work from the established Hardy, James, and Conrad, while also encouraging Pound, Lewis, and Lawrence in their more *avant garde* pursuits.²⁹ His propensity to span the divide between generations of literary endeavour discloses one of the difficulties found in attempting to place Ford firmly within a literary movement. Likewise, his political and philosophical views remain equally as difficult to pin-point, topics that will return to the forefront of discussion in the section to follow.

II. WAR

When in the summer of 1916, Second Lieutenant Ford Madox Hueffer went to France with the Royal Welch Regiment of Fusiliers, he was stationed behind the front line as a transport officer, but this did not mean that he was out of the range of the dangers of combat. Some time around 28 July 1916, he was ‘blown into the air’ by a high explosive shell. The impact was so great that he recorded having ‘completely lost my memory so that [...] three weeks of my life [were]

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ This idea of a connection between a literary purpose and stagnation is picked up again in the section below.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Levenson, *Genealogy of Modernism*, p. 61.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

completely dead to me'.³⁰ As a result, he spent thirty-six hours in a Casualty Clearing Station in Corbie languishing in a catatonic state in which he was unable to remember his own name. Christopher Tietjens's experience of loss of memory in *Parade's End* is based on this, and more notably an event with a fellow invalid that Ford remembered from his convalescence at Corbie. He recalled that when he 'was in hospital a man three beds from me died *very* hard, blood pouring thro' bandages & he himself crying perpetually, "Faith! Faith! Faith!" It was very disagreeable as long as he had a chance of life—but one lost all interest and forgot him when one heard he had none'.³¹ This event is recounted in *Some Do Not . . .* when a man tried to strangle Tietjens in his bed:

He let out a number of ear-piercing shrieks and lots of orderlies came and pulled him off me and sat all over him. Then he began to shout '*Faith!*' He shouted: 'Faith! ... Faith! ... Faith! ...' at intervals of two seconds, as far as I could tell by my pulse, until four in the morning, when he died ... I don't know whether it was a religious exhortation or a woman's name, but I disliked him a good deal because he started my tortures, such as they were ... There had been a girl I knew called Faith. Oh, not a love affair: the daughter of my father's head gardener, a Scotsman. The point is that every time he said Faith I asked myself 'Faith ... Faith what?' I couldn't remember the name [...]³²

The urgency of the man's cries are diminished by the connection Tietjens makes to a former acquaintance, yet it is peculiar that when trying to recall the girl's name he asks 'Faith what?' instead of 'Faith *who?*'—after the war, one may extend this line of questioning to ask 'faith *in* what?' Ford's war experience impacted his writing beyond merely providing autobiographical material. It destabilised his faith in traditional modes of order such as the church and the state and in himself. He later mused in *It Was the Nightingale* that, 'I don't know that the large words Courage, Loyalty, God and the rest had, before the war, been of frequent occurrence in London conversations. But one had had the conviction they were somewhere in the city's

³⁰ Ford, *IWITN*, p. 175.

³¹ Ford, *Mightier Than the Sword—Memories and Criticisms* (London: Heinemann, 2012), pp. 264-265.

³² Ford, *Some Do Not . . ., Parade's End* (London: Everyman's Library, 1992). p. 212.

subconsciousness [*sic.*]... now they were gone.³³ However, it was some time before he was able to collect his thoughts enough to consider the state of the world in this way: the symptoms he experienced of shell-shock were not brief and treatments were experimental for this newly diagnosed neurosis in the First World War.

Charles Myers, through the publication of his *Present-Day Application of Psychology*, was the physician responsible for the first appearance of the diagnosis 'shell-shock' in print. He wrote that 'shell-shock' was a neurosis 'essentially of mental origin' that demanded the attention of 'a new class of medical man, educated in [...] psychological theories and practices'.³⁴ The Great War was the first conflict in which psychological casualties were treated with any seriousness.³⁵ The systematic methods of diagnosis and treatment of shell shock during the war bore a crucial role in the formation of a comprehensive method of dealing with psychological casualties in later conflicts.³⁶ Initially, however, British doctors were uninterested in medical psychology as it may be applied in military situations. Radical changes to psychiatric practise in Britain, culminating in the Mental Treatment Act 1930, which made treatment without certification available to patients, came about as a result of the war.³⁷ Earlier, in 1915, the British Army attempted a formal medical classification of mental breakdown as a result of active service. A soldier whose neurosis was a direct result of a shell explosion was attributed the label 'Shell-shock, W' (for wound), while a soldier who developed the same symptoms outside of a cause 'due to the enemy' were labelled 'Shell-shock, S' (for sickness) and, therefore, did not receive a wound stripe or a pension.³⁸ Aside

³³ Ford, *IWTN*, p. 55.

³⁴ Charles Myers, *Present-Day Applications of Psychology: With Special Reference to Industry, Education and Mental Breakdown* (Los Angeles: HardPress Publishing, 2013), pp. 43-44.

³⁵ Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (London, Continuum, 2010), p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9. For instance, the official recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association only occurred in 1980 after decades of Psychological and Medical research into 'war neuroses'. See Wyatt Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), p. 2.

³⁷ Tracey Loughron, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 6.

³⁸ Charles Myers, *Shell Shock in France 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), pp. 93-101.

from the unambiguously subjective diagnosis practices underlying the terms ‘wounded’ and ‘sick’, the qualifier ‘due to the enemy’ was almost impossible to interpret.³⁹ By the end of the war, many hundreds of doctors had developed some level of expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of ‘war neurosis’, yet this did not counteract the public stigma attached to mental illness.⁴⁰ In 1922, a report was published by the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’ which estimated that there were a total of 65,000 ex-soldiers who remained hospitalised or who were drawing disability pensions for mental illness as a result of combat.⁴¹ The total number of soldiers who suffered from shell-shock to a severity requiring discharge from the army varies with some estimates as great as 200,000.⁴² However, as Richard Aldington later wrote, ‘we talk of shell-shock, but who wasn’t shell-shocked, more or less?’⁴³ Even so, through the 1920s those who found themselves caring for shell-shocked soldiers recognised that their suffering was especially acute because, besides their painful psychoses or as a part of them, they were unable to forget the war. Post-war Britain remained consumed by the war, and the desire to remember those who had died was accompanied by the dictum ‘Lest We Forget’.⁴⁴ Through the war, shell-shock was a markedly more visible effect of battle than the death of a soldier. The dead were kept out of sight—many bodies were unrecoverable from the battlefield and few were repatriated. Furthermore, as Allyson Booth wrote in *Postcards from the Trenches*, the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 banned photographs of the death, yet photographs of shell-shocked soldiers were circulated publically, showing ‘blank faces and twisted limbs, suggesting a haunting excess

³⁹ Charlotte Jones, ‘Representing Shell Shock: A Return to Ford and Rebecca West’, in *War and the Mind: Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End, Modernism, and Psychology*, eds. Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 129.

⁴⁰ Loughron, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture*, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ Anthony Babbington, *Shell-Shock: A History of the Changing Attitudes to War Neurosis* (London: Leo Cooper, 1940), pp. 93-101.

⁴² Laurinda Stryker, ‘Mental Cases: British Shellshock and the Politics of Interpretation’, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-1918*, ed. Gail Braybon (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), p. 160.

⁴³ Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, p. 376.

⁴⁴ Reid, p. 8.

written on the surface of the body but pointing to a deeper, invisible disturbance'.⁴⁵ As a result, shell-shocked soldiers remained in the sight of society as a daily reminder of the war but as a 'reminder' that was not fully understood. When writing a study of effects of shell-shock, the chief source for information is the 'comprehensive survey of published wartime medical discourses' such as the accounts from the neurologist W. H. R. Rivers.⁴⁶ First-hand accounts are more rare because of the 'silence within the experience of war', which manifests itself most emphatically upon the soldier's return home.⁴⁷ Ford was something of an exception to the rarity of first-hand accounts. While he did not explicitly write about his experience of shell-shock, or call the affliction by name, he attempted to confront the difficulties of expressing himself after returning from the front through a series of half-finished impressions of the war and its aftermath and wrote with a self-awareness of his inability to recall and express.

III. POST-WAR

The end of the war remained as clear in Ford's memory as its beginning. He recalled, in a potentially apocryphal revelatory moment, how in 1919, he stood contemplatively on the edge of a kerb in Campden Hill.⁴⁸ Here, on the side of the road by the local waterworks, he realised that he could not remain living in London owing to how the city had changed during the Great War. It's gaiety and insouciance which had 'shot defiant rays of light to the peak of Heaven' had passed into a darkness containing echoes of air-raid warnings, ominous shadows, and spectres of friends lost in the war.⁴⁹ Although the change was made manifest in visible representations or in the atmosphere of London, Ford also felt that the very social system of the country had

⁴⁵ Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Loughron, p. 16. For further information, see, *inter-alia*, any of the following journals during the years 1914-1919: *The British Medical Journal*, *Lancet*, *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, *The Medical World*, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, and the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

⁴⁷ Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ This is a potentially apocryphal anecdote. Ford's accounts often changed or were embellished. See footnote no. 56 below.

⁴⁹ Ford, *IWITN*, pp. 47-48.

crumbled. A society which, ostensibly in his view, had no cares because it had order was now reckless because it had none. The wanton destruction of the war revealed to Ford in a prophetic vein ‘that beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos. One had come from the frail shelters of the Line to a world that was more frail than any canvas hut’.⁵⁰ Ford became concerned with the ‘host of ways in which narratives function to “order” our lives’, recognising that The Great War disrupted the methods by which ‘order’ could be rendered through narrative.⁵¹ The Victorian ideal of steady and onward-marching progress was upset by the fact that modernity created the very means by which it wrought its destruction through aeroplanes, machine guns, and mustard gas. However, the recognition that the ‘authorizing notions of modernity, like reason and objectivity, may well act as concealed forms of oppression and terror’ continued to assault the battlefields of the mind once the guns in Europe fell silent.⁵²

If the Great War itself canonised authors such as Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, and Siegfried Sassoon as ‘War Poets’—because of their writings which were published and circulated during the war and have been venerated as part of the cultural memory of the war—the lasting trauma of war experience, a matter which was not consigned to the past with the Armistice, shaped the writings of Ford for the rest of his life.⁵³ Ford realised with ‘astounding prescience that the mind’s repression of war-suffering made it difficult to exorcise the suffering, and by the same token difficult to convey it in prose’ and found himself unable to write in a way which would, in his opinion, give an accurate rendering of the war and, likewise, compose a work of ‘reconstruction’ in order to overcome his continuing trauma and offer a suitable memorial to the many who were killed.⁵⁴ In other words, his inability to impose a narrative structure onto the war was symptomatic of his realisation that any peace he might find was dependant on having

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵² Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 101.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 197

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

survived an experience which, by all right, should have ended him (*i.e.* one may call this reaction ‘survivor’s guilt’). Ford’s response to surviving the war was twofold: a sense of relief and pleasure at having managed to make it through alive that existed with a sense of grief at the universal suffering through which he too had gone and come.⁵⁵ The problem for writing after the war was how to express the former without ignoring the weight of the latter.

When Ford returned to Britain after the war, he was uncertain of his place in London literary circles. Max Saunders records ‘three central and related themes’ which were to form Ford’s views on the war after he returned home:

First, that the war might have seemed like an escape from private entanglements, but it was not. Secondly, it follows from this that the soldier, like the impressionist (or indeed a reader), is in one place with his mind somewhere quite another with his body: ‘he is indeed *homo duplex*: a poor fellow whose body is tied in one place, but whose mind and personality brood eternally over another distant locality’. Thirdly, that this ‘never-ending sense of worry’ produced ‘mental distresses’ that were as significant as the ‘physical horrors’: ‘the heavy strain of the trenches came from the waiting for long periods of inaction, in great—in mortal—danger every minute of the day and night’.⁵⁶

By contrast, Soldiers who served in Afghanistan or South Africa in the nineteenth-century were thousands of miles away from home and, therefore, able to disassociate from its troubles. The trenches in Belgium and France were easily reached by post and telephone communications. News of familial quarrels, spousal betrayals, and financial emergencies were readily added to the terrors of the machine guns and artillery shells. The line between the war and home was blurred beyond reckoning. These effects of war preyed on Ford’s mind throughout the conflict and added to the sense of remove he felt upon returning home. He felt alienated and unsettled, recording ‘for me, as a writer I was completely forgotten and as completely I had forgotten all that the world had before then drummed into me of the art of conveying illusion to others’.⁵⁷ In

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁷ Ford, *IWTN*, p. 3.

It Was the Nightingale, he recalled how a smarmy Arnold Bennett asked that he write a piece on his views of the peace settlements to be published in *The Times*.⁵⁸ After the article was dutifully written and posted to the newspaper, it was with great embarrassment that Ford received a letter from Whitehall informing him that as an ‘Officer of His Britannic Majesty’s Army’ he was not allowed to express in any medium his views on the Armistice and that even when he was released from active service he would still be an officer of the Special Reserve, which would restrict his writings under the ‘Official Secrets Act’. Section 2 of the Official Secrets Act 1911 included statutory restrictions against ‘Wrongful Communication &c. of Information’. Specifically, the law forbade the ‘dissemination of confidential information ‘held by any person holding, or who has held, office under His Majesty, &c.’.⁵⁹ There is no evidence of an author being prosecuted during, or in the decades immediately after, World War One under this act, section 8 limits prosecution to cases under direct discretion of the Attorney General, yet this lack of court documentation does not preclude clandestine efforts of censorship. It seems that Bennett knew that this statutory limitation existed at the time of asking, and the effect on Ford was immense. Ford wrote that as the ‘spectre at the feast had told him he was dead as a writer, and he had no one who was willing to contradict this, he convinced himself that he could no longer write’.⁶⁰ Because of a lack of confidence when in the midst of literary London, Ford decided that the only way to resume his writing was to escape from the city. ‘The Country is good when one has discovered for oneself various hollownesses [*sic*]’, Ford wrote to Herbert Read, ‘—those of the plaster Pillars of the State and the papier maché hearts of men’.⁶¹ This retreat came in the form of Red Ford cottage in West Sussex. Although a physical change of

⁵⁸ Saunders records that Ford wrote several accounts of this exchange. Bennett was director of British propaganda in France for Lord Beaverbrook, the Minister of Information, so he was, indeed, in a position to ask this of Ford. ‘Ford said Bennett ordered him to write about ‘terms of peace’, and that they then ‘disagreed very violently. *Very* violently!’ about what the peace treaty would secure for France’. In three of the accounts, the ‘essentials’ are the same: Ford states that he was asked to write an article, the Ministry suppressed it, and a military superior reminded him that as an army officer he was forbidden to write for the press. See Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 57.

⁵⁹ Official Secrets Act 1911 (1&2 Geo 5c, Ch. 28).

⁶⁰ Ford, *IWITN*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 86.

place was needed, so too was the change of mind-set that the country afforded Ford in this period. London remained imbued with the war experience, but distance from the metropolis allowed for a renewed perspective and that perspective allowed Ford to regain the confidence to write.

In the summer of 1919, Ford Madox 'Hueffer' changed his surname to 'Ford' by deed poll. Changes in name, relationship, address, and eventually country of residence all contributed to a 'reconstruction' of the man himself after the war. Ford said in a letter to his agent James B. Pinker that he decided to change his name 'partly to oblige a relative and partly because a Teutonic name is in these days disagreeable'.⁶² Shying away from one's German heritage was not an uncommon practice at the time. The most notable occurrence of this was when in 1917 the Royal Family, during the rein of George V, changed the name of their Royal House from 'Saxe-Coburg and Gotha' to 'Windsor' to distance themselves from their war-mongering cousin, the Kaiser, who previously had been welcomed in the courts of Queen Victoria and King Edward VII. Ford also asked Pinker that he not give his new address out to '*anyone* whatever', adding that it was 'absolutely necessary for me to have a place where I can write undisturbed if I am ever to write again'.⁶³ Indeed, Ford was only able to escape the ineluctable symptoms of war once his experience was translated into narrative memory. Even if for some years after the peace, Ford felt as though he was unable to write, or indeed accurately recall his service, his letters, essays, and attempts to write fiction were steeped in haunting images and a dislocated sense of self. A dedicatory letter to *The Good Soldier* was added to the front of the text only in 1927, over a decade after its initial publication. In this letter to Stella Ford, Ford wrote that though this may be his best book, all other writing after the war 'may be regarded as the work of a different man', adding that he is certain that without her 'spurring me again to write' that he should never have

⁶² Letter from FMF to J. B. Pinker, 6 June 1919, *Letters*, pp. 96-97.

⁶³ Letter from FMF to J. B. Pinker, 5 June 1919, *Ibid.*, p. 93.

put pen to paper once again, never mind recovering from his war experience.⁶⁴ Alongside the tangible changes in Ford himself, there was a change in the manner and scope of his intellectual pursuits as well.

The third instalment of *Parade's End* is entitled *A Man Could Stand Up*—, the operative word in this title being 'could', yet the thought is cut off by an unceremonious dash which leaves the lingering question 'a man could stand up, if what?'. The boundary between autobiography and fiction is one that the First World War made newly problematic, and the question implied in the title 'a man could stand up' contained the tacit response, 'if one were able to see clearly' (*i.e.* survive peering over the top, thus, and gaining perspective'). In 1916-1917, Ford explored, in two introspective essays, the reasons for his inability to write about the war, thus with characteristic slight of hand, writing about it'. In a 1916 essay, 'A Day of Battle', Ford recalls having 'asked myself continuously why I can write nothing—why I cannot even think anything that to myself seems worth thinking! [...] And why cannot I even evoke pictures of the Somme or the flat lands round Ploegsteert? With the pen, I used to be able to 'visualize things'—as it used to be called'.⁶⁵ Though he asks why he was unable to 'visualise things', his descriptions of the front do so lucidly. He recalled seeing 'little pictures having all the brilliant minuteness that medieval illuminations had [...] of men, burst into mere showers of blood and dissolving into muddy ooze; or of aeroplanes and shells against the translucent blue', which paints the war in the still, vibrant tones of Pre-Raphaelite stained glass.⁶⁶ Even so, he considered how even in ancient texts those who went to war were rarely the ones who were able to write about it, saying 'it was not Hector of Troy—it wasn't even Helen!—who wrote the *Iliad*: it wasn't Lear who wrote *Lear*'.⁶⁷ He felt that an account of war needed distancing. The *Iliad* and *Lear* are fictional

⁶⁴ Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (1915; rpt. Richmond: Alma Classics, Ltd., 1943), p. 3.

⁶⁵ Ford Madox Ford, 'A Day of Battle', *The Ford Madox Ford Reader*, ed. Sondra J. Stang (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1987), p. 456.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

dramatisations as opposed to essays. Owing to a lack of perspective, 'A Day of Battle' was restricted to being able to *tell* about the war; it wasn't until *No Enemy* that Ford could *show* it.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Paul Skinner, Introduction to Ford Madox Ford, *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction*, ed. Paul Skinner (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2002), p. viii. All further references are to this edition (including to the main body of the text as well as Skinner's introduction) and will be abbreviated in citations as *NE*.

II. THE 'SERIOUS BOOK' AND DIFFICULTIES OF CATEGORISATION

Ford wrote to his literary agent J. B. Pinker in the summer of 1919 to discuss the trouble he found with arranging the publication of a new book entitled *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction*. It was a work which began as a series of essays published in the *New Statesman* with a working title 'English Country'.⁶⁹ The completed work illustrates the character Gringoire's experience of the Great War through a series of landscapes that explore the way in which Ford's memory of his service was able to be manifest as fictional, impressionistic tableaux. These series of landscapes tacitly recognise the stasis of trauma experienced by the author. For instance, instead of, as the titular description 'tale' might suggest, *i.e.* a plot-driven account of the war, the book is divided into two sections, 'Four Landscapes' and 'Certain Interiors', wherein each chapter recalls a singular, still scene. The difficulty with finding a publisher for this work came largely from the complication that Ford's next novel after *The Good Soldier* was promised contractually to John Lane. However, whether 'English Country' could be classified as a novel was questionable. Ford questions this himself when corresponding with Pinker, having written:

You speak of it as a novel & that rather troubles me. If it is a novel, it simply has to go to Lane. I regard it as what is called a 'serious book'—I supposed it is really betwixt & between.

Can you approach Lane about it? Or should I? I do so dislike being in false positions about books—yet I always seem to get into them, with the best intentions in the world. I wish you could get over your antipathy to J. L.—at any rate for the occasion—& put the matter to him. I would—but then I might seem to be going behind *your* back & there we should be again.

I meant *English Country* to be a 'piece of writing', like the *Soul of London* and to go, eventually, to Duckworth.

⁶⁹ Max Saunders notes that these essays were published in August and September of 1920 in the *New Statesman*. Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 80. For further information on the compositional history of *No Enemy*, see Skinner's Introduction to the work; Longenbach, *Ford Madox Ford: The Novelist As Historian*; or Hynes, 'The Genre of *No Enemy*'.

I wish you wd. send me that Northern Newspapers money. My pigs have been sick—and that is ruinous as well as distracting.

I suppose you wd. not care to buy a pig—not a sick one—about 20 st.⁷⁰

Ford was not unaccustomed with being in ‘false positions’ as his various *affaires de coeur* from this period suggest (for instance, he left Violet Hunt as the war ended and settled with Stella Bowen in West Sussex in 1919), and in this letter, he is careful to moderate his tone, only tentatively stating his preference that he would like ‘English Country’ (*No Enemy*) to be published by Duckworth. Presumably from experience of mishandling his business arrangements in the past (predicting that if matters had gone badly wrong that ‘there we should be again’), he positions himself in the role of a martyr and avoids any culpability of finite views by stating that he is in possession of ‘the best intentions in the world’, a characteristically Fordian and hyperbolic statement. The forcedly light-hearted communication disarms the possibility of fanning the flames of Pinker’s unexplained antipathy towards Lane with the added, farcical offer to sell him a pig. However, one gathers that Ford’s concern here is not entirely to do with the relationship between his agent and publisher, the logistics of printing ‘English Country’, or the health of his livestock, as ‘distracting’ and inter-related as these anxieties might be. Of interest here is his reticence to speak in definitive terms owing to an uncertainty about the classification of his work, which, as I shall discuss below, was an unease not only about how to publish *No Enemy* but about the fact that he had composed the work at all. This section will begin with an account of the ‘serious book’, alongside a survey of recent criticism, in order to establish an understanding of what a ‘betwixt & between’ work might, in Ford’s view, have been.

The prevailing tone of the language in the letter above is that of supposition rather than conviction. Ford may *regard* ‘English Country’ as a ‘serious book’, a classification for Ford as ruinous as a sick pig, but he *supposes* it is really ‘betwixt & between’. It is a ‘piece of writing which cannot, therefore, be categorised by any recognisable terms but is stranded in a generic limbo;

⁷⁰ Letter from FMF to J. B. Pinker, 24 July 1919, *Letters*, p. 96-97.

however, one questions the validity of Ford's speculation here when he uses the same terms in his offer to Pinker: 'I *suppose* you wd. not care to buy a pig' (emphasis added). Once again, the terms employed lack conviction yet employ a form of passive persuasion. His question is hesitant at best because he knows that a man living in London has no use for a whole pig though, of course, he hopes he might buy one off him anyway because, as he admits himself, he needs the money. Nevertheless, Ford's reluctance to send the book to Lane is evidence that the work would have been refused by the publishing house as something other than a novel, or indeed fictional. If it is a 'betwixt & between' work, it would be easy enough to surmise, upon reading the text, that it is not a novel, but what Ford means by a 'serious book' is rather more vague.

In September of 1924, Ford published an article in the *Transatlantic Review* which took as its subject 'The Serious Book'. The article was released under the name 'Daniel Chaucer', ostensibly a regular contributor to the journal, which was, in actuality, a common pseudonym of Ford's.⁷¹ His regular instalment, 'Stocktaking: Towards a Revaluation of English Literature', denotes that the 'serious book' is a work with a specific purpose, such as a guide to electrical engineering—in this case, a purely instructional 'manual'.⁷² However, Chaucer (hereafter referred to as Ford) wrote in regards to the hypothetical guide that 'all views become in Sapper's language, tripe: there is no escape for them. The moment they are expressed, they begin to decay'.⁷³ This type of book is functional and, therefore, useful but as a result its contents are also prone to obsolescence. One aversion to the 'serious book', therefore, is its short life-span.

⁷¹ For instance, Ford's novel *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes*, a re-telling of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), was originally published by Constable in 1911 under the same pseudonym.

⁷² Ford Madox Ford (Pseudonym, 'Daniel Chaucer'), 'Stocktaking: Towards a Revaluation of English Literature', *The Transatlantic Review*, 23 September 1924, pp. 274-283.

⁷³ A 'Sapper' is a Private Soldier in the Royal Corps of Engineers. The term was first used in 1856 to denote soldiers in the British Army who dug 'saps', or trenches (from the French '*sappe*' or '*sapeur*', an archaic word for a spade). Here, 'Sapper's language' is likely to refer to H. C. McNeile's popular short stories published in the *Daily Mail* and other journals through the war which were published under this pseudonym. McNeile was an officer in the Royal Engineers, hence the name. His stories sought to offer candid, straightforward accounts of the war in order to lend authenticity to his writing. See Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War*, pp. 67-68.

Technology will continue to develop after the publication of a book of this nature, and eventually a guide to electrical engineering published at a certain date will have little practical application. Unless the book goes through updated editions, eventually it is of no further use. Of course, such a book may have a use for historians of technology; however, the point remains that its usefulness undergoes a shift. Ford continues by explaining that the difference between ‘serious’ and literary writing is also one of perspective. The author of a ‘serious book’, he states, ‘is a purveyor of all Views’, and ‘to the measure of the light vouchsafed him is a prophet’.⁷⁴ Conversely, Ford believed that the writer of imaginative works ‘should render, not draw morals’.⁷⁵ He expressed this same view later with a damning indictment of those works which attempt moralising, writing ‘I have always had the greatest contempt for novels written with a purpose’.⁷⁶ This suggests that he disliked only *novels* written with a purpose, not all books which may serve a use. This is a view which he confesses he developed after offending George Moore when, upon a visit to the author, he revealed that he enjoyed his reminiscences more than anything else he had written. Moore reacted ferociously, and the occasion wrought the formulation of Ford’s commandment that ‘one should never say to a novelist that you prefer his “serious” writings to his fiction’.⁷⁷ Adding ‘though I find that such few novelist friends as I have always say that to me. But novel-writing is a sport infinitely more exciting than the other form, so that almost all writers would prefer to be remembered by their imaginations rather than by their records’.⁷⁸ The encounter with Moore left a lasting impression on Ford’s views on literature that were drawn out and examined through various works. Indeed, this encounter is dramatized in *It Was the Nightingale*, which was published nearly a decade after the essay written by ‘Chaucer’.

Through renderings the artist is a passive observer and recorder, whereas the prophet actively offers doctrine. A distinction between literary ‘practitioners’ and their compositions

⁷⁴ Ford, ‘Stocktaking’, p. 274.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ford, *IWITN*, p. 205.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

along these lines draws upon the debate, discussed briefly in the introduction to this thesis, over whether a work of literature should serve a function or whether there is some worth in the 'purely artistic', if such a work can exist. In fact, Ford compares authors of 'literature' to the nineteenth-century Naturalist, a specialist of natural history who is 'concerned more with observation than with experiment'.⁷⁹ Considering the Artist as a type of literary Naturalist suggests a certain stationary approach to subject matter that is quietly observed and meticulously recorded rather than created. Ford sought to embody such a role in his 'piece of writing' (another ambiguous term which he uses in his letter to Pinker above which is suggestive of an incomplete, or trifling, work), *The Soul of London* (1905). This work attempted an holistic view of the 'Imperial Capital', of its approaches and buildings and its people at work and at play. However, Ford purposely circumvented the formulaic, 'encyclopaedic, topographical, or archaeological' approach to his record of the city.⁸⁰ He was less interested in 'writing about' the metropolis, he wrote, than in capturing 'the atmosphere of modern London'.⁸¹ 'Impressions' took the place of statistics, history, and argument. For example, sections are entitled 'a manifestation of the modern spirit', 'mental images of former Londoners', and 'the individualist and his neighbours'. An attempt 'after the truth of rendering' in the book is tempered with the understanding that the relationship between writer and object is never a static one. Instead, the business of the work is to give 'presentations'.⁸² The complexities of this approach are illuminated by Ford's later 'On Impressionism' (1913) where he claimed that 'all art must be the expression of an ego', comparing art to the work of the 'agricultural correspondent [*sic.*] of the Times', who may give the reader 'not so much his own impressions of a new strain of grass as the factual observations of himself and of as many as possible other sound authorities'.⁸³ Virginia Woolf discussed this approach to literary recording and writing in a similar manner in her essay

⁷⁹ 'Naturalist', n. *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online, third ed. Oxford University Press).

⁸⁰ Ford Madox Ford, *The Soul of London* (1905; rpt. London: Everyman, 1998), p. 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸³ Ford Madox Ford, 'On Impressionism', *Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Frank MacShane (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 33-55.

‘Modern Fiction’ where she wrote that ‘the mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpest of steel’.⁸⁴ It is the purpose of the author, Woolf claimed, to give fictive life and order to these impressions.⁸⁵ Likewise, Ezra Pound, who was a close acquaintance of Ford’s, wrote that an image ‘is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’ and that the poet should ‘render the image as we have perceived or conceived it’.⁸⁶ For Ford, the ideal novelist was one who never propagandises for any particular cause. He believed that his readership was more ‘improved’ by being delighted than by reading moralizing, didactic works. In other words, literature should be limited to creating sympathy for ideas, but it should not bear the burden of, nor can it, reform. Ford’s fictional writing exemplified a concern with literature’s function, while at the same time, illustrating a refusal to employ fiction ‘as a vehicle for explicit proselytism’.⁸⁷

The difference between these views, one may conclude, is that the ‘serious book’ sets out with a purpose but its manifestation is impersonal, just as the prophet acts on another’s (chiefly, a divine god’s) behalf. The artist, on the other hand, seeks to render the world around himself truthfully, but in doing so, cannot avoid imparting himself onto his work. A ‘non-fictional novel’ or autobiographical work, such as *No Enemy*, is told largely through stories. Novelists, undoubtedly, draw upon their own lives, to varying extents, in this form of writing. That Ford’s remembrances contain ‘historical characters’—James, Conrad, Hudson, Crane—does not make them any less stories, nor does it make them ‘untrue’. A betwixt & between work may, therefore, be unsettling to readers or critics who are more comfortable with tidy and distinct works that fit comfortably into a single genre. Samuel Hynes, in his essay ‘The Genre of *No Enemy*’ (1986), finds the categorisation of this type of work to be a puzzling impasse, saying:

⁸⁴ Presumably, too, Ford would have been familiar with George Moore’s attempts to write a kind of literary impressionism in *Esther Waters* (1894) and other novels. It is some years before Woolf expresses the same ideas, but nonetheless her essay is a seminal work on the subject.

⁸⁵ Virginia Woolf, ‘Modern Fiction’, *Collected Essays*, vol. 2, ed. Leonard Woolf (London: Hogarth, 1966), p. 105.

⁸⁶ Ezra Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, *Early Writings: Poems and Prose* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 253.

⁸⁷ Robert Green *Ford Madox Ford: Prose and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 120.

How are we to name the genre of such an odd book? A fiction with two narrators but without a narrative; an autobiography without a self; a construction of spatial elements that nevertheless manages to have enough movement to make the end of movement on the last page significant; a patchwork of fragmentary impression of war remembered and of peace achieved?⁸⁸

Paul Skinner wrote that ‘*Return to Yesterday, It Was the Nightingale, Provence, Great Trade Route*, Ford’s finest books of the 1930s’, are all ‘betwixt & between’.⁸⁹ Three decades before the noisy acclamation of Tom Wolfe and other practitioners of the ‘New Journalism’, or the ‘non-fictional novel’ of Truman Capote, Ford developed this genre—or mixture of genres—which is so much more familiar now. However, I shall argue in the section below that *No Enemy* is far more coherent than Hynes suggests if one eschews the question of categorisation of the work and focuses instead on the literary tropes which facilitate reconstruction through reminiscence. The suggestion, above, that *No Enemy* is an ‘autobiography’ without a self suggests a vacancy of authorial influence and lack of a subject. *No Enemy*, however, does have a subject: Ford. However, Ford is scattered through various narrators and, indeed, the narrative form itself, which gives a perspective from which to explore the trauma of war. Likewise, instead of focusing on recounting scenes of combat or moment of suffering after the war, Gringoire’s esoteric tangents relocate his tale away from the realities of war. The dislocation of author and subject matter demonstrates the ‘essential discontinuity and incoherence of war as it is actually experienced’.⁹⁰ In other words, *No Enemy* serves as an experiment in the (in)effectiveness of imposing narrative onto war experience. Memory as a linear narrative is literally disrupted by the gaps of the traumatised subject. A purely utilitarian view of a work of literature, as a form of art, is reductive. However, one must recognise that even ‘art for art’s sake’ has an elemental function which operates as a temporary, transcendental removal of the observer, or reader, from the natural world. Literature which is ‘art for art’s sake’ does not necessarily foreground aesthetic

⁸⁸ Samuel Hynes, ‘The Genre of *No Enemy*’, pp. 137, 140.

⁸⁹ Skinner, ‘Introduction’, p. x.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

considerations (*e.g.* ‘beauty’) above all else. Pater and Wilde, for instance, did presumably expect to have readers. However, the contention between these two views seems to stem from a disagreement over *when* a use may be recognised or prescribed to a work of art. If a use is premeditated, such in the sense that Ford wished to create in *Parade’s End* a work ‘for the obviating of all future wars’, this he would class as in the latter, functional, form of literature. However, it is difficult, as Ford was to learn, for an author to impart a purpose onto his characters and maintain the illusion that their views are not his own.

The portrayal of Christopher Tietjens, the main character of the tetralogy *Parade’s End*, as the ‘last Tory in England’ was a decision that was to haunt Ford.⁹¹ Mistakenly taken as representative of Ford’s own political views by readers and critics, Tietjens was dismissed as reactionary and nostalgic for a pre-war order. Ford’s political views represented ‘a sociology of the missing middle’: a sympathy with the traditional landowners and the working classes, but an aversion to the middle-classes, and to political moderates, and to *arrivistes* like Tietjens’s friend Vincent MacMaster. Ford’s support of the suffragettes and his championing of Irish Home Rule would have been anathema to the Conservatives. Instead, he rendered the pervasive anxiety of the pre-war years that traditional values and the traditional order were being shaken. The basis of Fordian ‘feudalism’ is a distrust of the liberal insistence on ‘rights’. For Ford, liberal individualism is a form of egoism: rights are generally alibis for exploiting those with fewer rights. His ideal of political conduct is the Tory altruist who, rather than asserting his will and his ‘rights’, effaces himself in his ‘responsibilities’. Ford’s politics, like all his attitudes, are impressionist: ‘illuminative exaggerations’, unrealistic rendering of unrealistic positions, which make us *see* political realities.⁹² As a result of this flawed and narrow conflation of author and character Ford stated in the preface of the third book of the series, *A Man Could Stand Up*—

⁹¹ Ford, *Some Do Not...*, p. 51.

⁹² Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 205.

(1926), that his views were ‘not, *not*, NOT’ those of Tietjens.⁹³ However, the final instalment of the quartet, *Last Post* (1928), showed that feudalism after the war no longer enjoyed security as a social and economic system. The system of landed gentry and private charity had transformed itself into a form of capitalistic heritage industry, whereby Tietjens, formerly a member of the privileged classes, must sell antique furniture to rich Americans. It is a precarious act to attribute a political or ideological label to an author based upon his or her fictional works. One risks not only oversimplification but a restriction of the faculties of literature. One must only think of *Moll Flanders* and the verisimilitude accredited to the tale by Defoe in its preface in order to see the fallacies of assuming protagonist and author are one and the same. Likewise, though Dowell, in *The Good Soldier*, may profess to relate a ‘real story’, ‘the saddest story ever told’, we know that his characters are fictitious personalities on paper. *No Enemy*, on the other hand, problematises the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, and narrative and non-narrative.

Likewise, Ford’s views are not easy to pin down. In *Mirror to France* (1926), he claimed: I have always been contentedly and unobtrusively inclined to the extreme Right in political matters, but ... I have never considered myself sufficiently intelligent to interfere in the internal politics of my own country’.⁹⁴ We see a glimpse here of Ford’s habit of self-deprecation, which is not, in practice, limiting: *i.e.* he might claim an inability to comment on political affairs but this does little to stop him doing so. For instance, following the quotation above, he goes on to comment upon individual political issues at some length, admitting that he was a supporter of Irish Home Rule and of Women’s Suffrage, neither of which would have constituted part of an ‘extreme Right’ policy at the time.⁹⁵ Overall, Ford asserts that he does not like to be ‘pigeon-holed’, and a reluctance to be defined is evident with regard to his literary views as well. To return, briefly, to ‘On Impressionism’, he begins the essay with the caveat:

⁹³ Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up*—, p. iv.

⁹⁴ Ford Madox Ford, *A Mirror to France* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1926), p. 101.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

I do not know why I should have been especially asked to write about Impressionism [...] a few years ago, if anybody had called me an Impressionist I should languidly have denied that I was anything of the sort [...] but one person and another in the last ten years has called me Impressionist with such persistence that I have given up resistance. I don't know; I just write books and if someone attaches a label to me I do not much mind'.⁹⁶

While Ford may not have minded the act of labelling, there are instances where this act is at best unhelpful and at the worst, distorting.

Among the most recent full-length works published on Ford is Rob Hawkes's book *Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns: Edwardian Fiction and the First World War* (2012). The book begins with the bold statement that 'Ford Madox Ford is a major figure of the modernist age'.⁹⁷ However, the *raison d'être* of the book cannot be argued effectively if this statement is taken in a straightforward sense, and by the end of the first paragraph, Hawkes claims that, excepting *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*, Ford's *oeuvre* does 'not fulfil the expectations generated by his masterpieces or, indeed, by the category of modernism'.⁹⁸ To claim this is to encourage a view which unabashedly centres upon the 'readership', or more specifically, the critic, yet this is the outlook which forms the centre of the book's theoretical stance: that a 'reader's', or more specifically a particular type of literary academic reader's, expectations and modes of categorisation are the primary authorities when attempting to classify Ford's works.⁹⁹ Within this approach, genre, and the expectations of an anonymous and unanimously agreed 'readership' serve as the agents of what is meet and right in the era of modernist literature. To expand upon this approach, Hawkes later discusses the functionality of genre in literature, quoting Tzvetan Todorov, who says that 'it is because genres exist as an institution that they function as

⁹⁶ Ford, 'On Impressionism', p. 33.

⁹⁷ Rob Hawkes, *Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns: Edwardian Fiction and the First World War* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p. 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

“horizons of expectation” for readers and as “models of writing” for authors’.¹⁰⁰ This model of genre, once established, lacks credibility because it functions only to strengthen its own system of categorisation: an author produces a literary work, the work is classified, the reader comes to know what to expect from this classification, the author then writes to these expectations, and this is repeated. Hawkes also says that he believes that the major contention of Ford’s works is that they ‘stimulate whilst simultaneously undermining the reader’s desire for narrative coherence’.¹⁰¹ While one may take the point that when ‘a reader’ approaches any given text, there will be a certain number of expectations which exist: one might reasonably expect a novel to contain a story within which there is plot development, fictional characters, the illustration of a setting—this is an extraordinarily reductive manner of considering imaginative works of literature. For a work such as *No Enemy*, Skinner argues that ‘one of the functions of the narrator is undoubtedly to articulate what is expected of a “War Reminiscence”’.¹⁰² While Skinner’s view is reasonable, Hawkes assumes a unanimously agreed and non-diverse readership which is unable to adapt to a text which is ‘outside’ any ‘conventional narrative structure’. If this were the only desire of a readership, one may question the success of various mediums of literature which require different modes of reading and different expectations upon approach: poetry, drama, the short story, not to mention ‘the serious book’ such as a travel guide, scientific tract, biography, historical text or ‘cultural study’.

Moreover, a vast historical and contextual deficit is created by such an approach, specifically an apprehension, and eventually an inability, to recognise works which may fall outside of ‘horizons of expectation’. The most pernicious result of this form of narrow-minded attitude is a lack of recognition of authorial intellectual complexity and invention within a text. Hawkes, wearing this particular brand of theoretical blinkers, continues by saying that ‘Ford’s

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 104. Quotation taken from Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). See also Hans Jauss, *Towards and Aesthetic of Reception*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Skinner, ‘Introduction’, p. xii.

works [...] are frequently resistant to this form of categorisation'.¹⁰³ Such a 'resistance' does not lead, as it logically might, towards an inquiry into 'why?' Ford's works are a square peg to the orderly, round holes of generic categorisation, and thus what flaws there might be with this form of labelling, or, more interestingly, what besides definition may be discussed about the text. Instead, the opposition of Ford's *oeuvre* to the 'readership's' expectations provides the latitude for the epithet 'misfit'. One might also ask if an understanding of a text is necessary, or indeed possible, before reading. E. M. Forster discussed the follies of wanton classification in *Aspects of the Novel*, where he wrote that it is 'the pseudo-scholar [who] classes books before he has read them'.¹⁰⁴ One would be reticent to cast about the label 'pseudo-scholar', yet Forster had a point when he suggests that pre-emptive labelling can create the effect of 'moving around books instead of through them'.¹⁰⁵ A theoretical stance may be useful for criticism but only within a plurality of approaches that consider, not ignore, the context in which a book was written. Furthermore, 'books have to be read (worse luck, for it takes a long time); it is the only way of discovering what they contain', and to this end, the section to follow contains close readings of *No Enemy* in an attempt to work *through* the text.¹⁰⁶

However, it is worth turning, briefly, to Roland Barthes's work 'The Death of the Author', to which Hawkes's theoretical stance is indebted. The literary approach employed in *Misfit Moderns* follows the reasoning of Barthes's essay that emphasises that the true locus of writing is reading. This is a conclusion reached based upon the belief that 'the image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions . . .'.¹⁰⁷ Barthes begins with the issue of the conflation of author and narrator (or of author and character) through an *exemplum* of the multitude of meanings in a passage from Balzac's *Sarrasine*. While the point is taken readily that it is impossible to know the

¹⁰³ Hawkes, *Misfit Moderns*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1941), p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 143.

intentions of an author, it is quite a different assertion to suggest that a work may not be illuminated by an historical understanding, whether this is through general historical contextualising or investigation into the author's life (and reasons for writing a particular text), often through using paratextual materials such as letters or diaries. The former approach may rely upon blind assertions drawn from the text about an author's reasons for having written it, whereas the latter relies upon evidence which can be found through research and then quoted, cited, and discussed. While still evading the trap of 'intentional fallacy', one may build a commentary on a text that does not rely upon the assumption that it is divorced from the author as soon as it is created. The impetus of this form of thought stems from the fact that texts are messy. They hold no single meaning, and therefore an author's aims in creation or aims to control the reactions of a readership cannot be substantiated. However, the act of definition, categorisation, or 'pigeon-holing' does much the same. Instead the baton of intention is passed to the critic, who, as in the case above with *No Enemy*, wishes to establish an accepted and definitive reading in order to 'stabilise' the text. An allowance for this act of steadying is given in Barthes's statement that 'to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting" (as the Classic writers put it), but rather what the linguisticians [*sic.*], following the vocabulary of the Oxford school, call a performative act [...] To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing'.¹⁰⁸ Yet to suggest, as Hawkes has done, that a modern reader or critic is hampered by lack of 'appropriate terminology' only creates the environment within which an increasing amount of deliberately obfuscatory language can be cultivated, serving only to shut down discussion and create a breed of 'lynx-eyed censors, keenly on the look out for the least hint of terminological inexactitude'.¹⁰⁹ This act creates a boundary within which a work must lie, and sealing off the tomb of the author ignores the intellectual vivacity and scope of

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁰⁹ Ford Madox Ford, *The Month: An Illustrated Magazine of Literature, Science and Art*, July 1907.

their creation. And this is, really, where Hawkes's argument begins to break down. He suggests repeatedly that we, critics, do not have the terminology with which to talk about Ford's work. Hawkes approaches the complexity of narrative perspective in this work by saying that it is 'about a form of in-betweenness [*sic*] signalled by what I will describe as destabilising narrative strategies [...] which undermine the fundamental structures and forces which shape all narrative and which, in doing so, undermine the distinctions upon which many of our assumptions about early twentieth-century literature rest'.¹¹⁰ This premise provides a point of departure from which a discussion about 'Ford's notion of the precariousness of 'Ordered Life' may be fostered. Hawkes suggests that Ford's works must be 'viewed in terms of this concern with narrative shape and stability, and as representative of the host of ways in which narratives function to 'order' our lives, rendering our experiences comprehensible, coherent, and meaningful'.¹¹¹ However, he goes on to talk about how the narrator of *The Good Soldier*, John Dowell, is debunked as inadequate, lacking knowledge of 'his own story', which causes a 'destabilisation of narrative', and Faye Hammill is quoted as saying that 'the increasing number of critics working on the non-modernist literature of the early twentieth century are hampered by the lack of appropriate terminology to describe their specialism'.¹¹² This puts the proverbial cart some miles before the horse. If one were so reticent to wait for terminology in order to read, or conclusions before writing, one would never attempt either. This is a view which fundamentally misunderstands the formalistic workings of narrative within such a tale, which has as much to say from its silence about the war as its diversions into gardening and cricket matches. *No Enemy* has a tangible historical context on which to draw that can provide some answers to these questions. The work's gestation was a long one and caused Ford a great deal of perturbation. First, because he found it difficult to write about his war experiences: not only to set down a

¹¹⁰ Hawkes, *Misfit Moderns*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4. Quotation taken from Faye Hammill, *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

record of his service in words but to do so in a way in which fit his desired literary mode of composition to make his readers *see* the war. Secondly, he could not decide what form the work would take, whether it would be a war memoir or a fictional tale. The development of *Parade's End* began many years before its publication, or indeed before its conception. It was only through writing of *No Enemy*, *The Marsden Case*, and numerous letters and essays that the later, major work came into being. *No Enemy* takes Ford's line of enquiry a characteristic stage further, to ask how literature stood up to the war, or rather, what form of writing might stand up against a world which was disorderly and traumatised.

Ford himself provides an answer: to return to the first paragraph of this section, although he professes a dislike of categorisation, he is willing to engage with its terms, specifically with the term 'Impressionist'. An understanding of the way in which this form of literature functions, through this piece, provides the requisite terminology for a readership to 'stabilise' a text such as *No Enemy*. *No Enemy* was only published ten years after it was written, and it was written as a purgative act. One may question the degree to which an author retains some authority over a text that he has written. If the distinction between fiction and autobiography is one that is difficult to reconcile (with no less than the term 'autobiografiction' suggested by Hawkes a term which might ameliorate this difficulty), surely the same unrest must be caused by an author who is also a critic and an editor. A neat detachment of a work from its author cannot occur when it is created by a multifaceted being and nor should this be a goal if there is a specific impetus for a work's composition, which might also be extended to all literature. In the same way that the psychological field makes a distinction between 'nature' and 'nurture' and the way in which these influences come together to form a sentient being, a literary work should be approached with a dual recognition of its origins and reception. For *No Enemy*, its origination is twofold: I) a reaction to Ford's experience during The Great War, and II) experimentation with narrative after an event which problematised narrative itself.

III. *NO ENEMY*: AN ATTEMPT TO RECONSTRUCT ‘ORDERED LIFE’

The title of *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction* is taken from Amiens’s song in Act II, scene v of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i’ th’ sun
Seeking the food he eats
And pleased with what he gets,
Come hither, come hither, come hither.
He shall he see
No Enemy
But winter and rough weather.¹¹³

This passage depicts a contentedness against peril in which the only ‘enemy’ is the earthly, seasonal threat of surviving the winter. For *No Enemy*, this is a wishful allusion, for the reconstruction of its main character after ‘Armageddon’ is never explicitly complete. From the book’s first page, ‘the most pressing task for the reader is [...] to negotiate a path through this seemingly shapeless text, beginning [...] in an encounter with the narrative voice’.¹¹⁴ Though Ford may have drawn a comparison between *The Soul of London* and *No Enemy*, the assured authorial voice which guides the introduction to the former is not present in the latter. Its narrative is more complex, and despite beginning clearly with the sentence ‘the writer’s friend Gringoire, originally a poet and Gallophile, went to war’, the narrator, later referring to himself as ‘The Compiler’, continually intrudes upon and alters what, in the title, promises to be a straightforward *Tale*. The opening page does, however, set out a clear purpose for the book:

¹¹³ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene v.

¹¹⁴ Hawkes, *Misfit Moderns*, p. 107.

it struck the writer that you hear of the men that went, and you hear of what they did when they were There. But you never hear how It left them. You hear how things were destroyed, but seldom of the painful process of Reconstruction.¹¹⁵

A form of distancing is immediately employed in which this is laid out to be a story ‘seldom’ told. The rarity of the story to come is made more elusive by a lack of overt reference to where and what the words ‘There’ and ‘It’ refer. The fog around narrative specificity only clears around the last word ‘Reconstruction’. However, before any meaningful account of reconstruction is attempted, and one may reasonably question whether this occurs at all in the text, Gringoire characteristically wanders down a tangential path in his storyline. The narrative turns to the provision of an extensive recipe for ‘Mixed Meats *en casserole*’: ‘take two chops. Pare off *all* the fat till you have two *noisettes de mouton* [...]’.¹¹⁶ Continual meanderings follow Gringoire in his attempts after the ‘Armageddon’ of The First World War to find sanctuary. He initially seeks, like Ford, a form of reconstruction in a physical sense: that is in finding his cottage in the countryside where he can perfect his production of potatoes. The retreat he finds is unreal, such as the setting of a fairy tale, an allusion which The Compiler makes when describing that Gringoire ‘has survived to inhabit in tranquillity with the most charming of companions a rural habitation so ancient, frail and unreal that it is impossible to think of it otherwise than as the Gingerbread Cottage you may have read of in the tale of “Haensel and Gretel”’.¹¹⁷ However, Gringoire also longs for a reconstruction of the self which enables him to continue writing—and, indeed, the book concludes with an appendix written by Gringoire, but, as always edited by ‘The Compiler’. In order to foster reconstruction, Gringoire must return to his war experience and attempt to construct a narrative of his service, and in order to create a future, or rather to move on from a traumatic moment, he must revisit and confront the past. Owing to an underlying memory of ‘Armageddon’, and the fact that the story begins *in media* reconstruction,

¹¹⁵ Ford, *NE*, p. 9.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

there is a sense of disjointed unsettledness. In other words, because Gringoire's mind is not at ease the narrative is not either. *No Enemy* is, as discussed above, an unusual 'piece of writing'. There is little structure, plot, or development. The focus accorded to the workings of Gringoire's mind in a state of trauma illustrates that retrospective view of the modernist novel that perceives a movement from the external world to the internal, to questions of consciousness, identity and memory.¹¹⁸

Gringoire says that 'the stuff of war reminiscences concerns itself almost as much with what war has made of a man as with the pictures that he saw. Correspondingly, Max Saunders considered that *No Enemy* is 'a book which registers the psychological effects of Ford's war by exploring his relationship to landscape—the way crucial moments of his wartime experience come back to him as visions of the landscape'.¹¹⁹ Still you are not the sort of person to see that and, in a minute I will reward your patience with a landscape that, though it has nothing to do with our main theme, may make a nice *bonne bouche* for your little book'.¹²⁰ And, indeed, the book is split into four 'landscapes' that offer still moments of clarity in Gringoire's memory of the war. Skinner describes these tableaux by saying that they 'represent four moments in four years when, for very short intervals, the strain of the war lifted itself from the mind. They were, those intermissions of the spirit, exactly like gazing through rifts in a mist'.¹²¹ Likewise, Jonathan Boulter in his essay on *No Enemy* suggests that these moments in which Gringoire is able to gaze 'through rifts in a mist' demonstrate a symptomatic stasis that afflicts the victim of a traumatic experience. His approach is indebted to a Freudian understanding of trauma which 'places the subject in a single, static moment of time', creating what is labelled a 'temporal feedback loop'

¹¹⁸ Skinner, 'Introduction', p. xv.

¹¹⁹ Saunders, *A Dual Life*, p. 80.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

that denies the possibility of narrative progression.¹²² This particular form of inertia resists any cathartic ‘revisiting’ of war experience, essentially halting progress by avoiding plot movement.

In a letter to Victor Gollancz, a publisher of Ford’s works, in 1932, *No Enemy* is described as ‘my reminiscences of active service under a thinly disguised veil of fiction’.¹²³ The narrative is disguised through several complex layers, each of which carry some of the burden of autobiography. Gringoire’s ‘tale’ is relayed by a framing narrator referred to as ‘The Compiler’ (or perhaps, ‘The Censor?’) who is reminiscent of the arbitrating narrators found in works by Conrad or James.¹²⁴ Such narrators offer a distancing from the events Ford recounts in order to share out the burden of remembering and attempting to narrate a conflict which he felt had left ‘everyone who had taken physical part in the war [...] mad’.¹²⁵ Though it is, in essence, Gringoire’s own story, what he has to say is consistently moderated and filtered by ‘Compi’, as Gringoire calls him. Throughout the book, one naturally questions who the unnamed ‘Compiler’ is. Occasionally, hints of Ford’s presence in the book are dotted about the page; for instance, in this section where ‘our writer’ is connected with the ‘English Review’:

On the right of the station, in the elms, was a brown Y.M.C.A. hut, where the officers got very greasy bread and rather black fried eggs and coffee. There were innumerable, old, dog’s-eared magazines on the mess tables in amongst the breakfast utensils. Twenty or thirty numbers of the “English Review”, like the dominoes, of a date when our writer used to own that periodical. It seemed an odd things to see; an odd, queer thing to have owned.¹²⁶

Despite ‘The Compiler’s’ insistence that this is a story about Gringoire *after* Armageddon, most of the book is concerned with reconstructing his memory of the war itself. This leads into

¹²² Jonathan Boulter, “‘After ... Armageddon’: Trauma and History in Ford Madox Ford’s *No Enemy*”, in *History and Representation in Ford Madox Ford’s Writings*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (New York: Rodopi, 2004), p. 77.

¹²³ Letter from FMF to Victor Gollancz, 1 March 1932, *Letters*, p. 204.

¹²⁴ Multiple critics have pointed out that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, which employs a similar narrative trope, was one of the books that Ford had sent to him at the front. See Alan Judd in *Ford Madox Ford*, p. 283.

¹²⁵ Ford, *IWITN*, p. 48.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

questions of *what* the trauma is that Gringoire is meant to be dealing with and how, if at all, the book manages to deal with ideas of reconstruction. Part of the difficulty in recording Gringoire's tale is inducing him to speak: 'he would be silent most of the day. But towards evening, as like as not, he would suddenly suspend all activities, and with very possibly a hair-sieve or trowel in his hand, gesticulating too, he would begin to talk'.¹²⁷ In this way, *i.e.* the distance created between 'Armageddon' and any overt discussion of it, the narrative suggests that Gringoire has not yet moved beyond 'destruction' to 'reconstruction'. Much of the discussion of trauma is 'relocated' into ramblings about Gringoire's assertion that what will save the world is cooking and gardening:

The main points of his harangue were to the effect that humanity would be saved—if it was to be saved—by good cooking, intensive horti-, as opposed to agri-culture. And of course by abstract thinking and the arts. And the avoidance of waste. Above all by the avoidance of waste.¹²⁸

One is never certain how much of Gringoire's monologues are given *verbatim*, even when provided within quotation marks. It is only in part two that the narrator, 'The Compiler' claims to allow Gringoire to 'speak for himself', though this is tempered with the explanation that what will follow is only an impression of Gringoire's accounts:¹²⁹

Of course, this section is a rendering. It does not pretend to record words exactly as Gringoire spoke. It is, rather, a resume of conversation of an evening when the writer—or rather the compiler—was privileged to be housed by Gringoire.¹³⁰

This may be a way of setting up the narrative in an impressionistic, reminiscent vein. Returning briefly to Ford's essay 'On Impressionism', he gives the example of overhearing a conversation at another table in a restaurant. If another customer is making a fuss over his supper, one is likely to remember the scene and a few choice phrases but unlikely to recall *verbatim* the entire

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 147

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 148

exchange. This occurs when recalling conversations or events as well. Exchanges and occurrences come back to us in bits and pieces. However, it becomes more difficult to imagine that this is simply a literary trope when, several pages later, The Compiler admits that his is a ‘censored version’ of Gringoire’s tale.¹³¹ Censoring implies an active process of amending or expurgating his reminiscences and is linked to official acts of war, for instance the dismissal of Ford’s article about the peace as discussed above. There is a tentative quality to the work, which shies away from its professed purpose of rendering ‘Armageddon’ and life afterwards. The various methods of displacement which are in effect throughout the text demonstrates a fundamental reluctance to render the war into narrative. And, indeed, without any more elaboration, Gringoire admits ‘I am not much set to talk to you about the trenches or even about fighting’.¹³² Indeed, even during moment when the war is discussed specifically, there is stasis: “‘For, *là bas* ... on the Somme or in Flanders one feels one’s self very forgotten, very deserted, and very, very isolated with an isolation like the isolation that is felt by ... Oh, well, it is as if we were suspended—we, seven million men—on a carpet in the infinitudes of space”.¹³³ Though he may not be forthright in his attempts, or even ability, to discuss the war, he does, throughout, explain how and what he is willing to divulge:

‘Yes, I could keep it up for many of your pages and for many hours’, Gringoire said, ‘but I am not so much concerned to describe these landscapes, or to prove the quality of my memory, as to establish the psychological facts about the other four landscapes’. He had just gone back into memory, without any particular effort—without indeed any effort.¹³⁴

In describing the ‘psychological facts’ of his memory of the war, one might, once again, expect a straightforward account of combat, the trauma of the war is expressed in anxiety over the landscape. Like Ford’s recognition of the *homo duplex*, Gringoire repeatedly discusses the

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 151.

¹³² Ibid., p. 90.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 138.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

difference between a ‘surface awareness’ and a ‘secondary mind’.¹³⁵ The cares one might assume a soldier to have, within this frame of mind, are not necessarily those that come to bear upon him at the front. He recalls the impersonal nature of his time at the front saying that ‘the strain was a long strain [...] since it was a strain concerning itself with the English Country and not at all with one’s regiment or one’s self. One’s regiment would go out, if things went wrong. It would go out, disappear, as sands disappear under great waves. One’s self too, probably, or it wouldn’t matter anyhow ... but the contaminated fields, the ashamed elms—that was the long strain’.¹³⁶ His sufferings, and indeed his sympathies, can be seen in this passage to lie with the ‘English Country’, not with the potential for his own, or his regiment’s, death. Indeed, it is the land for which he fears as the war approaches, speaking of ‘the menaced earth with its familiar aspect’.¹³⁷ Within these ‘landscapes’ are recurring concerns over finding a sanctuary. Repeatedly, Gringoire abjures the commonest concerns of life and death, country, and even those who remain at home. There is a degree of self-consciousness in his musings on this matter:

“I wonder”, Gringoire asked again that evening, “if other people had, like myself, that feeling that what one feared for was the land—not the people but the menaced earth with its familiar aspect. And I wonder why one had the feeling. I dare say it was just want of imagination: one couldn’t perhaps figure the feelings of ruined, fleeing and martyred population. And yet, when I had seen enough of those, the feeling did not alter”.¹³⁸

His feelings were not to alter after the war either, an indication which was revealing of the fact that the war does not end with the ceasefire. As Jay M. Winters has written, what makes the idea of shell-shock so emotive and caused its resonances to carry on down through the generations from the Great War are the ‘truths’ it represents, one of which is that ‘battle does not end when the firing stops; it goes on in the minds of the many of those who returned intact, or apparently unscathed, and in the suffering of those whose memories are embodied, enacted, repeated,

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

performed'.¹³⁹ The Armistice was not the end of Gringoire's 'long strain'. One gets the sense that he is still looking for sanctuary and that there is still the possibility of 'the wolf' catching him. In a footnote at the beginning of section II, 'Gardens and Flats', The Compiler explains that 'Gringoire' is a nickname 'our poet' was given at school. It refers to a story by Alphonse Daudet called '*Chèvre de M. Séguin*' in which a wolf catches Monsieur Séguin's goat, an allusion which is meant to convey the threat that 'though a poet may struggle all his life against poverty, in the end the wolf, starvation, will get him'.¹⁴⁰ This occasionally repeated threat is a reference to Grimm fairy tales (a trope which is initially invoked through the description of his house as a 'Gingerbread Cottage' as 'The Compiler' states in the quotation above). For Gringoire, 'the wolf' is not only starvation. It is also psychologically, the threat of returning to combat, whether in memory or physically. In the midst of the tangential discourses on landscape or gastronomical expositions, moments of clarity about the war break through:

I do not believe that there will ever be another war if you put it only on the baser ground that the great financiers who alone can make or stop wars got hideously frightened by the last one. And in addition to that you can consider the educative effect of the Armageddon that finished yesterday. It will take a good many decades before any human soul will again regard war as a means of enrichment and a good many centuries before any Great Power will again imagine that to have an aspect of bestriding the world in jack-boots and with the saber rattling is of advantage to itself. It is a better world on the 29th June, 1919, than it was on August the 3rd, 1914 ... Yes, the world is better and sweeter.¹⁴¹

There are conflicting accounts here. The war is 'lost' and the wolves are still on the prowl, but still the world is 'better and sweeter'. However, Gringoire later says that he believes that 'Nothing can prevent it or much delay it unless there should come a change in the hearts of humanity. And I do not perceive much change in the hearts of man'.¹⁴² And yet, there is an aversion to the topic being discussed at all and a recognised divide between those who fought

¹³⁹ Jay M. Winters, *Remembering the War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 61.

¹⁴⁰ Ford, *NE*, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

and those who did not and the difference in their experience and memory of the war. Gringoire vows that ‘by the grace of God, I will never talk about the war again whilst I live. As you say: the people who did not take part hate to be reminded of that part; and the people who did take part have had enough of it.’¹⁴³ Without a willingness to discuss the war openly, there is not the possibility of it being translated into the past.

One of the few passages in which Gringoire recalls with clarity his wish for a sanctuary during the war is when he makes reference to the Battle of the Somme:

It was then that Gringoire related a psychological anecdote that gives the note of this book. “I suppose it was my friend’s sympathetic and suggestive voice that did it . . . for I suddenly began to see bits of a landscape that has pursued me ever since—until now here I sit in it. Not quite a landscape; a nook, rather; the full extent of the view about one hundred seventy yards by two hundred seventy—the closed up end of a valley; closed up by trees—willows, silver birches, oaks, and Scotch pines; deep, among banks; with a little stream, just a trickle, level with the grass of the bottom. You understand the idea—a sanctuary”.

There were, in those days, you will remember, no more sanctuaries. All nooks of the world were threatened by the tide of blue-gray mud. We were out there to hold it back on the Somme. But could we?¹⁴⁴

The desire for sanctuary in the war was, as Gringoire explains, a desire for home: ‘And you see it was mostly for the sake of the little threatened nooks of the earth that Gringoire found himself on that hillside . . . He had always had a dreamy contempt for politics: one is an artist, one is a poet, one is a builder of castles in the air, one is a gentleman, a farrier, a grocer, a miller—what you will—but a politician! “*Ab, mais non*. That one should prostitute one’s pen!”’¹⁴⁵ In *It Was the Nightingale*, Ford recalled that ‘in those halcyon days—just before the peace was declared—everyone was filled with public spirit. That was the era of reconstruction and each human had his

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

own plan for the salvation of humanity.¹⁴⁶ He does not specify what changed, or, rather, why the impetus for reconstruction failed after ‘the peace was declared’. The ‘public spirit’ may have changed as a result of the soldiers returning home, many stricken with shell-shock, and as a result, like Ford, silence. As Freud wrote it in *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death* (1915), in war with the real threat of death ever present, ‘life has become interesting again: it has recovered its full content’. However, after the war, life returned to ‘normal’, even if people were unable to forget the horrors of living within a time when death was ‘ever present’. In Gringoire’s case the development of the idea of home is a reaction to, or more interestingly, is dependant upon the strain of war, the threat of violence and annihilation, and in this instance, the idea of home and sanctuary are metaphors for clarity, structure and stability.¹⁴⁷ Similarly to *The Good Soldier* and *Parade’s End*, episodes in the protagonist’s life are described not in the order in which they took place, but in the order (or disorder) of their recurrence: the past has significance insofar as it recurs in the present, the present insofar as it will recur in the future.

Art had an important social function towards reconstruction in the inter-war years because it was considered by Ford the sole remedy for a ‘harassed humanity’. Ford wrote in *Memories and Impressions* that:

The only human activity that has always been of extreme importance to the world is imaginative literature. It is of supreme importance because it is the only means by which humanity can express at once emotions and ideas. To avoid controversy I am perfectly ready to concede that the other arts are of equal importance. But nothing that is not art is of any lasting importance at all, the meanest novel being humanly more valuable than the most pompous factual work...¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, art ‘alone can give you knowledge of the hearts, the necessities, the hopes and the fears of your fellow men; and such knowledge alone can guide us through life without

¹⁴⁶ Ford, *IWTN*, p. 294

¹⁴⁷ See Sigmund Freud, ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’, *The Pelican Freud Library*, Vol. 12, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Ford, *Memories and Impressions*, p. 186.

disaster'.¹⁴⁹ Ford's recognition of the 'cognitive power of art' displays a development of thought away from his pre-war view that even literature could scarcely aspire to illuminate mankind's unknowable heart.¹⁵⁰ However, art is also created by those men whose hearts are 'unknowable', and, in particular, after the horrors of war by men who could not remember, misremembered, and struggled to express their experience. In the same way that Ford wrote that 'no one could have come through that shattering experience and still view life and mankind with any normal vision'. In the 'Postscript' to *Good-bye to All That*, Robert Graves wrote that 'I would even paradoxically say that the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities. High-explosive barrages will make a temporary liar or visionary of anyone; the old trench-mind is at work in all over-estimation of casualties, 'unnecessary' dwelling on horror, mixing of dates and confusion between trench rumours and scenes actually witnessed'.¹⁵¹ The writing of *No Enemy* was a cathartic act. For Ford, its introspective nature functioned as a means of 'personal reconstruction' after the war, a purging of the war experience and a step towards 'reconstruction' of his self.

¹⁴⁹ Ford, *Thus to Revisit*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁰ Green, *Prose and Politics*, p. 119

¹⁵¹ Ford, *IWITN*, pp. 48-49 and Graves, *Good-bye to All That*, p. 296.

CHAPTER II

‘SERMONS IN STONE’: A MORAL EXPLORATION OF ARCHITECTURE AND THE PROCESS OF POST-WAR REBUILDING IN HUXLEY’S *ANTIC HAY*

*... if one conceives that the subject of writing is
the moral life of one's time, in the same way as
the subject of Greek Tragedy is moral [...] then to-day one is in a very difficult situation.
The precise difficulty is to write about this
moral life in a way that is significant:
to find the real moral subject.*

Stephen Spender, *Writers and Manifestos*¹

*There is nothing inherently absurd about the
idea that the world which we ourselves have so largely
constructed can also, if we so desire, be reconstructed.*

Aldous Huxley, *On the Margin*²

Max Beerbohm published a book of caricatures entitled *Things New and Old* in 1923 wherein Aldous Huxley was depicted as humorously stretched to more than double the average height of a man. In his right hand, he delicately held a cigar, and foppish hair crowned his disproportionately bespectacled head. He was drawn wearing a white linen suit, which was no doubt meant to emphasise his penchant for escaping Britain to the more clement life of the French or Italian countryside.³ This representation of Huxley as the expatriated man-of-letters suggested he was more comfortable when removed from British society and unlikely to be

¹ Stephen Spender, *Writers and Manifestos* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 25.

² Aldous Huxley, *On the Margin* (1923; rpt. London, Chatto & Windus, 1939), p. 354.

³ Max Beerbohm, *Things New and Old*, in *Max Beerbohm's Literary Caricatures: from Homer to Huxley*, ed. J. G. Riewald (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), p. 281.

concerned with its goings on. At the outset, one may understandably question the depth or sincerity of Huxley's concern for his fellow man in the nineteen-twenties. His desire, expressed in his collected essays *On the Margin*, that society should 'live with dignity, even the grandeur, befitting their proud human title' seems mistaken when considering this was written by the same man whom Sir Isaiah Berlin remembered as being 'cynical, God-denying, the object of fear and disapproval [...] the wicked nihilist [...] the delight of those young readers who supposed themselves to be indulging in one of the most dangerous and exotic vices of those iconoclastic post-war times'.⁴ If not thought to be 'wicked' or 'cynical' by most people, Huxley certainly held a reputation for being 'disengaged' and 'impassive'.⁵ However, Francis Bickley, writing in *The Bookman*, argued that Huxley's pessimism did not come from a distaste for life itself. Rather it was the result of his clear-sighted contemplation of the 'gulf which yawns between life as it should be and life as, here and now, it actually is'. In other words, his mockery of the post-war life was not necessarily from the point of view of the cynic, and the abundant work he produced in this period, especially his correspondence to those who remained in Britain during his time abroad, demonstrated that he was far from aloof.⁶ In a private letter written by Huxley to his father in November 1923, about a month after the publication of *Antic Hay*, he defended the book as a sympathetic offering to his peers after the Great War. 'I will only point out', he wrote,

that it is a book written by a member of what I may call the 'war-generation' for others of his kind; and that it is intended to reflect—fantastically, of course, but none the less faithfully—the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions, and values current in the previous epoch . . .

⁴ Aldous Huxley, 'Sir Christopher Wren', *On the Margin*, *Aldous Huxley: Complete Essays, vol. I 1920-1925* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), p. 117, and David Bradshaw, *The Hidden Huxley* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. vii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁶ Huxley was engaged in a contract with Chatto & Windus that demanded two publications a year: one was required to be a novel, the other a shorter work of prose, poetry, or essays. He would leave Britain to write fiercely for several months in order to fulfil this obligation: 'There I shall settle down to grind out two yearly books of fiction for Chatto's and any other thing I can manage . . . I shall come back to civilisation a few months each year to find out what is going on', see Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography, vol. I 1894-1939* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), Ch. 4.

I can't say that I expected you would enjoy the book. But on the other hand I expected that my contemporaries would; and so far as I know by what people have written to me, they have.⁷

Despite Huxley's popularly-remembered aversion to mass culture and disdain for technological 'progress', this letter reveals that he sought to represent authentically the mood of his time and was, indeed, concerned about the well-being of his generation. His attentiveness was owed, in part, to a reaction against the increasing violence of war rhetoric and behaviour which he experienced while an undergraduate at Oxford towards men who remained at home away from combat. He recoiled in disgust at the treatment of conscientious objectors and the xenophobia of the press, and experienced dismay over explaining his inability to serve owing to his exceptionally poor eyesight.⁸ The letter also provides a hint of the book's reputation around the time of its publication. In fact, even twenty-five years later, Evelyn Waugh recalls its popularity through Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), 'Picture me, my dear, alone and studious. I had just bought a rather forbidding book called *Antic Hay*, which I knew I must read before going to Garsington on Sunday, because everyone was bound to talk about it, and it's so banal saying you have not read the book of the moment, if you haven't'.⁹ *Antic Hay* may well have been 'the book of the moment' in the early-twenties, but moments pass. It is not, as a result, one of Huxley's well-remembered works. It does not bear the unique quality of being his first novel or the substance of being his most experimental piece of writing. However, *Antic Hay* is distanced enough from the canon of utopian or dystopian works that it has not undergone the same considerable weight of scholarly attention as *Brave New World* and, beneficially for the purposes of this chapter, its status as 'the book of the moment' means it is more obviously rooted in the specific time of the wake of the Great War.

⁷ Aldous Huxley, 'Letter 210: To Leonard Huxley', *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 224.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁹ Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred & Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945; rpt. London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 41.

In fact, when *Antic Hay* was first published in 1923, an advertisement taken out by Chatto & Windus in the *Times Literary Supplement* predicted that the book would be ‘one of the peep-holes through which posterity will squint at London just after the period of the Great War’.¹⁰ This chapter will examine this early, relatively unknown work of Aldous Huxley as an example of how post-war intellectuals conceptualised the ideal way of life. It is a discursive ‘novel of ideas’ which juxtaposes a method of moral examination with law-giving moral instruction as found, for instance, in Biblical parables. In ‘a chaos of Portland stone that is an offence against civilisation’, the young London set are afflicted with an ‘*accidie*’ for which the ‘mumbo-jumbery’ of the church can no longer be a panacea.¹¹ Coinciding with the first exhibition by The Architecture Club, of which Huxley was a member, and the bi-centenary of the death of Christopher Wren, 1923 was a year of great public interest in architecture. The character Gumbril Senior, constructs a model of Wren’s plans for London after the Great Fire of 1666 and claims its vision is essentially moral rather than aesthetic. Thus, given the chance to rebuild ‘the very mind-set of the people’ after the war, this novel offers a chance to revive an ancient concept of morality that went hand-in-hand with the *eudæmonic* pursuit of a good, worthwhile life. Section one begins with an exploration of the ‘novel of ideas’ form of Huxley’s work, arguing that the discursive manner of his writing allows for a didactic thinking-through of ideas. This leads into a discussion of the renewed interest in architecture in 1923 and details of Wren’s plans for London, and finally, the chapter closes with close readings of *Antic Hay* which illustrate the ‘moral quandary’ of post-war life.

¹⁰ Anonymous, ‘Review of *Antic Hay*’, *The Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), Thursday, December 13, 1923; p. 860; Issue 1143.

¹¹ Aldous Huxley, *Antic Hay* (1923; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), p. 136. Hereafter *AH*.

I. 'THE NOVEL OF IDEAS' FROM MENIPPUS TO HUXLEY

The form that *Antic Hay* takes is particularly well suited to the type of moral enquiry in which it is engaged. Nonetheless, it is a bizarre form for a 'novel' to take. There is little evidence of plot development, and the characters are closer to caricatures than fully developed fictional beings. Indeed, the story is less about the passions and actions of the characters and more about their ideas and discussions. This once caused David Daiches, for example, to state plainly that 'Huxley is no novelist . . . his "novels" are either a series of character sketches or simple fables or tracts'.¹² However, this section will consider the ways in which Daiches's view is overly-prescriptive when considering what literature in the form of a novel should be, arguing that the literary forms of a 'novel', 'character sketches', or 'simple fables or tracts' are not mutually exclusive mediums of writing. While Huxley was also a prolific essayist, his novels do not form a wholly separate *opus* and are best understood as a part of a collective body of intellectual work. The form his fiction takes is also a particular statement on the function that he believed that literature should have.

Northrop Frye explains the didactic subtleties of the art of novel writing in his *Anatomy of Criticism* by positioning Huxley as a part of a literary pedigree that stretches back to the writings of Menippus of Gadara (and, thus, the 'Menippean Satire'). This idea is introduced through a part of a larger discussion on the 'Theory of Genres'. 'The novel' is recognised as a troublesome term when one begins to categorise works that fit into this 'genus' of fiction because of the breadth of the genre's manifestations and genealogy. Four types of works are delineated though a loosely psychological explanation of what they do. In short, Frye suggests that the novel in its most 'conventional' form is 'extroverted and personal'; the Romantic is 'introverted and personal'; the 'Confessional' form, begun he suggests by St Augustine is 'introverted and intelligent'; and the final form, the Menippean Satire (or 'Anatomy') is 'extroverted and

¹² David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 52.

intelligent'.¹³ The final form, which includes works such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Rousseau's *Emile*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, 'deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes'—'pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior'.¹⁴ Furthermore, the form of the Menippean satire is usually presented as a dialogue that is reminiscent of Plato's discursive works, such as *Phaedrus*, where there are a set of people, often in one location throughout, who discuss intellectual points of view.¹⁵ As a form, satire can be 'either entirely fantastic or entirely moral'.¹⁶ Frye suggests that if one were to picture forms of satire as a spectrum, at one end would be *Alice in Wonderland*, at the other *Utopia*.

Huxley was well aware of the potential of this form of literature. He wrote, in *Point Counter Point*, an excerpt out of Philip Quarles's notebook, where he considers what the 'entirely moral' novel is meant to do:

Novel of Ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece. In so far as theories are a rationalization of sentiments, instincts, dispositions of soul, this is feasible. The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express—which excludes all but about .01 per cent of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books.¹⁷

In this quotation, Huxley makes the point, perhaps self-deprecatingly and certainly at some remove, for one should avoid the trap of conflating author and character, that he did not consider himself a real novelist. Furthermore, 'congenital' is a peculiar term to use when referring to novelists, though not surprising for Huxley who was scientifically disposed, since it is usually a medical term. A 'congenital' disease or abnormality is one that a person would have

¹³ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 306-309.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁵ The *Phaedrus* was written some time around the composition of the *Republic* and *Symposium* and is a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus which revolves around disputes about writing and rhetoric.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), ch. xii.

from birth. This may suggest that he did not feel intrinsically capable or comfortable with writing fiction. Conversely, the statement suggests that Huxley believed that one must be born with the aptitude to write fiction. His early novels are populated with a group of intelligent friends who are in one location for the duration. *Crome Yellow*, for example, is set in a country house which resembles Garsington Manor—the country house of Lady Ottoline Morrell where Huxley spent a considerable amount of time outside of Oxford while an undergraduate and where he met, *inter alia*, D. H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler, and his future wife, Maria Nys. The search for a ‘more desirable way of life’ is the underlying motif of all of Huxley’s major novels—whether they are considered utopian, dystopian, satire, or Menippean in their literary ancestry. It is also useful for this study that Huxley’s publishers, Chatto & Windus, had the tendency to issue a collection of essays at the same time of each of his novels. The first of these, *On the Margin*, was also released in 1923 and is a collection of works from his time spent writing for *The Athenaeum* magazine (which in that year became *The Nation and the Athenaeum*), *Vogue*, *The Westminster Gazette*, and *House and Garden*. Most of the essays in this collection are from a weekly column that began in 1920 in *The Athenaeum* called ‘Marginalia’, written over the pseudonym ‘Autolycus’.¹⁸ His essay, the ‘Subject-Matter of Poetry’, shared his desire to study all aspects of life in this writing and lamented the fact that there were very few writers who had an understanding of the sciences, and likewise that there were very few scientists who are able to express themselves in verse, wishing for an expansion of what ‘themes’ were considered writing about. If this were the case, he provided example that if either Einstein knew how to write in blank verse or Yeats were able to understand the immense and technical complexities of the theory of relativity, we might find ourselves able to read poetical expositions on the beauty of scientific discovery. He believed that there should be no reason that artistic expressions should

¹⁸ Autolycus is one of the lesser-known Greek gods. He was the grandfather of Ulysses, and was known for being a highly-skilled thief. More likely, this pen-name was meant to recall the character from *The Winter’s Tale*, who refers to himself as a ‘a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles’ (IV, iii), the subject matter of ‘Marginalia’ being much the same. In the first article of the series (Feb. 20, 1920), Huxley discusses the importance of writing about ‘literary trifles’: ‘the more absurd, trivial, and useless the fact, the more tenderly it should be cherished, of such stuff the choicest literary notes may be made’.

be limited to the traditional themes of love, death, nature, and religious experience.¹⁹ Likewise he wished to explore all aspects of life in his novels, yet in doing so he tends to revert to formulaic modes of writing. What his essays sought to formally prove, his novels dramatised.

Antic Hay was Huxley's second novel. It forms a part of those early works of his which are modelled on the 'country house' novels of the early nineteenth-century author, Thomas Love Peacock. They are works that are set in one location with a stock cast of characters and focus on their discursive interaction rather than any action that they undertake. Frederick Hoffman explained these 'novels of ideas' when he wrote that in them, 'the drama implicit in an idea becomes explicit when it is shown as a point of view which a person holds and upon which he acts'.²⁰ In other words, the novel *Antic Hay* shows what it is like for a group of people, or rather its characters to *live* in post-war London. To write in this manner exemplified the moral *telos* that Huxley thought all fiction should have: that art for art's sake was futile—that writing must convey something other than its own satisfaction in form. This is a view that Huxley held throughout his life. In an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1960, he said 'when you can find story-telling which carries at the same time a kind of parable-like meaning [...] this is something extraordinary [...] fiction [is] immensely important, not only for [its] own sake, [not only] because [it] provides a picture of life now and of life in the past, but also as a vehicle for the expression of general philosophic ideas, religious ideas, and social ideas'.²¹ Where this study disagrees with Hoffman is when he goes on to say 'one cannot repeat too often that there is no "moral" to be drawn from the career and fate of ideas in such a novel': this was, in fact, the primary purpose of a 'novel of ideas'.

A typical scene within an Huxleyan novel is an extended introduction of the main cast of characters through dialogue, almost as one would find in a play. As this is done, each character

¹⁹ This idea is reminiscent of Lucretius (*viz.* exploring Epicurean physics through verse).

²⁰ Frederick Hoffman, 'Aldous Huxley and the Novel of Ideas', *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. William Van O'Connor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), p. 194.

²¹ George Wickes, Ray Frazer, and Aldous Huxley, 'The Art of Fiction XXIV, Aldous Huxley', *The Paris Review* (23, Spring 1960), pp. 71-79.

expresses and develops the intellectual stance which they are to represent throughout the novel. Once these positions are formulated, the characters respond automatically to any set of given situations, supporting their categorisation as ‘caricatures’. One’s interest in such a novel is held by the variety of the situations in which ‘verbal clashes of this kind can be sustained and by the wit, liveliness, and intellectual density of the dialogue’.²² In *Antic Hay*, this introductory scene occurs at a dinner in a Soho restaurant where Casimir Lypiatt’s recital of his latest poem disintegrates into an argument about how dreaming is obsolete after the war:

‘Look down’, cried Lypiatt, with a quavering voice
‘Look down, Conquistador !
There on the valley’s broad green floor,
There lies the lake; the jewelled cities gleam;
Chalco and Tlacopan
Awaiting the coming Man.
Look down on Mexico Conquistador,
Land of your golden dream.’

‘Not “dream,”’ said Gumbriel, putting down the glass from which he had been profoundly drinking. ‘You can’t possibly say “dream”, you know’.

‘Why do you interrupt me?’ Lypiatt turned on him angrily. His wide mouth twitched at the corners, his whole long face worked with excitement. ‘Why don’t you let me finish?’ He allowed his hand, which had hung awkwardly in the air above him, suspended, as it were, at the top of a gesture, to sink slowly to the table. ‘Imbecile!’ he said, and once more picked up his knife and fork.

‘But really’, Gumbriel insisted, ‘you can’t say “dream”. Can you now seriously?’ He had drunk the best part of a bottle of Burgundy and he felt good-humoured, obstinate and a little bellicose.

‘And why not?’ Lypiatt asked.

‘Oh, because one simply can’t’. Gumbriel leaned back in his chair, smiled and caressed his drooping blond moustache. ‘Not in this year of grace, nineteen twenty-two’.

‘But why?’ Lypiatt repeated, with exasperation.

²² Peter Bowering, *Aldous Huxley: A Study of the Major Novels* (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), p. 37.

‘Because it’s altogether *too* late in the day’, declared precious Mr. Mercaptan, rushing up to his emphasis with flutes and roaring, like a true Conquistador, to fall back, however, at the end of the sentence rather ignominiously into breathless confusion . . .

‘*Too* late in the day’, he repeated. ‘Times have changed. *Sunt lacrymae rerum, nos et mutamur in illis*’.²³

This quotation is provided at length here, from what is a much longer argument, to show *how* ideas are expressed in the novel. Each of these characters correspond to a way of thinking about the ideal or the way in which one ought to live. Mercaptan is the modern aesthete who is more comfortable tucked away in his ‘civilised’ boudoir than out with the ‘Bright Young Set’. His concern with epochs is evident in his emphasis that it is ‘*too* late in the day’ to dream. This was a popular way to look at the state of the world in this time: Ernst Schiller and Arnold Toynbee in their tracts on civilisation are concerned with the passing epochs (and especially the life-span of Empires).²⁴ Coleman, who sports a large blond beard in imitation of Jesus is the iconoclast; Gumbriel Junior is the sceptic. Casimir Lypiatt is the idealist, an artist and poet who lives poorly and pontificates greatly. His is the most curious portrayal of these because his character is shown unfavourably, even though he shares the view with Huxley that there is no longer a place for ‘art as art’s sake’, that art should *do* something; it should inspire men—not instruct them. He wants people to think through the problems of the world, not merely to decry them. Art in every form should have a moral purpose: ‘How can you ever hope to achieve anything decent or solid, when you don’t even believe in decency or solidity? I look about me’, and Lypiatt cast his eyes wildly round the crowded room, ‘and I find myself alone, spiritually alone. I strive on by myself, by myself’ . . . ‘I have set myself to restore painting and poetry to their rightful position among the great moral forces. They have been amusements, they have been mere games for too long’.²⁵ The ambivalence with which Lypiatt’s wishes are met is suggestive of the larger problem with which

²³ Huxley, *AH*, pp. 52-53.

²⁴ See Richard Overby, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation* (London: Penguin, 2010), chapter I entitled ‘Cassandras and Jeremiahs’.

²⁵ Huxley, *AH*, p. 48.

Huxley believes society to be plagued: in this midst of endless voices, it is difficult to know to which one to listen.

The cacophony of opinions that are expressed in this scene caused at least one critic to vehemently denounce the existence of any kind of morality in the book. In a 1932 introduction to a reprint of *Antic Hay*, the American author Lewis Gannett condemned the novel and Huxley himself for ‘destroying whatever was left of the prestige of Victorian ideals’, adding that ‘here we see the supreme negativism of the post-war age’.²⁶ One may question Gannett’s choice in writing an introduction to a book he seemingly despised; nonetheless, the denigration with which he made his judgement was especially severe because he believed that Aldous Huxley had abandoned the intellectual legacy of his family—particularly of his grandfather Thomas Huxley, who is described tamely as ‘a good Victorian when it came to morals’. The list of grievances against *Antic Hay* extends to lament not only the passing of morals, but the wrecked credence of beauty, love and science as well, and it is understandable how he might have come to these conclusions. Amongst the ‘conscientious hedonism’ of the characters, Lypiatt decries art as merely ‘a protest against the horrible inclemency of life . . . Can an artist do anything if he’s happy?’, and Coleman, seeking pleasure, says ‘the real charm about debauchery . . . is its total pointlessness, futility, and above all its incredible tediousness’.²⁷ We might then momentarily excuse the review’s conclusion: ‘I do not know whether men will re-read “Antic Hay” for pleasure a century hence; but they will return to it and to “Point Counter Point” to re-taste the bitterness of the post-war decade. A flavor boiled down and concentrated in Aldous Huxley as in no other writer of the period’.²⁸ There are two reasons for mentioning Gannett’s comments. First, today, over a century after the beginning of the Great War and nearly a century’s time from the ‘post-war age’, one is in an historical position to assess whether his expectations remain true

²⁶ Lewis Gannett. Introduction to Aldous Huxley, *Antic Hay* (1932; rpt. New York: The Modern Library, 1951), p. ii. These introductory comments are signed off as ‘Lewis Gannett, New York, November 1932’.

²⁷ Huxley, *AH*, pp. 168, 174, 186.

²⁸ Gannett, ‘Introduction’, p. iii.

about the prospective reception of *Antic Hay*. One can build a different reading of the text to offer, instead, a defence of Huxley's perceived moral framework, and evidence suggests that the novel's reception in the decade after its publication was, on the whole, positive, though the 'afterlife' of *Antic Hay* is not of principal concern here. Secondly, it is momentarily worth considering whether any trace of 'the prestige of Victorian ideals' were, in fact, left at the time this book was written.

Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918), which was published five years before *Antic Hay*, is surely the one book of the period deserving accusations of upsetting the standing of Victorian ideals and their vanguard. Edmund Wilson's article in the *New Republic* on 21 September 1932, the year of Strachey's death, offered a confirmation of this charge: 'Lytton Strachey's chief mission, of course, was to take down once and for all the pretensions of the Victorian age to moral superiority [...] the English have never since *Eminent Victorians* appeared been able to feel quite the same about the legends that had dominated their pasts. Something had been punctured'.²⁹ The book's portraits of Cardinal Manning, Florence Nightingale, Dr Arnold, and General Gordon laid bare these lives in a way that caused people to re-evaluate whom they should deem role models. Dr Thomas Arnold, the great reformer of public schools, those 'seats and nurseries of vice', was Huxley's maternal great-grandfather (a distinguished ancestor who was missed out by Gannett). His reforms were not so much concerned with pedagogy (*i.e.* the arrangement of the syllabus or, in the modern demotic, 'learning outcomes' for his students) but with his school's moralistic goals, stemming from an educational reform movement began in the nineteenth century, which was largely the product of the rise of evangelicalism.³⁰ Arnold, who was depicted in *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), demanded that his pupils learn the 'elements of conduct and the principles of [Christian] character'.³¹ Strachey claimed that this guidance did

²⁹ Edmund Wilson, 'The Last of Lytton Strachey' *The New Republic* (New York, vol. 20: 50, p. 137).

³⁰ Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 10.

³¹ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), p. 181.

more harm than good and compared Arnold to the God whose principles he preached, writing: ‘as the Israelite of old knew that his almighty Lawgiver might at any moment thunder to him from the whirlwind, or appear before his very eyes, the visible embodiment of power or wrath, so the Rugby schoolboy walked in a holy dread of some sudden manifestation of the sweeping gown, the majestic tone, the piercing glance, of Dr Arnold’.³² Far from changing the ‘face of education’ throughout England, he deliberately remained committed to running Rugby School monastically. Speculation that this was to cultivate more followers for his own religious beliefs, and thus more justification for them, is touched upon by Strachey but left carefully noncommittal in its assertion. As the discussion shall return to shortly, Huxley disparaged this academic stance which was of a straightforwardly deontological nature.

However, more importantly, at this point, is to recognise that in the preface of *Eminent Victorians*, Strachey argues that he was not primarily engaged in being an iconoclast. Instead, he was insistent that his business was to write a non-biased account of the people whom he studied, giving the reason that they ‘are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past’.³³ In other words, Strachey believed that the subjects of an historical study have a value which transcends temporal processes.³⁴ His philosophy of biography was an attempt to know the historical person as a comprehensive human being—not observe them merely as static museum pieces from a particular era. He ends this prologue with a carefully stated methodological motto, as it were: *je n’impose rien; je ne propose rien; j’expose* (‘I impose nothing; I propose nothing; I expose’).³⁵ This distance from his subject matter is the same licence as Huxley claims in *Antic Hay*, through his character Gumbriel Senior, who likewise finds it easier to make plain his stance by quoting St Peter Damianus, *‘Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt, vigilemus’* (‘In this hour, the

³² Ibid., p. 183.

³³ Ibid. p. viii.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. ix.

worst of times, we must be vigilant’).³⁶ In other words, while the reactionary comments of Gannett might suggest that Huxley was actively a post-war nihilist, he embodied more readily, the task of watching, waiting and reporting his observations on the time. These qualities, much like those possessed by the nineteenth-century naturalists as discussed in chapter one, of examining and recording new species, are the ones which made Huxley so discerning and apt in his critical writings.³⁷ One may question whether this type of claim has any merit when it is made by the author himself. A biographer, or novelist, selects and omits, controls and is controlled by his material. Yet the autobiographical and didactic nature of the work makes this a more ambiguous line to draw. The character which most closely resembles Huxley is Gumbriel Junior, and his experience as a schoolteacher, though short-lived in the novel, is used as the exemplar for moral dilemma.

³⁶ Huxley, *AH*, p. 22. Huxley mistakenly attributes this quotation to St Peter Damianus. However, it is the opening line of Bernard of Cluny’s poetical satire *De Contemptu Mundi*.

³⁷ An authorial trait discussed more fully in the previous chapter.

II. 'HE OFFERED THEM ALL THESE THINGS': WREN'S PLANS FOR THE CITY OF LONDON

'It has always struck me as very curious', begins Gumbriel Senior, the elderly but still impassioned architect of Antic Hay, 'that people are so little affected by the vile and discordant architecture around them'. 'Suppose, now', his speech turning to the hypothetical, 'that all these brass bands of unemployed ex-soldiers that blow so mournfully at all the street corners were suddenly to play nothing but a series of senseless and devilish discords—why, the first policeman would move them on, and the second', he adds, not without a touch of hyperbole, 'would put them under arrest'. Yet he points out that when an architect designs, and thus causes the construction, of a structure that is 'as stupid and ignoble and inharmonious as ten brass bandsmen each playing a different tune in a different key', there is no outcry. The police are not called to action—no one instinctively notices that anything is wrong.³⁸ The impetus for Gumbriel's dissatisfaction in this scene stems from much earlier in the novel where he laments the passing of architecture as 'an expression of human dignity and greatness'. He suggests here that architecture can only be practised properly when 'you abandon the petty human scale and build for giants, when you build for the spirit and imagination of man, not for his little body'. Sitting by the fireside, he thinks of the greatest architects throughout history, beginning with Alberti, whom he calls 'the noblest Roman of them all', and ending in the seventeenth century, musing intermittently through the passage, 'of Brunelleschi . . . of Michelangelo . . . And of Wren and of Palladio' but being unable 'to put into words what he felt when he thought of them'.³⁹

Despite Gumbriel Senior's belief in people's lack of interest in the 'enormous palaces of steel and stone' going up around them, 1923 was a year of great public interest in architecture. A. Trystan Edwards, a contemporary architect, gave his record of a walk through London one

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

afternoon in the spring of 1923 as he was making his way to an exhibition by The Architecture Club, a newly-founded society at that time.⁴⁰ Whilst traversing ‘several streets of modern houses’ at the back of Park Lane, he condemns the expensive nineteenth-century villas for being ‘profusely decorated with terra-cotta ornament belonging to every style which has been practiced in Europe during the last thousand years’, calling them ‘fussy, obtrusive, individualist, [and] thoroughly *bad-mannered*’. He concludes with thanks that at least one side of this scene of architectural ‘corruption’ is shielded by the continuity of the white façades of Park Lane. He was thus put in the mood of ‘appropriate thoughtfulness’ to visit the exhibition of a club which first expressed its purpose in a simple manifesto, published in the journal of the Society of Architects in 1922, by proclaiming that it existed ‘to enlarge public appreciation of good architecture ... and especially of the best work of to-day’.⁴¹ Furthermore, the club propounded the conviction that ‘there is more good modern work than most people realize, and that there would be far more were the public informed as to where to get it, and encouraged to think the getting of it worth while’.⁴² There were three classes of members admitted upon its founding: architects, writers, and ‘persons interested in the furtherance of good building’.⁴³ The young critic and author Aldous Huxley was among the founding members of this second group. Other notable members included its first president, Thomas Hardy, along with, *inter alia*, Edwin Lutyens, Gilbert Scott, John Galsworthy, and Lord Leverhulme. Prior to Huxley’s move to Italy in 1923, the club held its first exhibition in Grosvenor House where models and photographs were arranged to portray what was ambiguously advertised as ‘the best work of British architects of the past twenty years’.⁴⁴ The exhibition was a resounding success and attracted so much interest that it remained open in London nearly a month longer than anticipated and then travelled to major cities around

⁴⁰ A. Trystan Edwards, ‘Twenty Years of British Architecture’, *Architecture: A Magazine of Architecture and the Applied Arts and Crafts* (London, April 1923 (1:6) accessed via British Periodicals), p. 279.

⁴¹ Anonymous, ‘The Architecture Club’, *Journal of the Society of Architects* (London: October 1922 (15:12) accessed via British Periodicals), p. 299.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Anonymous, ‘Architecture Old and New’, *The Times* (London: 2 March 1923: 7).

the country. An article in *The Times* that was published during the exhibition praised it for offering the public man a chance ‘to awake his interest, to show him that architecture is not a secret rite, but an affair of his own eye, business, and bosom; and [that the] art concerns this aesthetic sense, his comfort, his business efficiency’.⁴⁵ Edwards too, from the point of view of the professional architect, thought that the club showed conclusively that the British can ‘design very beautiful public buildings in the Classic manner’.⁴⁶ Of course, for Huxley, these sentiments left the vast unanswered question: what is ‘good’ or ‘beautiful’ architecture? His essays in the early nineteen twenties show that he had strong feelings about what was ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in architecture. Huxley wrote an essay for John Middleton Murray’s *The Athenaeum* where he announced that ‘to-day [...] there are signs that architecture is coming back to that sane and dignified tradition of which Wren was the great exponent’.⁴⁷ This was an unsurprising statement at the time, as nineteen twenty-three was the bicentenary of Wren’s death and the neo-neo-classicist movement was heralded as a triumph by many against Victorianism. The occasion was marked with a number of public memorials and publications, but perhaps none of these were as poignant as the little-known scene in *Antic Hay* when Gumbriel Senior reveals a full-scale model of Wren’s plans for London which he built in the upper floor of his London home, inviting his guests to walk with him ‘through this ideal city’ and telling them of Wren’s vision.⁴⁸

Some 80 years after the Great Fire destroyed the medieval City of London, Christopher Wren, the son of Sir Christopher Wren, published *Parentalia* (1750), the memoirs and history of his family. In this book, he details his father’s life, from his childhood in Wiltshire and scientific education at Oxford to his selection by Charles II as the King’s Surveyor of Works and the role that he played through this appointment in the rebuilding of London. St. Paul’s is his most visible legacy today, and indeed, in the building’s crypt, his tomb bears the simple epitaph, *si*

⁴⁵ Anonymous, ‘Modern British Buildings’, *The Times* (London: 6 March 1923, 17).

⁴⁶ Edwards, ‘Twenty Years of Architecture’, p. 282.

⁴⁷ Huxley, *On the Margin*, p. 182.

⁴⁸ Huxley, *AH*, p. 136.

momentum requires circumspice ('If you require a monument, look around you'). While the plans that Wren had for the city remain familiar enough today, they were never built. The way in which Wren the younger describes the burning of London and its aftermath gives us some idea of why this may be the case. At the end of a long quotation from Seneca, wherein he gives an account of the burning of *Lugdunensis* (Lyons), Wren adds a marginal note by way of an analogy: *Nota Bene: Londinum, nobilissimam urbem, cui nulla gens habuit parem, flamma triduo incineres redegit* (Note well: After three days, the fire had reduced to ashes that most noble city, London, for which no other nation had an equal).⁴⁹ London, the largest city in the world in the year 1666, the seat of the monarch, and the centre for commerce and wealth of Britain was destroyed in three days. Wren did not take the fire as a reason to grieve. In the purging of the fire, it's common lore, whether or not this did occur, that the fire rid the city of the plague, there was opportunity to build a new and better city. Wren, the younger, sums up the mood of the aftermath, thus: '*The Fire of London, furnish'd the most perfect Occasion that can ever happen in any City, to rebuild it with Pomp and Regularity: this Wren foresaw, and as we are told, offer'd a Scheme for that Purpose, which would have made it the Wonder of the World*'.⁵⁰ His 'scheme' disregarded the cramped street plans of the medieval city with its houses traditionally built out of timber and plaster. The new city would be of stone and brick in order to avoid another fire on such a scale. Wren's neo-classical cathedral church, taking the place of the ancient gothic cathedral, formed the centrepiece of the new city. It would have been approached from the west by a boulevard that crosses a re-opened and purified River Fleet. 'Arterial' roads flanked the cathedral and ended in piazzas, giving way to smaller, radial roads. Everything was planned in harmonious proportion and offered the seventeenth-century citizens of London, in the words of Gumbriel Senior when he is detailing this plan in model form, 'open spaces and broad streets [...] sunlight and air and

⁴⁹ Wren, Christopher. *Parentalia: or, Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens; viz. of Matthew Bishop of Ely, Christopher Dean of Windsor, &c., but chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren . . .* (London: T. Osborn and R. Dodsley, 1750), P. 270.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

cleanliness [...] beauty, order, and grandeur' on such a scale 'so that even the most bestial [...] as they walked those streets, might feel that they were of the same race—or very nearly—as Michaelangelo; that they too might feel themselves, in spirit at least, magnificent, strong, and free'.⁵¹

Sir Christopher Wren viewed the opportunity to rebuild London in the aftermath of the Great Fire as particularly fortuitous because it would have been a crowning achievement of neo-classicism. In addition to providing exalting living conditions for the inhabitants of London, the construction of Wren's plan would have reinforced the already pre-eminent architectural movement.⁵² Wren was greatly influenced by Inigo Jones (1573-1652) who, along with Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) before him, was devoted to Vitruvian understandings of proportion in their work. Indeed, the old St Paul's had been modified out of its old gothic ways by Jones to include a new Palladian west front before it burned in the fire.⁵³ This is an architectural mode that was returning to popularity in the early twentieth-century as well. For instance, Wren's classical plan for London is strikingly close to the kind of architecture promoted in Le Corbusier's 1923 work *Vers Une Architecture*. Le Corbusier's atavistic concept of architecture calls for use of 'regulating lines', which work to produce the effect in a building of 'a profound projection of harmony'.⁵⁴ Regulating lines can be found in the plans for many classical, or classically inspired, buildings. If one were to use simple geometrical calculations to transcribe circles and squares on a drawing of the façade of Notre Dame one would see the proportionality involved in the placement of doors and windows, the height of the towers, and the width of the aisles. Furthermore, regulating lines serve as 'an assurance against capriciousness' in design but not a restriction on creativity, in the same way that a schoolboy's lessons on grammar guides his writing but does not choose his

⁵¹ Huxley, *AH*, p. 135.

⁵² Adrian Tinniswood, *His Invention So Fertile* (London: Pimlico, 2002) and *By Permission of Heaven: The Story of the Great Fire* (London: Pimlico, 2004). See also: Anthony Geraghty, *The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren: from All Soul's College, Oxford*. (London: Lund Humphries, 2007), Sir George Clark, *The Later Stuarts 1660-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1963).

⁵³ See Eric DeMaré, *Wren's London* (London: Folio Society, 1975).

⁵⁴ Le Corbusier, *Vers Une Architecture* (1923; rpt. Oxford: Architectural Press, 1989), p. 48.

words.⁵⁵ Without labouring the point, one may note that Gumbriel Senior's thoughts on musical harmony (*i.e.* 'golden ratios') mirror those found in classical architecture. Huxley's writings about his travels in the early twenties serve to explain his architectural preferences. Aldous and Maria first moved from England to a villa overlooking Florence, a city Huxley thought was too 'trecento and quattrocento for his taste—too much gothic in the architecture and too much primitive art in the galleries'.⁵⁶ He thought that one must go to Rome for the architecture and to Venice for the painting, and this is the course his travels took.

Wren's plan for London is the central image of *Antic Hay*, which displays the accumulation of centuries of shared intellectual inheritance in architectural planning. What follows is an excerpt of the first glimpse of Gumbriel Senior's model:

It was a big room; but almost the whole of the floor was covered by an enormous model, twenty feet long by ten or twelve wide, of a complete city traversed from end to end by a winding river and dominated at its central point by a great dome. Gumbriel Junior look at it with surprise and pleasure. Shearwater was roused from his bitter ruminations of desire to look at the charming city spread out at his feet.

'It's exquisite', said Gumbriel Junior. 'What is it? The capital of Utopia, or what?'

Delighted, Gumbriel Senior laughed. 'Don't you see something rather familiar in the dome?' he asked.

'Well, I had thought . . .?' Gumbriel Junior hesitated, afraid that he might be going to say something stupid. He bent down to look more closely at the dome. 'I had thought it looked rather like St Paul's—and now I see that it is St Paul's.'

'Quite right', said his father. 'And this is London'.

'I wish it were', Gumbriel Junior laughed.

'It's London as it might have been if they'd allowed Wren to carry out his plans of rebuilding after the Great Fire'.

'And why didn't they?' . . .⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁶ Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁷ Huxley, *AH*, p. 135.

The new scheme for London disregarded the huddled street plans that had slowly crept up over the years. It offered wide thoroughfares with impressive vistas and central piazzas containing important buildings of the church and state. Again, Wren records the impetus behind the vision:

Some intelligent Persons went farther, and thought it highly requisite, the City in the Restoration should rise with that Beauty, by the Straightness and Regularity of Buildings, and Convenience for Commerce, by the well disposing of Streets and publick Places, and the Opening of Wharfs, &c. which the excellent Situation, Wealth and Grandeur of the *Metropolis of England* did justly; in respect also of the Rank she bore with all other trading Cities of the World, of which tho' she was before one of the richest in Estate and Dowry, yet unquestionably the least beautiful.⁵⁸

The moral exploration of the *Antic Hay* is one that is ostensibly as fruitless as Wren's plans for London in that it does not provide any conclusions. In fact, the 'redemptive characters' that Huxley creates are often the weakest. John 'the Savage', from *Brave New World*, is the well-remembered example, who hanged himself after finding it impossible to live out the moral code he learned from reading Shakespeare in the modern society outside his Malpaisian home.⁵⁹ In *Antic Hay*, this character is Gumbriel Senior, the architect. And, it goes on for some time with Gumbriel Senior explaining why 'they' didn't allow the city to be rebuilt according to these plans and where it leaves London today, saying, effectively, that we cannot blame the men and women for rebuilding it in the same way in the seventeenth-century because people always carry on in much the same way: 'Several million people were killed in a recent war and half the world ruined; but we all busily go on in courses that make another event of the same sort inevitable. *Experientia docet? Experientia* doesn't!'⁶⁰ In other words, 'the war to end all wars' was not enough, in Gumbriel's opinion, to keep man from going to war again. Within this scene, there is no extended dialogue on the merits of building in this manner. His critique is almost wholly contained in a lamentation that Regent Street 'is being pulled down' and a restrained, private, very English

⁵⁸ Wren, *Parentalia*, p. 269.

⁵⁹ See the ending of Aldous Huxley's, *Brave New World*.

⁶⁰ Huxley, *AH*, p. 136.

admission of frustration over the fact that he must take on commissions building small residential dwellings rather than display his talents in grand city planning and municipal architecture.⁶¹ This is the great bane of the modern architect—he no longer has routine recourse to patronage by the church or state. Wren saw the beginnings of this in the objections that were raised against his plan. However, in the case of the rebuilding of London, it was more urgent to rebuild quickly than to consider the cost. Both Charles II and his Parliament knew that if London did not rebuild quickly, there was a danger that it might not be rebuilt at all:

The only, and, as it happened, insurmountable Difficulty remaining, was the obstinant Averseness of great Part of the Citizens to alter their old Properties, and to recede from building their Houses again on the old Ground and Foundations; as also, the Distrust in many, and Unwillingness to give up their Properties, tho' for a Time only, into the Hands of publick Trustees, or Commissioners, till they might be dispens'd to them again, with more Advantage to themselves, than otherwise possible to be effected; for, such a Method was propos'd, that by an equal . . . By these Means, the Opportunity, in a great Degree, was lost, of making the new City the most magnificent, as well as commodious for Health and Trade of any upon Earth; and the *Surveyor* being thus confin'd and cramp'd in his Designs, it requir'd no small Labour and Skill, to model the City in the Manner it has since appear'd.⁶²

The final impediment to Wren's plans were the reluctance of citizens in the City of London to wait for their houses to be rebuilt and the great expense at which the project would be done. Gumbriel Senior likewise expresses that as an architect, he is left to his own devices to pay his way. Indeed, the problem that Gumbriel believes comes from being a 'modern architect' is that architecture was now *profession* in the strictest capitalist sense (*i.e.* that it had become a paid occupation); it was no longer a 'sport' for the mathematically minded gentleman:

⁶¹ Christian Barman, 'Architecture and Morality', *Architecture: A Magazine of Architecture and the Applied Arts and Crafts* (Feb 1924; 2, 16), contends that John Nash's creation of Regent Street is *the* great overlooked architectural achievement of London because he was able 'at last to accomplish for London what Wren and a number of other and lesser architects would have liked to do', *viz.* design in full an area connecting Regent and St James' Parks, along with the neighbouring streets and buildings.

⁶² Wren, *Parentalia*, p. 269.

‘In the old days these creatures built their own hovels, and very nice and suitable they were too. The architects busied themselves with architecture—which is the expression of human dignity and greatness, which is man’s protest, not his miserable acquiescence. You can’t do too much protesting in a model cottage at seven hundred pounds a time. A little, no doubt, you can protest a little; you can give your cottage decent proportions and avoid sordidness and vulgarity. But that’s all; it’s really a negative process. You can only begin to protest positively and actively when you abandon the petty human scale and build for the giants—when you build for the spirit and the imagination of man, not for this little body. Model cottages, indeed!’⁶³

The bicentenary of Wren’s death was marked by a number of public memorials and numerous publications. Huxley wrote an essay on the occasion in which he suggests that the most important part of the celebrations was that people were taking a ‘renewed interest’ in the art that he produced: *i.e.* in the buildings which remain a living example of his work.⁶⁴ One may ask to what purpose were these celebrations held; Huxley would suggest that they were more than a agreeable way to honour a man. Centenaries represent a form of reckoning which allows a society to see precisely where ‘in relation to their achievement, we stand at the present time, that we may appraise the life still left in their spirit and apply ourselves the moral of their example’.⁶⁵ Likewise, the war gave the government of Britain the chance to rebuild and the chance to rebuild the lives of people in a different way because of a moment in which life was being appraised. Huxley demonstrated in his novels the fact that ideas may possess qualities which are comparable with those that animate persons and this was done in a period of time when ideas were considered to be not fixed, calculated, or limited by canons of strict acceptance or rejection. Ideas, as they are used by Huxley, possess, in other words, dramatic qualities. Hoffman makes a valid point when he says that there is not a specific ‘contest between right and wrong’ through which we are to gather comfort or instruction in Huxley’s writings. Instead, the

⁶³ Huxley, *AH*, pp. 29-30.

⁶⁴ Aldous Huxley, ‘Sir Christopher Wren’, *On the Margin* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923), p. 174.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

‘working-through’ of an idea means that an example is provided that one may think through and choose to follow.

In a later semi-biographical travel work, *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, Huxley discusses the development of his aesthetic tastes, saying ‘I was brought up in the straight and narrow way of Ruskinism’ and ‘so strict was my conditioning that it was not till I was at least twenty and had come under a newer school that I could perceive the smallest beauty in Saint Paul’s Cathedral’.⁶⁶ The ‘new school’ of which had come to influence Huxley caused enough of a shift in his disposition that he later introduced his thoughts about Wren’s architectural examples specifically in contrast to John Ruskin’s *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853). He wrote that ‘descending with majesty from his private Sinai, Mr Ruskin dictated to a whole generation of Englishmen the aesthetic Law. On monolithic tablets that were the Stones of Venice, he wrote the ‘great truths’ that had been revealed to him’.⁶⁷ This is not an unfair comparison, for Ruskin himself makes the comparison between the title of his work and Psalm 119:105 in a footnote, ‘The Law is light. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path’.⁶⁸ Ruskin maintained that there was an ‘essential baseness’ in the Renaissance (*i.e.* the modern Italian and Greek styles of architecture), and an ‘essential nobleness’ in the Gothic, ‘consisting simply in the pride of one, and the humility of the other’.⁶⁹ Furthermore, he thought that a love of symmetry was ‘invariably associated with vulgarity and narrowness of mind’; and of proportion he says that ‘it no more constitutes the true power of an architect, than the possession of a good ear for metre constitutes a poet; and every building whose excellence consists merely in the proportion of masses is to be considered as nothing more than an architectural doggerel, or rhyming exercise’.⁷⁰ His tome, a ‘hymn to architectural loveliness’, reveals the seven guiding principles which he believed to be necessary for the creation of ‘good

⁶⁶ Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1934), p. 124.

⁶⁷ Huxley, ‘Sir Christopher Wren’, p. 176.

⁶⁸ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture, The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, vol. VIII, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903), p. 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

architecture': these are 'sacrifice', 'truth', 'power', 'beauty', 'life', 'memory', and 'obedience'. Huxley disparages Ruskin's views on architecture for the same reasons that Gumbriel dislikes the teaching in the school chapel, making no secret that he saw a connection with Old Testament law-giving. Such rules are able to suggest what elements a 'good', singular building may have but not how that building should then stand in relation to those around it or exist for the people who are going to use it. As opposed to a work such as Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Wren's 'Tracts' on Architecture may frustrate one looking for the secret behind his genius or more simply some instruction about what he considered 'good architecture'. This is a clear example of instruction that guides without dictating. Wren, however, does not record any preference for style; his 'tracts' on architecture are distinctively vacant when it comes to directing architectural preference.

Wren's most famous building, St Paul's Cathedral, does not fare well when considered against the strictures of Ruskin's commandments. For instance, the upper portions of the outside walls above the aisles of the cathedral are 'false' and exist solely to create the illusion that the building is robust enough to carry the enormous dome in its centre and, thus, appear large enough to be monumental on the city-scape. When inside, the building retains the proportions of a gothic cathedral, with shorter aisles on either side of the nave and a cruciform floor plan. The three-layered dome exists to provide adequate support and proportional viewpoints both inside and out: the inner dome appears proportional from the interior and is painted with a mural, the central, conical brick dome supports the copula at its peak, and the outer-most dome creates the appropriate sense of proportion for its exterior. The building is, therefore, considered by Ruskin to be far from 'truthful' in its fabrication: a work of smoke and mirrors rather than substance. There are few examples of this style of architecture on such a scale in Britain, and indeed the original model known as the Great Model, which was the plan that Wren wanted to build, was vetoed by the clergy of the time because it looked too much like St Peter's basilica of the Vatican. This design upset two other demands, those of 'memory' and 'obedience' to

national styles (*i.e.* diverging from English Gothic). A. Trystan Edwards speaks of Ruskin as well to say that very often the only advice which the architectural profession has received from men-of-letters has,

During the last twenty years, architects have not very often received [such] helpful guidance and encouragement from men of letters. Some of our successful novelists, for instance, would not emerge from the test very well if the comfortable and costly home which they have built for themselves were judged by this standard of manners, and very often the kind of admonition which we have received from men of letters has consisted of little more than a resumé of those seductive doctrines of Ruskin and William Morris according to which all we have to do in order to produce good architecture is to emphasise and expose the constructional features of our buildings and concentrate our attention upon the manipulation of materials. It must be observed that both these precepts entirely ignore the relation of one building to another, and, in fact, divert our attention *away* from the most profound and important qualities of civic architecture.⁷¹

When architects ignore the ‘relation of one building to another’, proportion in city planning becomes impossible to regulate or make manifest. If, for example, every building is built with a dome like that of St Paul’s, then the cathedral ceases to be unique on the skyline. Consider, for instance, the London Building Acts 1888 and 1894 that regulated that buildings could not be build taller than ten stories, or the reach of a fireman’s ladder at the time. This restriction also protected views of St Paul’s Cathedral. However, after the war, when there was a greater need for rebuilding and development, most of these regulations were overturned, leading to both criticism and praise by those who thought this was a destruction of London’s unique skyline and those who believed it was a sign of progress. As the next section will discuss, Huxley makes a connection between this form of over-indulgence in ‘feast’ days, or wanton ornamentation, when he speaks out against the particular brand of hedonism that he sees existing in post-war life in London.

⁷¹ Edwards, ‘Twenty Years of British Architecture’, pp. 284-285.

III. 'THE PROBLEM WAS VERY TROUBLESOME INDEED': A MORAL QUANDARY

The beginning of *Antic Hay* provides Huxley's primary exemplum for the follies of moral instruction using a *reduction ad absurdum* to parody the type of education which relies on simple, easily repeatable maxims. On the opening page, Theodore Gumbriel Junior, B.A. Oxon, sits in the school chapel where he teaches (which is a recognisable portrayal of Eton College, where Huxley was a French Master from September 1917 until April 1919) speculating 'in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and nature of God'.⁷² In a more subtle and less developed version of the technique that Huxley later called 'counterpoint', the narrative tightly contrasts his thoughts with the peculiar rituals of an Anglican service. Simultaneously, the Reverend Pelvey is giving the 'First Lesson' from the authoritative position of a brass eagle lectern and is, in Gumbriel's words, 'fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy' which allows him to speak with an 'enviable certainty': 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord'.⁷³ This ostentatious 'foghorning' by Pelvey clashes with the attempted empiricism of Gumbriel's thoughts about his own childhood. He can understand belief in a divine being as something that is meant to instil, 'a sense of warmth about the heart; God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought', but he cannot begin to accept 'God as truth, God as 2+2=4—that wasn't so clearly all right', asking, 'Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds?'⁷⁴ The seemingly impossible reconciliation between religion and science is one that reappears intermittently for Gumbriel though the novel.⁷⁵ There is no answer given. Instead, Pelvey continues reading, commanding that these Biblical lessons

⁷² Huxley, *AH*, p. 7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

⁷⁵ Though it is not central to the argument in this chapter, it is worth noting that this is a portrayal of the popular idea of the 'conflict thesis' that existed between science and religion in the nineteenth-century, and onwards, was advanced by secularists such as John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White—besides their own seminal works, an introduction to the effects and history of this thought may be found in the *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion* (2010).

should be taught ‘diligently unto thy children’, which causes Gumbriel to think about his own childhood.

Gumbriel, the sceptic, thinks about the existence of goodness.⁷⁶ He confesses that his father had never been religious, ‘an atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school’. However, his mother had been dogmatic: she was ‘dogmatically good’. But he is troubled by the question of what it means to be good or, if indeed, one can any longer be good. For he says that ‘good’ is a word that people,

only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? . . . but in any case, there was no getting out of that though, good she had been. Not nice, not merely *molto simpatico*—how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name—but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her . . . and that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?⁷⁷

This reflection is laden with the self-awareness that in having these thoughts, he can perceive a generational decline in values. In the lines following the passage, the empty words of Pelvey resound against Gumbriel’s assurance in a typical Huxleyan juxtaposition. In spite of his devotion, the priest is an empty moral vessel; in spite of Mrs Gumbriel’s unwarranted death of ‘creeping and devouring pain’, she had been good. One can almost imagine Huxley mockingly adding a mental intonation in the tone of a proclamation of the mystery of faith: ‘Goodness has existed, Goodness is passed, Goodness may never come again’. The first chapter ends with a taste of disillusion. ‘Remember the parable of the sower’ says Pelvey. In the parable, Jesus tells the multitudes to whom he speaks that the man who sows seeds in good ground is the man who has heard the word of God and understood it; his life will grow and bear fruit.⁷⁸ But what if, after the

⁷⁶ Despite Huxley’s break from the country house setting of *Crome Yellow* (1921), effectively the same characters reappear in *Antic Hay*. E.g. Gumbriel is a mixture of Scogan and Denis. Later, in *Point Counter Point*, this is Philip Quarles; in *Eyeless in Gaza*, Beavis.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁷⁸ See the Gospel of St Matthew, chapter 13.

war, there remained no metaphorical ground left and no seed to sow? Gumbriel, looking around the chapel, turns to despair over the state of his occupation, thinking that many of the boys he can see are not worth trying to educate because of their tendency only to mimic his instruction rather than think for themselves.⁷⁹ Huxley demonstrates the foolishness of accepting moral instruction given within the present schooling system when Gumbriel sits to read his student's essays on the Risorgimento. The task given to them is to 'Give a brief account of the character and career of Pope Pius IX, *with dates wherever possible*', and the first response appears promising; Falarope Major says:

Pius IX was called Ferretti. He was a liberal before he was a Pope. A kindly man of less than average intelligence, he thought that all difficulties could be settled by a little goodwill, a few reforms and a political amnesty. He wrote several encyclicals and a syllabus.⁸⁰

While marking the essay, Gumbriel admits that he 'admired the phrase about less than average intelligence; Falarope Major should have at least one mark for having learnt it so well by heart'. However, this naïve regurgitation of facts continues. Higgs was of the opinion that 'Pius the Ninth was a good but stupid man'; Beddoes that 'Pius IX was a bad man who said that he was infallible, which showed he had a less than average intelligence' . . . 'Sopwith Minor shared the general opinion about Pio's intelligence and displayed a great familiarity with the wrong dates' . . . 'Gumbriel laid down the papers and shut his eyes—no, this was really impossible. Definitely it couldn't go on'.⁸¹ He loses the faith in the ability to teach his students to *understand* anything and drifts off into a day-dream that portrays his life as it could be if he gave up teaching, which he quickly decides to do, proclaiming, 'I have come to the conclusion [...] that most people . . . ought never . . . to be taught anything at all'.⁸² In the same way that the church service carries on without resolving Gumbriel's deliberations on goodness, there is no further commentary on

⁷⁹ Huxley, *AH*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

education here, but the sense remains that Gumbriel is sliding into a nihilist languor as a result of his teaching post and its prescriptive pedagogical underpinnings.

Concurrent with the account of Gumbriel's fast-paced moral conundrum, the extensive description of the atmosphere of the chapel intersperses itself in the narrative. Vivid references to the variegated windows 'all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass', tactile indications of billowing academic gowns and vestments, the noises of giggling and the distracted attention of a thousand schoolboys, and the organ issuing out a 'thin Puritan-preacher's note through one of its hundred nostrils', all intermingle to comprise the liturgical beat of the Anglican Mass. Yet this orthodoxy and setting is undermined by something as basic as Gumbriel's preoccupation over the pain caused by sitting on oaken stalls for a long period of time with the posterior of a 'bony starveling'.⁸³ He considers that were he to leave teaching he could become a capitalist with the invention and production of 'pneumatic trousers' which one would be able to inflate in order to relieve the bothersome symptoms that come of a sedentary life. The scene is a comical opening to a comical novel, but it contains more ominous undertones. Huxley was well aware of the over-stimulated boredom afflicting many of his peers and thought that the constant entertainment and distraction of modern life was to blame. When Huxley was at Balliol College, he had a piano in his rooms where he would entertain friends with popular jazz and music hall songs. He was an avid cinema-goer as well. In 1916, he says in a letter to his father that he had just seen *Jane Eyre* and that he wanted to see *Birth of a Nation* 'which is said to [...] mark quite a new epoch in cinematographic art'.⁸⁴ However, he recoiled in distaste when he saw that music and the cinema were no longer exciting new art forms but mediums that were used by those who survived the war as a means by which to escape reality. He wrote in an essay in 1923 that pleasure had turned into 'auto-intoxication', and he considered that this 'danger from within' was more of a threat to the life of the nation than the Germans ever were because it threatened a loss

⁸³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁸⁴ Huxley, *Letters*, p. 95.

of the self. The characters in *Antic Hay* find themselves in a Jazz club at one point in the novel, where the lyrics ‘What’s he to Hecuba? Nothing at all!’ are repeated antiphonally. The lyrics are a jest based on Hamlet’s speech, ‘What is Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba? ...’⁸⁵ Hecuba’s response to the death of her children is seen as appropriate, while Gertrude’s to King Hamlet’s is not. Each minor character in *Antic Hay* acts ‘inappropriately’: Casimir Lyppiatt decries art as merely ‘a protest against the horribly inclemency of life’.⁸⁶ Coleman, ever seeking pleasure, says ‘the real charm about debauchery [...] is its total pointlessness, futility, and above all its incredible tediousness’.⁸⁷ Mercaptan believe it is ‘*too* late in the day’ to dream. As a reaction to this ‘conscientious hedonism’, Huxley said in an essay written in 1925 that ‘feasts must be solemn and rare, or else they cease to be feasts’. In other words, if one parties every day, the party becomes normal, and, therefore, meaningless. Similarly, to make an architectural analogy, Edwards pointed out that if every petrol station is allowed the adornment of a spire or dome, these features cease to be special. In short, Huxley pronounces a desperate need to order and temperance. At the end of his essay on Wren, he claims that Wren’s vision was ‘rather moral than aesthetic’, he was ‘a gentleman, the finished product of an old and ordered civilisation’.⁸⁸ At centenaries, we stand at a point of reckoning with the past. Huxley believed that the twenties fell short because of ‘a historical moment thrust upon them’: The Great War. Nevertheless, he retained faith, writing later in 1937 in *Ends and Means* that ‘there is nothing inherently absurd about the idea that the world which we ourselves have so largely constructed can also, if we so desire be reconstructed’.⁸⁹

The third essay in *On the Margin* is simply entitled ‘Accidie’. Originally, along with ‘*gastrimargia, fornication, philargyria, tristitia, cenodoxia, ira* and *superbia*’, ‘accidia’ was reckoned as one

⁸⁵ See *Hamlet*, II, ii.

⁸⁶ Huxley, *AH*, p. 74.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁸⁸ Huxley, ‘Sir Christopher Wren’, p. 117.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Abacus, 2003), p. 286.

of the eight principal vices to which man was subject.⁹⁰ Huxley introduces the concept by explaining it as one the many evil spirits that supposedly assaulted the Cœnobites of the Thebaid (a monastic community near Thebes):

Most sins haunt man through temptations that come in the small hours of the morning or when alone, but there was one, 'the *dæmon meridianus*' who came on the day and left men with the feeling that the 'day was intolerably long and life desolatingly empty. When this was accomplished, the dæmon would smile and take his departure, leaving the victim in the black depths of despair and hopeless unbelief'.⁹¹

Chaucer discussed this affliction in 'The Parson's Tale', in an exposition on the 'Sequitur de Accidia'.⁹² He also calls it by a more accessible name to the modern reader 'sloth' and says that while 'Envye blindeth the herte of a man, and Ire troubleth a man, Accidie maketh him hevvy, thoughtful, and wrawe'.⁹³ He references the Bible as well, which orders 'accursed be he that serveth God negligently'.⁹⁴ There was the understanding in the ancient world that it is a sin against God to be lazy or not to live one's life diligently for such a life 'wastes, and it allows things to spoil, and it destroys all worldly wealth by its carelessness'.⁹⁵ While 'accidie' is an affliction of the mind, Chaucer makes the analogy that hard manual labour, whilst difficult to begin with, becomes easier with diligence because one builds up muscles and endurance and becomes strong, whereas sloth makes one feeble and tender. It is the same with the mind and mental fortitude is the suggested remedy.

It does not appear, however, that 'accidie' was a particularly familiar concept to the readers of *Antic Hay* or *On the Margin* any more than it is today. A search of *The Times* archives over a decade on either side of 1923 yields only two mentions of the word. However, these articles are notable for the way in which they used the term. A 1919 article with the headline

⁹⁰ Aldous Huxley, 'Accidie', *On the Margin*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 19.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁹² Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Persones Tale', *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. IV, ed. Rev. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1894), pp. 570-644.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 613.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 614.

‘The Spanish Influenza’ discusses the ways in which ‘a Sufferer’s Symptoms’ recalls the ‘Russian’ Influenza of 1889-1890 during which ‘the attack was very sudden and utterly unexpected [...] a period of formless nightmares between sleeping and waking, left the patient a stone lighter in weight and utterly incapable of mental or physical exertion, and a month passed before life seemed really worth living again; and the mood of *accidie*, or chronic loss of zest for work or play, continued until the coming spring’.⁹⁶ Furthermore, it recalls that ‘there was at least one visitation of the kind during the Napoleonic wars, and there are obscure hints of similar occurrences in the dark, dirty, war-vexed Middle Ages, harassed by contagious nervous diseases which account for the ubiquity of *accidie*, the intellectual deadly sin against which many a famous theologian took up his parable. Later, in 1924, an article optimistically called ‘Bad Weather to End’ describes a particularly bad year for British weather: ‘to judge by the latest reports of storm, rain, and flood . . . the last week has been true to the standard of malignity towards man and his works which was set by most of its predecessors. A cold and long-retarded spring; a perpetually moist and sunless summer; an autumn, except for parts of November, of the same inclemency; and now a winter of lashing rains and general inundation, with water lying in places seldom, if ever, overlaid by it in a lifetime—all these evils have fallen to our lot’. This does not appear to upset the author though as they point out that ‘we have become such a nation of week-enders as not to be subject to the hibernal monotony that affected our ancestors with “accidie” and the “spleen”’.⁹⁷

Huxley explained that the understanding of what *accidie* has meant changed over the course of its conceptual existence. It was once a sin, it became known as a physical affliction (the ‘spleen’ mentioned above) in the 18th century, and then became a muse for artistic expression. Yet by 1919, it has become an affliction of the mind that signals disenchantment and one that is fuelled by distraction. Distraction from the troubles of modern life is the only driving force of

⁹⁶ Anonymous, ‘The Spanish Influenza’. *The Times* (London), Tuesday, Jun 25, 1918; p. 9; Issue 41825.

⁹⁷ Anonymous, ‘Bad Weather to End’. *The Times* (London), Tuesday, Dec. 30, 1924; p. 11; Issue 43846.

the plot of *Antic Hay* and is the inspiration behind its title, which comes from Marlowe's *Edward II*: 'My men, like satyrs grazing on the lawns, shall with their goat feet dance the antic hay' as they attempt to distract the king with entertainment. In the same way, the young set in London try to distract themselves from all aspects of life. In one passage, which is one of the few even in-direct mentions of the Great War in the book, the narrator provides some insight into the hedonistic behaviour of Myra Viveash:

Steppes after steppes of ennui, horizon beyond horizon, for ever the same. She looked again to the right and again to the left. Finally she decided to go to the left. Slowly, walking along her own private knife-edge between her personal abysses, she walked towards the left. She remembered suddenly one shining day like this in the summer of 1917, when she had walked along this same street, slowly, like this, on the sunny side, with Tony Lamb. All that day, that night, it had been one long good-bye. He was going back the next morning. Less than a week later he was dead. Never again, never again: there had been a time when she could make herself cry, simply by saying those two words once or twice, under her breath. Never again, never again. She repeated them softly now. But she felt no tears behind her eyes. Grief doesn't kill, love doesn't kill, but time kills everything, kills desire, kills sorrow, kills in the end the mind that feels them; wrinkles and softens the body while it still lives, rots it like a medlar, kills it too at last.⁹⁸

The Medlar fruit is best consumed when it is already rotting. Myra Viveash was young (and ripe) but rotting on the inside because of the loss of her lover. She stands in as a representative of her generation in this way.⁹⁹ The novel, in many ways, was a purging of the feelings that Huxley had developed for Nancy Cunard in the early nineteen-twenties. Sybille Bedford records that his infatuation was the primary impetus for the Huxley's move to Italy: 'they went straight to Italy. There, in two months, Aldous wrote *Antic Hay*. He wrote it all down, Maria said, he wrote it all out; it was over. He never looked back. The possession—that one descent of Até—left a mark

⁹⁸ Huxley, *AH*, pp. 199-200.

⁹⁹ This passage is similar to the one in Vera Britain's *Testament of Youth*, wherein she recalled a 'perfect' day before the war: 'I have written so much on Uppingham Speech Day because it was the one perfect summer idyll that I ever experienced, as well as my last care-free entertainment before the Flood. The lovely legacy of a vanished world, it is etched with minute precision on the tablets of my memory. Never again, for me and for my generation, was there to be any festival the joy of which no cloud would darken and no remembrance invalidate', p. 91.

on his novels; not his marriage'.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the condition of the monks of Thebaid is precisely the same state of perturbation in which Huxley believes the inhabitants of post-war London to be (and with which he was infected when being distracted by Cunard), and the book dramatizes the effect of this 'disease'. The scientific nature of this diagnosis was common of social criticism during the time. The language used for much of this discourse was explicitly morbid, partly because a good deal of it was fuelled by the human sciences, through which the vocabulary of disease, physical decline or mental instability could be applied metaphorically to the wider world of politics and social development. The Western view of the world between the wars was essentially diagnostic: searching for the symptoms that indicated disease and fearful lest they should prove fatal.¹⁰¹

The focus upon a disease or disorder in society is also the impetus behind the setting. The sheer vastness of the despair is first pointed out by Coleman who calls London a city of 'seven million distinct and separate individuals', individuals of whom millions:

Are now sleeping in an empested [*sic.*] atmosphere. Hundreds of thousands of couples are at this moment engaged in mutually caressing one another in a manner too hideous to be thought of . . . Thousands of women are now in the throes of parturition, and of both sexes thousands are dying of the most diverse and appalling diseases, or simply because they have lived too long. Thousands are drunk, thousands have over-eaten, thousands have not had enough to eat. And they are all alive, all unique and separate and sensitive . . .¹⁰²

The focus shifted in Huxley's view from the results of the affliction to its impetus. It does not matter that there is negligence in the act of being slothful or that being in such a state might bring out the best form of poetic expression—it matters that something has happened to put mankind in this state in the first place. Huxley's final say on Accidie, specifically related to the effects of the Great War, is that it is no longer a sin, nor a disease, nor a muse. Instead, 'Accidie'

¹⁰⁰ Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, p. 138.

¹⁰¹ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*, (London: Allen Lane, 2009), p 4.

¹⁰² Huxley, *AH*, p. 82.

has become a 'fate' of man's own creation. The medicalization of much of the language of crisis in the nineteen-twenties and thirties suggested the possibility of a cure. One might, therefore, expect Huxley to offer a specific remedy for the disease in this essay, yet he realises that there could be no uniform remedy since there were so many different elements to the crisis. The function of the 'novel of ideas' is not to provide answers. Huxley was a prolific writer of essays, yet whereby the essay form is a method of formal proof-making, or rather a form that was meant to prove through deductive reasoning a logical conclusion, the 'novel of ideas' was meant to demonstrate these points. The essay 'Accidie' provides a short history of the term and explains why it is that Huxley thought that the modern era was subject once again to its effects, and the novel *Antic Hay* shows what it is like for people, or rather its characters, to live through its effects.

At the end of the novel, the scale model of Wren's City of London is sold off to the Victoria and Albert museum for the money to help one of Gumbriel Senior's friends settle his son's debts. The follies of youth put a stop to the plans of the elders. It is, perhaps, the final image of the novel that so plainly exposes Huxley's understanding of something baser, more human, than the perpetual lights and sounds and thrills of modern London. There are few parts of the prose that so evidently suggest that his work is not wholly comic:

. . . Gumbriel took off his hat, breathed the soft air that smelt of the greenness of the garden.

'There are quiet places also in the mind', he said meditatively.

'But we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately—to put a stop to the quietness . . . All the thoughts, all the preoccupations in my head—round and round, continually . . . What's it for? What's it all for? To put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost that it isn't there. Ah, but it is; it is there, in spite of everything, at the back of everything . . . beautifully and unbearably'¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Huxley, *AH*, p. 237.

The novel closes with Gumbriel Junior and Myra Viveash's 'Last-Ride-Together' where, from a taxi, they see 'all that is most bestial and idiotic in contemporary life', talk with one another about their boredom, and look at the lights in Piccadilly Circus because they 'give one temporarily the illusion of being happy'.¹⁰⁴ When Gumbriel then begins to talk of his plans for the morning, Myra interrupts to declare 'tomorrow will be as awful as to-day'.¹⁰⁵ In the end, *Antic Hay* is a simple discursive work. Its moral exploration is as unfinished as Wren's plans for London in that it does not offer anything morally concrete—rather than providing answers or commandments, it works through problems and possible answers. Perhaps, we might conclude that this is by design. For the novel merely to explore, rather than dictate, values for architecture and how one should live one's life comes close to the collective ennobling of humanity Huxley so desires for the inhabitants of post-war London.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 236, 246.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 254.

CHAPTER III

‘WE ARE MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER’: WINIFRED HOLTBY AND THE IMPETUS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE NINETEEN- THIRTIES

*Perhaps more than anyone else ... Winifred shared
the desire “to find, to test, and to
spread the customs and the ideas that would be
health-giving and live-saving”.*

Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*¹

*What is my ambition & dream? I don't know. I
want there to be no more wars; I want people to recognise the
human claims of [...] all oppressed & humiliated creatures; I
want a sort of bloodless revolution to come to breakdown all
snobberies & money standards & limiting vulgarities. And I
would like to be used as one of the instruments by which these
things are done.*

Winifred Holtby, *Letters*²

VERA Brittain recalled in her book *Testament of Friendship* how in June of 1934, Winifred Holtby agreed to address ‘a women’s organisation’ specialising in imperial affairs, at their annual conference on the ‘Colour Bar’ in South Africa.³ By this point in her life, aged thirty-six, Holtby was afflicted with Bright’s Disease, which was ultimately to be the cause of her death in

¹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship* (1940; rpt. London: Virago, 1980), p. 267.

² Letter from Winifred Holtby (WH) to Alice Holtby, 25 May 1933 (Winifred Holtby Collection, Hull History Centre, L WH/5/5.3/09/01a), hereafter abbreviated as HHC. The majority of the Holtby papers are in the Hull History Centre Special Collections. These were donated by Vera Brittain after Holtby’s death ‘to the citizens of Hull’, though papers are also located in the Winifred Holtby Memorial Collection at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and at The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University in Ontario. The largest of these collections is in Hull with over 10,000 items which are searchable from its own catalogue online.

³ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, pp. 373-374.

September 1935, and this engagement was the first she had accepted in nearly two years, preferring isolation from public appearances instead. Brittain went on to relay that the conference was an unusually ‘discouraging and quite untypical’ event because of the reaction fostered in the audience by Holtby’s speech. She began by self-deprecatingly stating, ‘Of course, I’m only a journalist’, meaning to qualify her talk as one which did not bear the same authority that some of the audience (officials, civil servants, and doctors from South Africa, among them) brought to the subject of the evening. However, a ‘self-conscious group of Journalists’ who were present in the press gallery took the declaration as an affront against their profession and ‘hissed’ at Holtby viciously. Though greatly shaken, she finished her speech and came home to Brittain ‘exhausted, depressed and quite unlike herself’.⁴ This episode exemplifies the anxiety that beset Holtby when considering her own occupation and purpose in life and, more particularly, whether journalistic writing was a sufficient vehicle for social change. Holtby’s reputation during her lifetime was built primarily on the basis of her journalism and political activism, while to the literary world at large, her novels were ‘respectfully but unobtrusively received’.⁵ However, her convictions and activist undertakings were always to infiltrate and shape her fictional work. Brittain believed that this was inevitable in ‘an age of perpetual and intensive propaganda by screen, wireless and Press’, which made it impossible for a writer to ‘live in serene detachment from the controversies of his time’.⁶

In a 1933 letter to her friend Margaret Haig Thomas, The Viscountess Rhondda, Holtby expressed her sense that one should, if possible, decide whether to be an activist or a novelist, writing, ‘I shall never quite make up my mind whether to be a reformer-sort-of-person or a writer-sort-of-person’.⁷ If this letter sought reassurance that she could be both at once, she had perhaps chosen the wrong correspondent. After the publication of Holtby’s fourth novel *Poor*

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Marion Shaw, *The Clear Stream* (London: Virago, 2000), p. 2.

⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 440.

⁷ Letter from WH to LR, 1933 in Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 129. Hereafter, Margaret Haig Thomas is referred to solely as Lady Rhondda (LR in footnotes).

Caroline (1931), Rhondda had written the author a damning, if faintly affectionate, indictment of her work:

I don't believe I shall *ever* like a novel of yours! And I shall to my dying day remain convinced that you ought to never attempt them. You haven't the qualifications they need...⁸

Rather unhelpfully, Lady Rhondda failed to describe the qualifications she considered to be required of a novelist. Her readiness to discourage Holtby from attempting further novels may have been grounded in business concerns; she was, after all, a founding member of *Time and Tide*, the feminist journal for which Holtby wrote prolifically. Later in the same year, Lady Rhondda would again write to Holtby begging her to remain concentrated on her journalism despite her declining health, ending with the plea 'I don't know what we should do if you failed us'.⁹ Holtby began writing for *Time and Tide* in the early nineteen-twenties and later served as its director from 1926. As she continued to write for the magazine and her responsibilities increased, Holtby often contributed multiple articles per issue, sometimes under one of several pseudonyms.¹⁰ It was only after the publication of *South Riding* that Lady Rhondda was to recognise Holtby as an artist who 'saw life steadily and saw it whole', alluding to Matthew Arnold's poem 'To A Friend' and their shared view that the author's duty is to instruct and guide their readers, as well as to entertain.¹¹

This chapter will consider *South Riding* as the 'novel in which the artist and social reformer had met and mingled in final co-operation'.¹² In addition to working tirelessly as an anti-war campaigner for the League of Nations Union, Holtby was a vocal supporter of the unionisation of black workers in South Africa. Her work for the latter cause enabled her to tour

⁸ Letter from LR to WH, 28 January 1931 (HHC, L WH/5/5.17/01/01f).

⁹ Letter from LR to WH, 22 August 1931 (HHC, L WH/5/5.17/03/01i).

¹⁰ Holtby published in various periodicals under the name 'Corbin H. Wood', see *Winifred Holtby: A Concise and Selected Bibliography together with Some Letters*, ed. Geoffrey Handley-Taylor (London: A. Brown & Sons, Ltd., 1955), p. 11.

¹¹ Lisa Regan, *Winifred Holtby's Social Vision: 'Members One of Another'* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), p. 12.

¹² Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 406.

South Africa in 1925, directly providing much of the material for her fifth novel *Mandoa, Mandoa!* (1933), a satire about the leaders of a small African state encountering the fast-paced, modern world of twentieth-century England.¹³ *South Riding*, however, withdraws not only to Holtby's home country but also to her corner of the countryside, a fictional 'South Riding' of Yorkshire, based heavily on the East Riding where she was brought up in Rudston and Kingston-upon-Hull. Although the novel's setting may be narrow, it is a work with a cast of nearly two hundred characters, which attempts an holistic vision of inter-war life within a small community. It focuses on the workings of local government, recognising that most corporate action in a community during this time, whether against 'poverty, sickness, ignorance, isolation, mental derangement [or] social maladjustment', begins with the deceptively 'impersonal' resolutions of a county council.¹⁴ The novel has never earned much institutional patronage; however, it sold nearly 16,000 copies in its first week of publication and 40,000 copies overall in the first year of publication in the UK (and an additional 20,000 in America). Victor Saville bought the film rights shortly after publication for £3,000 and the novel was rendered for the screen in 1938. Furthermore, there was a dramatisation on BBC radio in 1949, 1971, and 1973. *South Riding* has continued to be popular with uninterrupted re-printings since 1936 and a recent television adaptation in 2005.¹⁵

Furthermore, this chapter will argue that it was specifically through the novel form that Holtby best found a way to represent her philosophy for social change and the difficulties of enacting such changes. She believed that literature could and, moreover, *should* do something to help people through the economic and social crisis of the nineteen-thirties, giving form to modern chaos. Her beliefs centred on feminist promotion of the newly enfranchised 'woman citizen', arguing 'that the history of woman is not the record of her relationship to man, but the

¹³ Regan, *Holtby's Social Vision*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Preface to Winifred Holtby, *South Riding: An English Landscape* (1936; rpt. London: The Reprint Society, 1949). Hereafter referred to as *SR*.

¹⁵ Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, pp. 257-258.

story of her place in the universe’, and that ‘since the common humanity of man and woman is far more important than their sexual differences, the only adequate history of women would be a history of mankind and its adventures upon a changing globe’.¹⁶ ‘Old Feminism’ will be discussed alongside the non-fiction tracts of Holtby’s, *Virginia Woolf* (1932) and *Women in A Changing Civilisation* (1933) and those of other authors such as H. G. Wells’s *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* (1931), G. D. H. Cole’s *The Intelligent Man’s Guide Through World Chaos* (1932), and Walter Greenwood’s novel about the struggles of the working-classes in the north of England, *Love on the Dole* (1933). This chapter will demonstrate that these were often the sources people at the time trusted for information on the social, political, and economic condition of Britain and on how these circumstances might be altered in the inter-war years, rather than seeking the help or guidance of the political leaders of the country.

It is worth noting at the outset, that the type of moralising in which Holtby was engaged is Kantian in its ‘public use’ of reason. In his work ‘What is Enlightenment?’, Kant discusses the means by which one may attain freedom from ‘self-imposed nonage’ (or the ability to utilise one’s own reasoning, without the guidance or guardianship of others). Specifically, he discusses how ‘the public use of one’s reason’ is best imagined as a scholar engaging with a reading public, an act which cannot be made, for instance, by military officers or priests who are bound by the dogma of the institution of which they are a part.¹⁷ Holtby was not a scholar in the sense that she was an academic, but was a public intellectual. She was able to embody this role partly because of the society in which she lived and about which she was so concerned: a democratic society offers the freedom which Kant claims is necessary for any level of individual reason to be utilised. This is also one of the tenets of democracy which E. M. Forster praises in his essay ‘What I believe’, saying emphatically ‘two cheers for Democracy: one because it admits variety and two because it

¹⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 382.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question ‘What is Enlightenment?’* (1784; rpt. London: Penguin, 2009), p. 6.

permits criticism.¹⁸ Winifred Holtby was unfailingly critical of the society in which she lived, not because she was unpatriotic but because she knew that people were capable of serving one another more effectively, and the novel form was the chief medium through which she worked and expressed this idea.

¹⁸ E. M. Forster, *What I Believe and Other Essays* (1938; rpt. London: G. W. Foote & Co., 1999), p. 20.

I. VIRGINIA WOOLF: WORKS BOTH 'MORAL AND PERSUASIVE'

In 1932, Winifred Holtby published the first ever full-length study of Virginia Woolf's works. It is a wandering, discursive book, concerned, at least initially, with biographical discourse rather than literary exegesis. In a letter to Holtby, St John Irvine mocked the book—in the jesting manner that characterised their correspondence—for its hagiographical tendencies, stating 'you read the Woolf woman and immediately become a Woolf-hound'. Then switching metaphors, he added 'the portrait you paint in front of your lamentable work on that Bloomsbury Fake would convince anybody else that Virginia is suffering from a pain in her stomach and not from any divine inflatus; but you are at your old game of mistaking flatulence for inspiration!'.¹⁹ Irvine's comparison of writing to painting acknowledged a biographer's capability of manipulating and re-interpreting their subject-matter into a projection of their own unconscious predilections, rather than a realistic and 'truthful' representation of the subject; and indeed, a cursory reading of *Virginia Woolf* does little to suggest that Holtby was not a 'Woolf-hound', though the wry chapter titles—'The Advantages of Being Virginia Stephen' and 'Virginia Woolf is not Jane Austen'—indicate that she was willing to acknowledge and poke gentle fun at this tendency in herself. In *Testament of Friendship*, Vera Brittain revealed a more sympathetic approach to the book than Irvine's when she praised *Virginia Woolf* as 'rich in understanding and appreciation, yet dominated by a respect for integrity and a philosophic valuation of truth not always characterising of propagandists and social reformers'.²⁰ This section of the chapter will look at the moments within this book when 'philosophic valuation' occurs, showing that it is possible upon reading *Virginia Woolf* to discover more about Holtby's approach to literature and the way in which she thought it should function than about Woolf and her novels. Specifically, Holtby believed that literature was always moralistic, writing 'the morality of novels [...] the morality of

¹⁹ Letter from St John Irvine to WH, 26 October 1932 (HHC, L WH/5/5.19/05/01d).

²⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 134.

poetry. We cannot escape them. We may cling to a doctrine of pure aesthetics as closely as we choose, but the thing is round us'.²¹ That is to say, that she suggested that 'art for art's sake' cannot every truly be divorced from a moral stand in literature. It is when she approaches Woolf's works with this view that her criticism is most acute.

Virginia Woolf begins with an analogy designed to portray the intellectual inheritance into which Virginia Woolf née Stephens was born. Holtby says, through an analogy between Woolf's writing and her life, that 'the quality of her birth oozed into Katharine's consciousness from a dozen different sources as soon as she was able to perceive anything [...] her earlier conceptions of the world included an august circle of beings to whom she gave the names of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, and so on, who were, for some reason much more nearly akin to the Hilberys than to other people'.²² The 'Katharine' named here is Katharine Hilbery, the quasi-autobiographical character from Woolf's second novel *Night and Day* (1919). Holtby argues that the Stephens, like the Hilberys, were set apart from the average English family because of their erudition, which was made manifest in the family library. Leslie Stephen, Virginia's father, amassed a 'splendid library [...] stocked with the classics and containing his almost unique private collection of eighteenth-century books'.²³ Perhaps with reference to Ruskin's dictum that if a young girl 'can have access to a good library of old and classical books [...] she will find what is good for her', Stephen allowed his daughter the right to roam freely in his library.²⁴ Therefore, her education was primarily in the literature and philosophy of Ancient Greece, and having discovered, *inter alia*, Plato, Sophocles, and Homer on her own, rather than being set these authors as reading by a tutor, she felt she could claim them in the same personal, immediate way that Katharine 'gave the names' to 'Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Shelley'. More

²¹ Holtby, *Virginia Woolf* (London: The Ballantyne Press, 1932), p. 23.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

²⁴ John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865; rpt. London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1909), p. 34.

importantly for Holtby's study, this education through exploratory reading gave Woolf's approach to her own literature a *telos* to 'seek after truth'.

Holtby recognised this conviction for 'seeking truth' in Woolf, saying that in her work, 'theory and practice have walked hand in hand' towards 'virtue'.²⁵ *The Common Reader*, published in 1925, is a collection of twenty-six essays by Woolf on various practitioners and aspects of literature. *Virginia Woolf* focuses on one essay from this anthology entitled 'Not Knowing Greek', which explains the fascination with which 'readers' approach the works of Euripides, Aeschylus, Sappho, Sophocles, and Plato. Woolf claimed in her essay that at the very moment one encounters a line such as,

'Son of him who led our hosts
at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon',

which is taken from *The Iliad*, a 'fashioning' of setting of the poem begins in one's mind that connects to the ideal of a 'perfect existence' (she offers the English 'village by the sea' as one such example). Though the gory battle of Troy or an argument between the gods may be lyrically depicted, the story, or plot, remains hyper-real and motionless. Woolf attributes this to the 'impersonal', 'lightning-quick, and sneering' writing of the Greeks. What follows is an argument that the telling of an entertaining story is not the purpose of these works. Instead the tales are thoroughly didactic, and, more specifically, take the form of 'pursuing virtue':

to judge what each admission involves; to follow intently, yet critically, the dwindling and changing of opinion as it intensifies into truth. Are pleasure and good the same? Can virtue be taught? Is virtue knowledge? The tired or feeble mind may easily lapse as the remorseless questioning proceeds, but no one, however weak can fail, even if he does not learn more from Plato, to love knowledge better. For as the argument mounts from step to step, Protagoras yielding, Socrates pushing on, what matters is not so much the end we reach as our manner of reaching it. That all can feel—the indomitable honesty, the courage, the love of truth which draws Socrates and us in his wake to the Summit where,

²⁵ Holtby, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 37.

if we too may stand for a moment, it is to enjoy the greatest felicity of which we are capable.²⁶

Yet the question follows that if literature can have a *telos*, what is it about literature, which we take here to be writing of an imaginary form, and specifically the novel, that lends itself so well to a moralistic purpose? *Virginia Woolf* approaches this question through considering where literature stands ‘to-day’, and, in particular, by appraising Woolf’s own valuation of her contemporaries. Where in her essay ‘Modern Fiction’ (1919), Woolf had disparaged the Edwardian novel for not being an ‘end in itself’—‘in order to complete them’, she lamented, ‘it seems necessary to do something, to join a society, or more desperately, to write a cheque’—Holtby defends works that take up a political or social cause.²⁷ ‘Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Gallsworthy’ are indicted as ‘materialists’, and because they are concerned not with the spirit but with the body, Woolf suggests that ‘the sooner English fiction turns its back upon them, as politely as may be, and marches, if only into the desert, the better for its soul’.²⁸ By calling them ‘materialists’, she meant that they write of ‘unimportant things’, that is, that they focus on the mundane, not transcendental and everlasting truths. Woolf readily admits that these ‘truths’ cannot be explicitly named or pinned down but, conversely, that ‘Mr Joyce’ should be celebrated for coming ‘close to life’ by focusing on the spiritual and seeking to ‘reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain’.²⁹ Joyce is the only exception given to the modern ‘materialist’, however, and Woolf goes on to unfavourably contrast fiction written by the English with that of the Russians. The former, she says, bears witness to a ‘natural delight in humour and comedy [...] the beauty of earth [...] and in the splendour of the body’, yet in the latter, we may discern in every author ‘the features of a saint’, the rigorous spiritual exercise of fostering ‘sympathy’ and ‘love’ for the sufferings of others.³⁰ The dichotomy

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1951), p. 184.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

established by Woolf in this essay echoes the discussion in previous chapters of a spectrum of imaginary literature that runs from ‘form’ to ‘function’, and likewise, it is the latter of these which is considered worthy of pursuit in this instance. The function of ‘seeking truth’ is shared by Woolf and Holtby, but they maintain a difference in approach to how this may be achieved and to what end it is worth doing so.

Bertrand Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy*, which he began writing in the late nineteen-thirties and published in 1945, issues a *caveat lector* in one of its beginning chapters. When it comes to a modern reading of the Greeks, he claims that there are two common approaches. The first, which was ‘practically universal from the Renaissance until very recent times’, views the Greeks and the authority of their intellect with an almost mystical reverence as the founders of ‘all that is best’ and which the moderns cannot hope to equal. The second attitude, adopted more recently as a result of nineteenth-century scientific triumphs and an ‘optimistic belief in progress’, treats their legacy as fiendish, unhelpful, and ‘best forgotten’.³¹ Whichever view one may take, Russell himself advocated a ‘middling’ stance between these two extremes, and his comments on how to approach a ‘great thinker’ are applicable here. He argues that when studying a philosopher or an author, one’s attitude should be initially ‘neither reverence nor contempt’ but first a form of a ‘hypothetical sympathy’ until it is possible to consider what it ‘feels like to believe in his theories’, and only then should one resume a ‘critical attitude’, which should resemble as far as possible the practice of abandonment of all ‘opinions which he has hitherto held’.³² An attitude of sympathy is one which Holtby seems always to have held. Evidence of a considerate approach to the society in which she lived can be found in *Letters to a Friend*, a volume published posthumously in 1937 by Jean McWilliams, the Administrator of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps unit to which Holtby was assigned in Huchenville France after she joined active service in 1918. After the war, McWilliams moved to Pretoria, South

³¹ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 38.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

Africa where she became the Headmistress of a school. The impetus for Holtby's voyage to South Africa in 1925 came chiefly from the desire to visit her friend. In the letters, which occur intermittently until Holtby's death, the two friends refer to one another by the names of the cousins in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: Winifred is 'Celia' and Jean is 'Rosalind'. One of the first letters of this collected correspondence, which occurs during their most prolific period of exchange, was written when Holtby returned to Oxford after the war. She betrays to 'Rosalind' an early prejudice against 'meaningless writing'. She expressed this view some years before the composition of *Virginia Woolf* and before she gave name to the struggle in herself between a 'reformer-sort-of-person' and a 'writer-sort-of-person'. Holtby's complaint against 'meaningless writing' is explained through her admission that she 'can't work hard' at her undergraduate studies because her 'mind won't stick to the thing in hand. It runs off on to stories and things all the time. If they were any use, I should not grudge the time. But they aren't'.³³ By the time Holtby wrote *Virginia Woolf*, she had developed a clearer idea of what manner of writing was 'meaningful'.

A later chapter of *Virginia Woolf*, entitled 'Virginia Woolf is Not Jane Austen', is concerned, like Woolf's essay 'Modern Fiction', with detailing what has changed in society in the hundred-odd years between the lives of Austen and Woolf and how this alters their approach to writing. The Great War is Holtby's prime example of a divide between the two authors. She argues that writing can never be the same after the war because no activity thereafter, even the most banal 'domestic activity', was 'without reference to that tremendous, most un-domestic violence'.³⁴ Jane Austen was able to create a fictional world where one could believe in the illusion that a 'delayed proposal' or an 'invitation to a ball' filled the known universe, and 'so far as her little world was concerned, it did'. Yet after the war, every activity, whether 'buying

³³ Winifred Holtby, *Letters to a Friend* (New York: The Macmillan Society, 1938), p. 5.

³⁴ Holtby, *Virginia Woolf*, p. 84.

groceries or writing a love-letter’, was in some way ‘deflected to France, Egypt, or Gallipoli’.³⁵ Holtby goes on to suggest that Woolf’s writing has little credence because she does not recognise the ubiquity of the war and often gives an account of it second-hand. An example of this form of distancing can be found in *The Years* (1937) when Crosby first hears about the armistice: ‘the guns went on booming and the sirens wailed. The war was over—so somebody told her as she took her place at the counter of the grocer’s shop. The guns went on booming and the sirens wailed’.³⁶ One may infer that the guns are fired and sirens sounded in celebration, but this is not said plainly. Instead, there’s no contrast between a period of belligerence and one of peace. However, Holtby maintains that it is unanswerable that the war ‘changed everything’ in society and in writing, and that the loss that it engendered is a binding experience which its survivors share. The shared experience of surviving war affected how people read as well.

In a 1935 Holtby wrote an article for the *Left Review* entitled ‘What We Read And Why We Read It’. In this work, she situates her writing within ‘a large and ever increasing body of competent fiction’ which was read chiefly by ‘the great intermediate class of novel reading public’.³⁷ The price of books in inter-war Britain was high, and to some extent, this dictated what someone was able to read. The average wage of a male worker in the 1920s was about 60 shillings per week, which amounted to approximately £150 per annum. A journalist or writer may expect to have made between £10 and £15 per week, and the wealthier classes were those who earned (or received an allowance) of anything over £1,000 per annum.³⁸ Women normally earned about half of this amount. A new novel cost approximately 7s/6d, and a book of verse sold between 2s/6d for a short volume or for as much as a novel, if it were a longer, collected works. Works of history or biography could cost up to four times this much or more depending

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, *The Years* (1937; rpt. London: Vintage Classics, 1992), p. 305.

³⁷ Winifred Holtby, ‘What We Read and Why We Read It’, *The Left Review*, 1: 4 (January 1953), p. 112.

³⁸ Before decimalisation of the Pound Sterling on 15 February 1971, currency in Great Britain was divided into 12 Pence (abbreviated ‘d’) per 1 Shilling (abbrev. ‘s’) and 20 shillings to one Pound (£). It is difficult to offer an equivalency to modern currency because of the alterations in the foundation of money (*i.e.* the abolition of the Gold Standard), its form (decimalization), and the practically unrestrained inflation which has occurred in the past eighty years. However, these figures offer some sense of proportion.

on the bindings which the buyer might chose for bespoke collections.³⁹ Q. D. Leavis claimed in her work *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) that the existence of ‘true literature’ would fall extinct to the ever advancing authorship of cheap literature being produced for those who could afford it, and because of her perceived decline in writing, she offered a three-tiered stratification of the literary market: *i.e.*, the ‘highbrow’, the ‘middlebrow’, and the ‘lowbrow’ reading publics.⁴⁰ Chris Baldick estimates in the nineteen-thirties, the division of the British population into these groups of ‘reading publics’ was something like sixty-thousand, two-million, and upwards of ten-million, respectively, yet this approximation only takes into account book sales, not the transmission of literature through the radio, cinema or books which people might have encountered through education or lending libraries. A parody of this stratification of the reading public is presented in George Orwell’s *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). The novel opens with Gordon Comstock, who works as a shop clerk in Mr McKechnie's bookshop. The empty, dark front room is described as smelling of dust and it contained decaying books that were ‘most un-saleable’.⁴¹ The next room along in the shop, however, contained the lending library, which was busy with customers. It was ‘one of those “twopenny non-deposit” libraries beloved of book-pinchers’. One gathers what was being read by customers at the time through the account of the layout of the books on the shelves in the shop. The narrator says that ‘upwards and downwards they were graded, from clean and expensive at eye-level to cheap and dingy at top and bottom. [...] Down in the bottom shelves the “classics”, the extinct monsters of the Victorian age, were quietly rotting [...] in the top shelves, almost out of sight, slept the pudgy biographies of dukes’.⁴² Leavis blamed the mouldering of ‘the classics’ on forgotten, dusty bookshelves on mass-circulation newspapers, and on ‘middlebrow’ journalistic authors such as Arnold Bennett, who had promoted second-rate pseudo-literature at the expense of the more challenging works

³⁹ Chris Baldick, *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 10: The Modern Movement, 1910-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 18.

⁴⁰ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1938), p. 23.

⁴¹ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* in *George Orwell: Three Novels* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011), p. 257.

⁴² *Ibid.*

of the very best writers'.⁴³ Bennett, however, refused to see middlebrow literature and journalism as an evil, or indeed a threat to 'true' literary endeavour and consumption. He wrote in his memoirs that 'on the contrary, in no previous age have so large a proportion of the populace shown such discrimination among books, such intelligent interest in good books, as obtains to-day'.⁴⁴

Similarly, Holtby was eager to distance her own work from both the literary avant-garde and the 'wish-fulfilment' of cheaper forms of literature such as detective novels and romances. Her view was that the 'low-brow' was nothing more than a form of 'emotional indulgence' and that 'high-brow' fiction was difficult and obscure. Holtby was sceptical that authors such as Woolf would ever be able to 'command the allegiance of a wide contemporary public'.⁴⁵ Indeed, the sort of 'high-brow' snobbery that she was attempting to avoid is illustrated by Woolf's reaction to Holtby's writing. Woolf said of Holtby in a letter that she is clearly 'the daughter of a Yorkshire farmer and learnt to read, I'm told, while minding the pigs'.⁴⁶ By contrast, Holtby thought that the class of novel into which her work fell could command a wide readership and that within them were the social and ethical values which 'constructed the social and ethical values of the middle-classes'.⁴⁷ In exploiting this potential in 'middlebrow' fiction, Holtby attempted to instruct and correct her readers. 'Middle-brow' fiction is able to lie in a comfortable middle-ground, *viz.* without trying to be ground-breaking, the writing can be accessible, but without attempting merely to entertain, it can enlighten readers about the world in which they live and of the ways in which it might be changed. In *Winifred Holtby: "A Woman In Her Time"*, Catharine Clay discusses the ways in which Holtby used her position with *Time and Tide* to defend an 'educational ideal' of the press. Clay argues that Holtby maintained a belief in the

⁴³ Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Arnold Bennett, *The Evening Standard Years, "Books and Persons" 1926-1931* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), p. 333.

⁴⁵ Holtby, *Virginia Woolf*, pp. 201-202.

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf, *Letters of Virginia Woolf, vol. 5*, eds. Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 114.

⁴⁷ Holtby, 'What we read', p. 112.

ability of the press to exercise political and reformative power.⁴⁸ The conviction behind Holtby's journalism challenges the assumption that only financial necessity could drive her to work as a journalist, rather than focus solely on her fictional writing, and the next section of this chapter turns to the topic of her work as a journalist.

⁴⁸ Catharine Clay, 'Winifred Holtby, Journalist: Rehabilitating Journalism In the Modernist Ferment' in *Winifred Holtby, "A Woman In Her Time": Critical Essays*, ed. Lisa Regan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars' Publishing, 2010), p. 66.

II. NOT MAN, NOT WOMAN: THE PHILOSOPHY OF 'OLD FEMINISM'

If Winifred Holtby had a watchword that united the various intellectual endeavours of her careers as a journalist, activist, and author, it was that 'we are members one of another'. This is a phrase which echoes the message found in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, where St Paul asks that those who are 'renewed' in Christ put off lying and speak truth with their neighbours, 'for we are members one of another'.⁴⁹ It is a sentiment imbued with a New Testament understanding of the community of the church, for it also evokes the egalitarian lesson of the Epistle to the Galatians which states, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bound nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'.⁵⁰ Holtby, however, takes this idea beyond its Biblical resonances. After leaving Oxford she was disenchanted with the Christian Church and its teachings, viewing the Bible as a possible moral framework rather than divinely inspired, yet she carried the vision of corporate responsibility forth as a standard from behind which her political and social criticisms advanced. Holtby's first article for *Time and Tide*, and only her second ever published piece of journalism, 'The Human Factor' (1924), argues against the decision of the London County Council to reduce teaching staff at schools.⁵¹ She took this stance because of her visits to various schools in Bethnal Green and the understanding afterwards that the redistribution of head teachers to regular classroom duties would undoubtedly cause the neglect of students from poorer families.⁵² Episodes of sympathetic social awareness similar to this are likely to have found their origins in her childhood through watching her father manage the family farm. David Holtby employed eight to ten workers at any given time, and the interactions between her family and theirs—in fact, she saw

⁴⁹ Ephesians, 4.25, KJV. There is a long-documented theological debate over the authorship of the New Testament 'Pauline' epistles; however, I quote St Paul here as the traditionally accepted source.

⁵⁰ Galatians 3.28, KJV. This is repeated and elaborated upon in 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31.

⁵¹ Catherine Clay, *British Woman Writers 1914-1945: Professional Work and Friendship* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), p. 51.

⁵² Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, p. 142.

‘Old Shep’ and others as an extension of her family and kept up a correspondence with them even after leaving for school—taught her a ‘gratitude and even guilt’ at her own relatively privileged upbringing. It is not difficult to connect these formative experiences of working-class life to her first novel *Anderby Wold* (1923), where she parodies a ‘hierarchical and paternalist system’ laden with duty, responsibility, and demands of loyalty.⁵³ Later, the Holly family in *South Riding*, who live in a shanty-town known as ‘the shacks’, illustrate Holtby’s heightened sensitivity to deprivation during the depression years.⁵⁴ When the Holly family are encountered through the perspective of Mrs Mitchell, who also lives in the Shacks but was ‘staunchly middle-class’ until ‘a contraction in the European market’ cost her husband his job, Mrs Holly is accused of ‘fraternising’ with the other occupants of the Shacks and is described in animalistic terms as a ‘hen clucking over a brood of ducklings’.⁵⁵ However, later in the novel Lydia Holly is championed as the most promising student at the girl’s high school, and likewise, her father, though unemployed and seen as ‘furtive’ by his neighbours, is depicted as well-read enough to quote Longfellow’s poetry at length.⁵⁶

With an upbringing that allowed a sympathetic view of ‘others’, and as a university-educated woman, determined to pursue a career in writing and lecturing, it was unsurprising that Holtby would align herself with a feminist philosophy concerned with the rights of women as workers and as integrated citizens, and that this would be of the ‘equal rights variety’ that the weekly review, *Time and Tide*, and its parallel organisation the Six-Point Group, promoted.⁵⁷ *Time and Tide* was first published on 14 May 1920 with a format that remained largely unchanged for a decade. Issues began with a ‘Review of the Week’ covering important political and public events, followed by editorial pieces and other leading articles, book reviews, a theatre, cinema, or gardening piece, a poem or short play, and letters to the editor. The political matters typically

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁵⁴ Regan, *Holtby’s Social Vision*, p. 10.

⁵⁵ Holtby, *SR*, 239.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁷ Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, p. 131.

covered were ‘Ireland, the League of Nations, suffrage, equal pay, the marriage bar, and social concerns like alcoholism and housing’.⁵⁸ However, the journal was, founded first-and-foremost as a feminist magazine and, as such, took a particular stance on feminist issues from the outset. Its first editorial, written by Lady Rhondda, proclaimed that it was an independent paper which aimed to ‘treat men and women as equally part of the great human family, working side by side ultimately for the same great objects by ways equally valuable, equally interesting; a paper which is in fact concerned neither specially with men nor specially with women, but with human beings’.⁵⁹ Holtby was thoroughly acquainted with Lady Rhondda’s views and incorporated them into her writing. In fact, Holtby names Rhondda in *South Riding* when Sarah Burton assigns her autobiography, *This Was My World*, as holiday reading to her students.⁶⁰

Margaret Haig Mackworth neé Thomas, Viscountess Rhondda, was born in London on 12 June 1883, the only child to David Alfred Thomas and the first Viscountess Rhondda (1856-1918), a prominent suffragette. She was educated at Notting Hill School for Girls, then Somerville College, Oxford (an educational step taken first-and-foremost in order to escape the ordeal of the London season). However, she left Oxford after less than a year to marry Humphrey Mackworth, later Sir Humphrey, seventh Baronet of Caerleon. Her own active participation in the suffrage movement began in the year of her marriage, with the so-called Mass Meeting in Hyde Park on 21 July 1908. Shortly afterwards, she joined the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), later recalling that:

for me and for many other young women like me, militant suffrage was the very salt of life. The knowledge of it had come like a draught of fresh air into our padded stifled lives. It gave us release of energy, it gave us that sense of being some use in the scheme of things, without which no human being can live at peace.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 136.

⁵⁹ Lady Rhondda, Editorial, *Time and Tide*, 14 May 1920 (HHC, L WH/2/2.23).

⁶⁰ Holtby, *SR*, p. 161.

⁶¹ The Viscountess Rhondda, Margaret Haig Mackworth, *This Was My World* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1933), p. 120.

However, Lady Rhondda's most important venture into feminist politics, which was to bring her into public prominence, was her entrance into her father's business as a cross between 'a highly confidential secretary and a right hand man'.⁶² Upon the death of her father, she was named the director of the twenty-eight companies he left behind and inherited a sizable fortune. She increasingly took up her feminist activism and attracted a great deal of publicity from her campaign to take her seat in the House of Lords as a peeress in her own right. Her form of feminist activism, named later in the 1920s as 'Old Feminism' (a branch of the cause which I shall discuss more fully below), was to inform Winifred Holtby's views immensely as she wrote for, and later served as a director, for *Time and Tide*, the feminist magazine run by Lady Rhondda.

The influence of Lady Rhondda and *Time and Tide* is not lost on Holtby's biographers. Brittain wrote that Holtby brought 'the jewels of her pictorial imagination to adorn her main thesis that the history of woman is not the record of her relationship to man, but the story of her place in the universe', a statement which is strikingly similar to Lady Rhondda's statement in the editorial quoted above. Brittain adds that Holtby believed that 'since the common humanity of man and woman is far more important than their sexual differences, the only adequate history of women would be a history of mankind and its adventures upon a changing globe'.⁶³ This viewpoint is reinforced by various articles written by Holtby. Her commitment to the feminist cause was made clear in a 1926 public defence of 'Old Feminism' or equality feminism published in *Time and Tide* as a reply to an article commending the so-called 'New Feminism' headed by Eleanor Rathbone, which realigned the priorities of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) away from egalitarian calls for equal work for equal pay to more specifically woman-centred policies of birth control, family endowment, and protective

⁶² Ibid., 217.

⁶³ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 382.

legislation.⁶⁴ With its single focus and stress on cooperation rather than division between the sexes, Holtby justified the continued efforts of ‘Equality First’ feminists like herself:

The Old Feminists have also looked ahead, beyond the achievement of the reforms for which they are now working. They also have their vision of society, a society in which sex-differentiation concerns those things alone by which the physical laws of nature it must govern, a society in which men and women work together for the good of all mankind; a society in which there is no respect of persons, either male or female, but a supreme regard for the importance of the human being.⁶⁵

Furthermore, in a letter to the *Yorkshire Post*, later reprinted in *Time and Tide*, Holtby stated in simple terms the difference she perceived between the two feminist movements: ‘The New Feminism emphasises the importance of “the woman’s point of view”, the Old Feminism believes in the primary importance of the human being’.⁶⁶ Holtby felt that if the feminist cause were to succeed, it would ideally disappear after its goals were met. She boldly wrote that ‘personally, I am a Feminist [...] because I dislike everything that feminism implies [...] I want to be about the work in which my real interests lie [...] But while [...] injustice is done and opportunity denied to the great majority of women, I shall have to be a feminist’.⁶⁷

In her recent book *Winifred Holtby’s Social Vision*, Lisa Regan situates Holtby’s corporate social views within the tradition of nineteenth-century biologist, philosopher, and political theorist Herbert Spencer’s concept of unity and interconnection, which suggested an understanding of a community as an organic body. In the opening chapter of Spencer’s *The Principles of Sociology* (1876), he discussed the kinds of co-operation found in ‘social insects’. These are insects, such as ants, that have biologically conditioned roles to play in the life of the colony. Within these communities, ‘between the individual organization of the hive-bee’ and the organization of the hive as an ‘orderly aggregate of individuals with a regularly-formed

⁶⁴ Regan, *Holtby’s Social Vision*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁵ Winifred Holtby, ‘Feminism Divided’, *Time and Tide*, 8 August 1924, in *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby*, eds. Paul Berry and Alan Bishop (London: Virago, 1985) p. 49.

⁶⁶ *Time and Tide*, 6 August 1926.

⁶⁷ Winifred Holtby, ‘Feminism Divided’, *Time and Tide*, 1926.

habitation', there exists a fixed and imperative connection.⁶⁸ He breaks this relationship down by first considering the behaviour of a single inanimate object, one which depends on the 'co-operation between its own forces and the forces to which it is exposed'. The example he used was of a boy playing with marbles. The marbles strike one another and disperse based on the forces of inertia, impact, and friction, but they remain solid, distinct forms because of their 'individual properties'. A facile jump is made by Spencer to apply this same theory to humans, with the generally satisfactory statement that 'be it rudimentary or be it advanced, every society displays phenomena that are ascribable to the characters of its units and to the conditions under which they exist'.⁶⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that Holtby's reading was ever particularly scientific, unlike, say, that of Aldous Huxley who obsessively read and re-read his grandfather's texts in support of evolutionary theory, yet this corporate view of humanity as somehow bolstered by nineteenth-century scientific advances provided an empirical, if tenuous, groundwork for arguments about social reform in the early twentieth century.

Likewise, in her review of Olive Schreiner's novel *From Man to Man, or Perhaps So*, Holtby praises the work for its particularly 'modern' insistence on connection and interdependence. Though left unfinished, the work's philosophizing on human relations gave Holtby the battle-cry and title of her review, 'Bring up your Rears!'. This is taken from Rebekah's theoretical reflections on progress and human relations in the novel, at the moment when she questions whether:

the true cry of permanent human advance must always be 'Bring up your rears! Bring up your rears'? Head and heart can ultimately move no farther than the feet can carry them. As soon as a combination of men acquires permanence, there begin actions and reactions between the community and each member of it, such that either affects the other in nature'. Permanent human advance must be united advance!⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1989), p. 39.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Olive Schreiner, *From Man to Man, or Perhaps Only*, intro. P. Foot (London: Virago, 1926), pp. 191-192.

In her review, she states with conviction that ‘the unity of creation’, is the realisation that ‘we are all members of one another, and where, consequently, no individual can attain to full perfection until his brethren share his opportunities’.⁷¹ Some years later, in a Dickensian vein, one of the characters of her novel *Poor Caroline* (1931), Father Mortimer, considers the accidental connections of life in a city, that ‘great tapestry’ that ties people together in unforeseen ways:

“We are so oddly interrelated”, he thought. “We are members one of another. An inescapable communion. We cannot avoid incurring responsibility for our brethren”. With half comical dismay, he contemplated the glib complacency with which good Churchmen referred to this intricacy of mutual relationship as though it were not one of the most alarming qualities of the universe.⁷²

Such interrelatedness was inevitably to frustrate Holtby, for if she was aware of the effect that a single agent’s decisions can have on the ‘hive’, then the awareness that many separate individuals, all with an individual and often-clashing will, would be doubly disheartening when longing for corporate ‘advance’. In a letter to ‘Rosalind’, Holtby lamented the seemingly infinite forces battling for their own form of social advance:

England’s in a horrid mess [...] We’re all running after the moon. Some of us want to get rich by the unaided efforts of others; others want to have their rights—only they don’t know what they are, but they intend to have ‘em. Others insist that the panacea for every evil is that the government should pay for it [...] And at Oxford and other places where they still cherish ideals of Utopia, we weep because we can’t make archangels out of men all in a hurry.⁷³

The metaphoric relation of England to an organic body continues when Holtby states in evolutionarily aware terms that the utopian dreamers forget that ‘it’s taken a good many thousands of years to make a man out of a monkey’. A panacea, a ‘cure-all’, or the hope that Lloyd George, the head of the ‘body’, might suddenly discover a ‘gold mine in the garden of No. 10’, are hopeless because they abdicate the responsibility of collectively sustained efforts in social

⁷¹ Winifred Holtby, ‘Bring Up Your Rears!’, *Time and Tide*, 1926, n.p.

⁷² Winifred Holtby, *Poor Caroline* (1931; rpt. London: Virago, 2011) p. 137.

⁷³ Holtby, *Letters To a Friend*, pp. 16-17.

reform, preferring instead to belay these hopes on a gamble for a mystical and unlikely cure. However, where Holtby diverged sharply from any association with Spencer's philosophy was with her identification and sympathy with such visionaries. She says '*we* weep' at Oxford, not 'they', and in doing so, she counts herself as one whose frustrations are found in the inability of man to 'sprout wings'. Holtby is not a Social Darwinist to the extent that she wrote about the problems facing England in her time with a serene, scientific detachment. To some extent, she naïvely trusts in the faculties of man for their own betterment, or to 'bring up the rear'.

Instead, those who concern Holtby whole-heartedly are people who do not wish to sympathise with those who have caused, or who are victims of, the 'horrid mess' and instead wish to fight in order to endorse change: 'I am terrified of the so-called patriotic, religious anti-socialist, who is putting onto the heads of the workers the idea that the middle classes will fight—literally fight—against any change, and thus make them despair of the constitutional progress which is what nearly all of them want. To see them, like silly Samsons, trying to bring down the pillars and fall on to their own heads, is rather bitter'.⁷⁴ Holtby's argumentative writing is often able to state more what it is against than what it is for, but this philosophy was not complacent. She desires a revolution of mind-set rather than one of marches, protests, and demands, and thought these might be related, the former is a more fundamental, lasting change than the latter. The introduction which accompanied a weekly feature by Holtby in 'The Schoolmistress' provides an example of the market-value of her name: 'week by week the famous author of *Poor Caroline*, *The Land of Green Ginger*, *The Crowded Street*, and *Anderby Wold* will discuss in intimate fashion the various interests enjoyed by the cultured modern woman. To read Winifred Holtby's articles is to keep up-to-date'.⁷⁵ Though 'social problems must be represented before they can be solved', and moreover that '*social reform depends on print*', such a view does not suggest how reform moves past 'representation'. Holtby argues that this can only be achieved

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Anonymous press cutting from *The Schoolmistress*, 25 June 1931 (HHC, L WH/2/2.21).

through education and a change in mind-sets. This is dramatized in Sarah Burton's educational approach in *South Riding*, 'Sarah believed in action. She believed in fighting. She had unlimited confidence in the power of the human intelligence and will to achieve order, happiness, health, and wisdom'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, she saw it as her business 'to equip the young women entrusted to her by a still inadequately enlightened State for their part in that achievement. She wished to prepare their minds, to train their bodies, and to inoculate their spirits with some of her own courage, optimism and unstaled [*sic.*] delight. She knew how to teach; she knew how to awaken interest'.⁷⁷ These means by which to initiate social change, and the difficulties in doing so during the Great Depression are discussed below.

⁷⁶ Hotlby, *JR*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

III. 'EUROPE'S IN A HOLE, MILLIONS ON THE DOLE' — THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In March of 1933, Mr A. E. Caswallon-Evans, a worker in an engineering tool-shop in Luton, wrote to Winifred Holtby in response to a recent article she had published entitled 'Novelists Should Not Be Politicians'.⁷⁸ It was not uncommon for Holtby to receive letters from well-wishers, or indeed people who sought her help, because of her reputation as a philanthropist, and both Marion Shaw and Vera Brittain recall the great deal of time spent by Holtby responding to the correspondence which she received. However, in this instance, Evans was writing not to solicit help but to engage with Holtby's views in this article. He said that he and his co-workers in the factory would hold lunchtime 'tear-ups' during which they would discuss the reading which they circulated amongst themselves.⁷⁹ They had decided in the meeting of the day on which he wrote that her hypothesis was wrong, saying that 'authors, even novelists, are much more respected than politicians', and that in their opinion, the best news article which had appeared in news recently was from A. A. Milne. Furthermore, he offered the example that H. G. Wells was the author of many stories but that he had also published non-fiction tracts such as *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* (1931), which they had also recently read.⁸⁰ These hitherto unpublished letters by Caswallon-Evans are a good example of the type of interaction Holtby had with her reading public. Caswallon-Evans claims that the working classes were underestimated and disregarded intellectually, and quips that he finds it humorous that G. D. H. Cole's book *An Intelligent Man's Guide Through World Chaos* was read and understood by those who work in his factory, though they would not be considered 'intelligent men'. He wrote, 'sometimes I think you people underrate our intelligence, why the chap working the lathe next to

⁷⁸ Although Caswallon-Evans references this essay by name in his letter, there is no record in *Winifred Holtby: A Concise and Selected Bibliography* nor in any of the major biographies on Holtby to this essay. There is a possibility that this was, instead, the title of a speech that Holtby delivered, but this is unknown.

⁷⁹ Letter from A. E. Caswallon-Evans to WH, 14 March 1933 (HHC, L WH/5/5.19/06/01c).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

me is reading Mrs Woolf's *The Waves*'—and likes it!', though he adds that he and his co-workers must take care that their employers do not know what type of literature they are reading for fear of losing their jobs.⁸¹ His letters go on for some months, and there must have been a fair amount of correspondence between the two. Unfortunately the responses that Holtby wrote to his letters are lost. In the final letter between the two, Caswallon-Evans leaves her with a challenge, writing: 'but are the most prominent writers making the most of their opportunity? We know many of them detest the present social abominations, yet they seem to write on subjects that interest limited circles [...] we know Mr A. A. Milne's views through an anti-war letter to the 'News Chronicle', yet Christopher Robbin still goes bobbin' along. And so on. We believe most writers hate the present mad muddle. If each, simultaneously, published a book about it, irrespective of their previous work—a mass attack—what would be the effect?' He mentions that 'more reading is done now than ever before' even though they cannot all afford to buy books and have adopted a system of 'communal buying' which they then circulate.⁸² This section will consider the comparison and overlap between fictional work and 'political writing', with specific reference to the commonalities between Holtby's views on the economic crisis alongside G. D. H. Cole's *The Intelligent Man's Guide Through World Chaos* and her views on education and H. G. Well's proposition for 'a new Education' in *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*.

Any discussion of the possibilities of social progress in the nineteen-thirties cannot be had without reference to the pall cast over Great Britain and the rest of the capitalist world by the Great Depression, which began in the United States of America with the Stock Market crash on 24 October 1929.⁸³ As a result of the crash, international trade plummeted, unemployment rose, and income and prices dropped. An explanation for the cause of the Great Depression was that the capitalist system of economics was inherently doomed to failure because of its own

⁸¹ Letter from Caswallon-Evans to WH, 17 March 1933 (HHC, L WH/5/5.19/05/01k).

⁸² Letter from Caswallon-Evans to WH, 14 October 1934 (HHC, L WH/5/5.19/06/01d).

⁸³ While the decline in market value began on 24 October 1929, the date remembered as 'Black Tuesday', generally considered the 'crash' that began the Great Depression, was 29 October 1929.

propensity to create economic crisis and sustain socio-economic difference. Increasingly, intellectuals believed that some change was needed in the economic organisation of the country, and people, in general, felt that economists had an obligation to explain, however inadequately, what had caused the crash and to clarify how the British economy was to survive what was widely perceived to be the end of an economic age.⁸⁴ A loss of confidence in the market to self-regulate with minimal government intervention in a liberal model of economics led to the feeling that the market could no longer function as it had before 1914. The *laissez-faire* economic model, that is, a system with minimal government regulation and confidence in individual enterprise, lost credibility as the system best suited to benefit the country at large. Instead, after the example of the great amount of government effort in mobilising the war effort, there emerged an opportunity, and in fact the need, for 'national economic planning'. Many economists in the inter-war years believed that the depression was only temporary and a product of a period after the Great War in which the economy was transitioning to a time of normal market trading.⁸⁵ However, others thought that this was the sign of the end of the free market and an example of why capitalism was flawed and ethically unacceptable for those who were worst affected. G. D. H. Cole was one of these latter sceptics.

His book *The Intelligent Man's Guide Through World Chaos* (1932) begins by offering in simple terms an explanation of the economic situation, which exemplified 'the greatest depression which the capitalist world has ever experienced'.⁸⁶ He goes on to say that there was hope after the war that trade could return to pre-war levels but that 'the world no longer looks forward with confidence to a prosperity that will come to it of its own accord'.⁸⁷ In other words, he believed that it was an imperative for governments to intervene and regulate the market. The book then delineates the consequences of the war in financial terms. Chiefly, for Britain, it was

⁸⁴ Richard Overby, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), p. 70.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁸⁶ G. D. H. Cole, *The Intelligent Man's Guide Through World Chaos* (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1932), p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the war debt which loomed over the past decade of economic life. The preface of the work states that it is meant to be for any ‘intelligent’ man who would like to learn more about the economy. His understanding of who such an ‘intelligent man’ might be is rather more fluid than if he said that they must be part of the intelligentsia (*viz.* a fellow of a university college like himself) or, more generally, a ‘man of letters’. Instead, he intended the book as a guide to anyone who was literate and has some interest in the economy. Cole, accordingly, turned to economic history and conducts a lesson in elementary aspects of the subject, covering topics such as: ‘What is money?’, ‘The Gold Standard’, ‘How Banks Work (both in Britain and Abroad)’, ‘Employment’, ‘Foreign Trade’, ‘Taxation’, and the ‘Stock Market’. It is only after these four-hundred-odd pages of ‘introductory’ material, that the book turns to Cole’s own thesis about ‘Alternatives to Capitalism’, which attempts to fulfil the title’s promise of being a ‘guide through world chaos’. He suggests in this chapter that ‘economic reform necessarily means social reform’.⁸⁸ In other words, one must consider the social tradition of Capitalism when considering its alternatives because it is more difficult to change a society’s social norms than it is to change their banking habits. G. D. H. Cole confessed in an essay in the late 1930s that economists were too enveloped by ‘the clouds of “pure theory”’ to listen to him.⁸⁹ In the section of his book on the history of socialism in Great Britain, he notes that because of the relative stability of the capitalist system in the country throughout the nineteenth-century, the development of socialist alternatives into a movement in England was ‘not so much a revolt as that of logical development’.⁹⁰ As a result of a measured development of socialist aims through drawing-room meetings of societies such as the Fabians, proponents of alternate economic models were perfunctory and ‘far more confident in [their] denunciations of the existing order than in its adumbrations of the future’, existing on the fringes of government as ‘voices crying in the

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 581.

⁸⁹ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 75.

⁹⁰ Cole, *The Intelligent Man’s Guide Through World Chaos*, p. 609.

wilderness'.⁹¹ Well-reasoned arguments were not, Cole argued, enough to sway hearts and minds, whereas a narrative for social change might prove more affective.

In 1936, Virginia Woolf wrote an article entitled 'Why Art Today Follows Politics' for the *Daily Worker*. Her task, as she saw it, was to explain 'why it is that the artist at present is interested, actively and genuinely, in politics', for she believed that a politicisation of literature was clearly evident at the time, saying that in 'every publisher's list almost every book that is now issued, brings proof of the fact [that] the novelist turns from the private lives of his characters to their social surroundings and their political opinions'.⁹² Although she expressed the opinion that it is an author's duty to attend to the problems which beset a society when it's in chaos, she thought it troublesome that 'the historian today is writing not about Greece and Rome in the past, but about Germany and Spain in the present [...] the poet introduces communism and fascism into lyrics'.⁹³ This essay was primarily a response to the Spanish Civil War and the way in which this conflict emphasised the possibility of war elsewhere in Europe, yet her argument is equally applicable to the economic crisis of the nineteen thirties. One of the politically fictional reactions to the crisis was the 'morality tale' *Love on the Dole* (1933) by Walter Greenwood. His dramatised the absurdities of a capitalistic system which could condemn millions of people to the cyclical nature of life-long indentured work in a factory that sustained poverty. At the age of 29, Greenwood lost his job as a clerk in a textile factory in Salford, Lancashire, and soon after began writing a novel about the realities of life in a declining British economy. Jonathan Cape published the book to immediate success. It was reprinted twice in July 1933 and again later that year, with two further reprints in 1934. Richard Overby records how in 1935 a cheap edition was issued priced at 2/- instead of the original price of 7/6d in order to reach a wider market, and in

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 651, 649.

⁹² Virginia Woolf, *The Crowded Dance of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, vol. 2, ed. Rachel Bowlby (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 133.

⁹³ Ibid.

total, between 1933 and 1940, the book sold nearly 50,000 copies.⁹⁴ In an interview in 1933, shortly after the publication of *Love on the Dole*, Greenwood explained that the purpose of his book was to expose ‘the tragedy of a lost generation’.⁹⁵ It is sign of the scale of economic crisis that Greenwood used this phrase, ‘a lost generation’, normally reserved to describe those who died in the Great War, to label those who were affected by the depression. One reviewer of the novel applauded the lack of ‘chronic melancholy’ of the Bloomsbury set in Greenwood’s work, saying that ‘these Lancashire folk wear a rue with a difference of which your Bloomsbury novelist knows nothing’.⁹⁶ The review recognised an earthiness and a refreshing honesty in his writing that resulted in its wide appeal and consolatory ability in the midst of crisis in contrast to the perceived detachment of ‘highbrow’ authors.

Love on the Dole is a work of stark realism which contains moments of political discourse but is untouched by outright propaganda. Its full title is *Love On the Dole: A Tale of the Two Cities*. One of these cities was meant to be in the district of Salford, Lancashire where Greenwood lived, but it is never expressly located. The central characters of the novel are the Hardcastle family, a family of ‘ordinary’ working-class parents who are unemployed and rely upon the income of their children to support them. The son, Harry, loses his job at Marlowe’s engineering works shortly after his long-time girlfriend Helen becomes pregnant. Sally, the daughter, works at a local textile mill and falls in love with Larry Meath, a local Labour Party activist, but Larry dies as a result of an orchestrated police attack on a crowd of protestors. The description of the lives of these characters is not tinted with a rosy-hue, and the dialogue is written in a strong, and occasionally opaque, Lancashire dialect. After the introduction of the Means Test, Harry is denied the Dole which suggests that he has the ability to work without taking account of the fact that there are no jobs available for him in the local district. A sympathetic reviewer remarked

⁹⁴ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 71: from Reading University, Special Collections, Jonathan Cape archive, Ms 2446. See too S. Constantine, “‘Love on the Dole’ and its Reception in the 1930s”, *Literature and History*, 8 (1982), p. 233, who gives different dates; price details in WPG 3/1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72. From Salford University, Greenwood papers, WPG 3/1, review in *John O’ London*, 16 Feb. 1935.

that the novel had a quality ‘curiously like Dostoevsky’, with the difference that in Dostoevsky it is human failings that doom the characters where in *Love on the Dole* it is the faceless ‘economic set-up’, more devastating and terrifying: ‘here, from the first, we have no hope’.⁹⁷ Though never self-pitying, the novel brought readers to a direct awareness of the ‘tragic sense of helplessness’ which faced people in the midst of economic depression.

In the novel, the pawnshop is an example of the cyclical financial desperation that affected a typical working-class family. At the beginning of a week, wives and mothers would queue up to pawn bedclothes, suits, coats, babies’ clothing, or any other household valuables which could be dispensed with for a week’s time. The pawnbroker would pay an advance, and at the end of the week, when a family collected its wages, the items would be collected again for use at the weekend. Larry Meath fights openly against this oppressive cycle and is the only example of the ‘intellectual working man’ in the novel. Harry Hardcastle recalls early in the novel his first sighting of Larry,

Nearer the gates, Harry glimpsed Larry Meath reading a newspaper and leaning against the wall. Larry Meath! Harry’s heart leapt and his eyes glowed with eagerness. [...] His quality of studiousness and reserve elevated him to a plane beyond that of ordinary folk [...] if you went to the library to look at the illustrated papers or to watch the old geysers playing dominos, you sometimes saw Larry at one of the tables absorbed in some book or other that looked as dry as the desert.⁹⁸

Larry stands still and quiet amidst the rush of labourers arriving at the engineering works, where men would spend their shift among the raging din of metalworking machines, air thick with the smell of grease and oil, and an overbearing heat without respite from ventilation. The associations drawn with the library and ‘old geysers’ and books ‘dry as the desert’, a place, people, and objects which are aged and wise, ‘elevate’ Larry beyond the average inhabitant of his Lancashire town. He is different because of his proclivity to read and the knowledge instilled in

⁹⁷ Salford Uni, Greenwood papers, WPG 3/1, review by William Rollins in *New Republic*, 2 Jan. 1935.

⁹⁸ Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole* (1933; rpt. London: Vintage Classics, 1992), p. 25.

him from this activity. However, Larry Meath was not an unusually fantastical character for Greenwood to create. His intellectual activities, though he worked in a factory, serve as an example of the foundational knowledge available to the working-classes at the time, such as Caswallon-Evans and his co-workers mentioned above, and as Cole argued economic change necessitates social change, Greenwood demonstrates through Larry that knowledge is essential for activism.

Made up of two volumes totalling 924 pages, H. G. Wells's *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* was initially published in the United States in 1931, then by Heinemann in Great Britain in 1932, this work was published at a time when all three of the virtues in its title were in short supply. It was the third in a series, following *The Outline of History* (1919-1920) and *The Science of Life* (1929), which were written by Wells to illuminate the present state of affairs in the world and promote 'open conspiracy' for world government, which focused upon the avocation of a 'New History'. On the opening page, he states that the intention of the book should be 'a picture of all mankind to-day'.⁹⁹ As a result of this extraordinarily broad promise, it was unsurprising that F. R. Leavis, in a review published in *Scrutiny* in May 1932, considers the book to be about 'everything and nothing' and denigrates the 'essential triviality of a large portion of the work', saying that H. G. Wells 'is not an athletic thinker'.¹⁰⁰ However, he does make the concession that Wells 'is doing work that needs doing and that at the moment seems terribly urgent'.¹⁰¹ Wells is prescient in his understanding of the way in which, after the Great War, people began a 'serious and sustained' attempt to understand the state of the world, which resulted in a 'growing dissatisfaction with what was taught in the pre-war period'.¹⁰² The distinction between what was *taught* to children and what adults *knew* in the inter-war period was based upon experiencing the war. Pedagogical practices may not have changed because of the

⁹⁹ H. G. Wells, *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind* (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1932), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ F. R. Leavis, 'Review of *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*', H. G. Wells: *The Critical Heritage*, ed. John Patrick Parrinder (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 315-316.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁰² Wells, *The Work, Wealth, and Happiness of Mankind*, p. 3.

war, but the outlook of those who were old enough to be involved with and understand the conflict did. Wells provides the example that,

[...] while the adult world is learning painfully but steadily that aggressive nationalism is a disastrous obsession, a vast majority of our children are still being made into just as ardent little patriots as we were made before the war. They are even drilled, put under military discipline, made to wave flags and sing militant songs, and are given history teaching of a combative, romantic and narrowing type.¹⁰³

Instead, Wells argues that the mind-set which the post-war world warrants is one of the 'history of mankind is a single whole', which will expectantly have the effect of 'political institutions advancing towards unity'.¹⁰⁴ This unabashed 'attempt to build a modern ideology' left Leavis sceptical, particularly of the way in which Wells advocates 'tirelessly on behalf of a world machine, planned and efficient, protecting and expanding human life'.¹⁰⁵ While Wells thought it was 'the duty of the civilized man to own or use the latest products of civilization', one may question the extent to which a 'world machine' might protect and expand human life and on whom would be the burden of initiating such a considerable change in society.¹⁰⁶ Wells did not place the trust of his 'New Education' in the hands of the school master, saying 'the school teacher cannot outrun public opinion, if he does so, he loses his job, and there is an end to the matter. The first battles for the New Education of our new world must be fought in the adult mind'.¹⁰⁷ In pragmatic terms, this statement understood the implications of diverging too radically from a curriculum. A teacher may be in danger of losing their job if they were to instruct based solely upon their own convictions, but this view ignores the impact of distinct and separate conditions, such as differences in pedagogical practice. Conversely, Holtby viewed schools, occupied by individual teachers and students, and their individual convictions, as paramount to the dissemination of progressive movements.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 6; and Leavis, 'Review', p. 316.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

When Holtby made a tour of South Africa in 1925-1926, her friend Jean McWilliams asked her to speak at the prize-giving day at Pretoria High School. Holtby was both honoured and embarrassed over this request and wrote home to her mother in a typically self-deprecating way to ask her not to mind the newspapers from South Africa that unanimously praised her appearance, saying that ‘little donkeys become big lions here’.¹⁰⁸ In her speech, which was described as ‘one of the finest ever delivered in Pretoria’, she argued that one could judge a country by its schools, saying,

In this century we are acquiring a truer knowledge of the value of education in the life of the state. We are just beginning to see that though the subjugation of nature lies with the scientist, the civilisation of man lies with the teacher, and in this day of young restless nations, each demanding the recognition of mankind, we may estimate their standard of culture by the value they place upon their education.¹⁰⁹

Holtby focuses upon the teaching of history in her speech to the school at Pretoria as the particular form of teaching that may aide a new generation and avoid the chance of avoiding future war and also how education was able to shape those ‘young restless nations’, former colonies forging new identities. The ‘civilisation of man’ was dependent, in her view, upon creating a mind-set of communal responsibility through understanding the value of the individual. When Holtby wrote a book review for *Memoirs of the Unemployed* entitled ‘Unemployed in 1934’, she was committed to illuminating the importance of the accounts it contained. The book comprised stories from twenty-five unemployed men and women from around the country and attempted to illustrate what it ‘actually feels like’ to be a skilled artisan, an ex-officer, a village carpenter, or a South Wales miner out of work.¹¹⁰ Holtby was particularly engaged in creating empathy for those who were out of work, saying ‘these are real people, human and decent and aware’.¹¹¹ Likewise, in a review of *From Man to Man* by Oliver Schreiner, which was discussed

¹⁰⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Friendship*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹¹⁰ Winifred Holtby, ‘Unemployed in 1934’, *Testament of a Generation*, p. 169.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

briefly above, Holtby suggested that the mind-set of the country was beginning to change, and argued that ‘the social theory implied in her watch-word “Bring up your rears!”’ was increasingly able to ‘cut across’ the ‘complacent philosophy of the “survival of the fittest” which dominated the great and prosperous Victorians’.¹¹² In other words, she believed that ‘while half humanity, whether of the “inferior” sex or the “inferior” race, is deprived of opportunity for development, it endangers the whole progress of civilisation; for it is the tragedy of the dispossessed, not only themselves to suffer, but also that they shall imperil the fortunate’.¹¹³ Together, these philosophies were manifest in her final novel, *South Riding*.

¹¹² Winifred Holtby, ‘Bring Up Your Rears!’, *Testament of a Generation*, p. 199.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

IV. *SOUTH RIDING*: A DRAMA OF ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The announcements circulated about the publication of *South Riding* in 1936 were invariably marked with deep remorse over the recent death of the novel's author. *The Times* lamented that 'a spirit so wise and compassionate' as Winifred Holtby's should have 'ceased to pass on to the world gifts which it badly needs', and appraisingly, if vaguely, noted that her work was full of 'spiritual things that are imperishable'.¹¹⁴ *The Yorkshire Telegraph & Star* was equally mournful that one of 'Yorkshire's own' should have died at such a young age, and acknowledged that *South Riding* struck 'a new vein in fiction' which showed that the 'apparently humdrum' proceedings of local government could be the stuff of romance and tragedy.¹¹⁵ *The New Statesman and Nation* also considered the literary merits of the novel but thought instead that it was a courageously atavistic 'attempt to bring the novel back into effective contact with daily life and current problems', reminding the reviewer of Victorian novels through its depiction of the 'texture of ordinary life'.¹¹⁶ By making this connection, the *New Statesman* critic may have been thinking more specifically of a novel such as *Middlemarch* or *North and South*. *South Riding* is a similarly complex text with a large cast of characters, and possessing of the same highly-wrought realism of the mid-nineteenth century serial novel with a sprawling web of interconnectedness, to display the life of an entire community. The complex nature of the workings of local government, particularly the way in which something as seemingly benign as the placement of a new road could alter the lives of those living in the district, was something Holtby considered 'part of the unseen pattern of the English landscape'.¹¹⁷ *South Riding* represents an attempt to trace that pattern. The novel is voluminous, allowing ample room for opinion and debate, on pertinent

¹¹⁴ Review of *South Riding*, *The Times*, 3 March and 7 March 1936, (HHC, L WH/3/3.14/01/02c and L WH/3/3.14/01/02g).

¹¹⁵ Review of *South Riding*, *Yorkshire Telegraph & Star*, 27 February 1936 (HHC, L WH/3/3.14/01/01f).

¹¹⁶ Review of *South Riding*, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 21 March 1936 (HHC, L WH/3/3.14/01/02o).

¹¹⁷ Holtby, *SR*, p. v.

issues at home and abroad.¹¹⁸ For most of the novel, Sarah Burton, the ostensible main character, is on the periphery and the novel instead becomes immersed in the lives of the numerous minor characters drawn from across the social strata: county councillors, each representing a distinct political type: schoolgirls of varying social class, destitute former soldiers, libidinous lay preachers, barmen, cowherds, doctors, policemen and clerks—are all connected in finely-drawn networks of obligation or influence.

South Riding's eight 'books' are arranged in the form of an agenda, each starting with short excerpts from the proceedings of a council meeting with headings such as 'Education', 'Highways and Bridges', 'Agriculture and Small-Holdings', and 'Public Health'. Besides this internal paratextual material, the novel is introduced with a pair of epigraphs: Vita Sackville-West's 'I tell the things I know, the things I knew / Before I knew them, immemorially', from 'The Land', and a Spanish proverb quoted in Viscountess Rhondda's autobiography, 'Take what you want,' said God. 'Take it—and pay for it'.¹¹⁹ The first epigraph disassociates the author from her work, or rather from the act of creating it but also signals a return to her youth in Yorkshire. To tell of things which happened, known 'before I knew them', suggests a second-hand rendering of the work to follow. This divorce between occurrence and conveyance offers up an ageless premise for the novel and furthermore suggests, in the line 'the fieldsman with unhurrying tread / Trudges with steady and unchanging pace', a sort of perpetual motion of life which is repetitive and unchanging. The latter epigraph is restated many times in the novel as an economic principle; though, as I shall discuss below, the point is made by various characters that it is not unquestionable: not all people in a society should be expected to pay their debts. Prior to these epigraphs, however, there is a short, introductory letter of 'explanation and apology' to 'Alderman Mrs. Holtby', Winifred's mother. The public inclusion of this personal address in the novel makes clear that it is prefatory in intent, informing all potential readers how the ideas for

¹¹⁸ Chris Baldick, *The Modern Movement*, p. 187.

¹¹⁹ Holtby, *SR*, pp. vi, xi.

South Riding originated and developed and describing what the book is trying to do. The letter states that it was through listening to her mother's descriptions of her work in the local government in the East Riding that Holtby became fascinated by the ways in which even the most 'academic and impersonal' resolutions considered and passed by a county council were 'daily revolutionising the lives of those men and women whom they affected'.¹²⁰ Unlike, for instance, the preface of an eighteenth-century novel such as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), in which Daniel Defoe informed the reader that book to follow was 'true', saying that he 'believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it', Holtby uses the letter to say that the 'South Riding is not the East Riding; Snaith, Astell, and Carne are not your colleagues'; that, in short, her novel was drawn from 'sources unknown to [her mother]' and is wholly imaginative in construction.¹²¹ This caveat undoubtedly served in part to protect Alice Holtby's reputation as a local politician (she was the first woman to become an Alderman on the County Council for the East Riding of Yorkshire), but it also creates a critical distance for her work. Distancing as a feature of social criticism meets a standard of objectivity; however, Michael Waltzer argues that the ideal critic is engaged, not detached.¹²² The novel is able to offer both of these qualifications. As a fictional work, it may remain detached from representation of real people or places, yet with the omniscience of third person narration may offer a 'close-up' view of a society, hovering at a critical distance but at the same time absorbed in the lives of its characters.

To return briefly to the review in the *New Statesman*, referenced above, the reviewer notes Holtby's analytical stance as one which is able to engage with contemporary societal issues in a way which creates understanding and hope for progress. The 'reactionary and the progressive' are, the reviewer says, 'given the same fair justice', concluding that readers of the novel would

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. v.

¹²¹ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (London: Norton & Co., 1994), p. 3.

¹²² Michael Waltzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Comment In The Twentieth-Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p.

find within its pages ‘reasonable hope that the progress we have made since Neanderthal times is not yet finished’.¹²³ *South Riding* represents a revival of the provincial civic realism of George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, in the way that, as Mr Brooke considers, the novel takes up the stand that ‘it is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view’.¹²⁴ The vastness of the novel allows for sympathetic portrayals of individuals with enormously differing points of view who are each struggling with historical change and small-scale local reforms. It is, therefore, difficult to offer a reading without being reductive. As a form of ‘civic fiction’—Kiplington is based on the real Withernsea in the East Riding of Yorkshire—the novel contains a study of ordinary lives within a carefully specified social environment: ‘this kind of novel could aspire to the standing of a minor epic in commemorating the special customs, dialects, festivities, trades, industries, social hierarchies, and political conflicts of its region’.¹²⁵ *South Riding* begins with ‘Young Lovell Brown’, a journalist at the beginning of his career, sitting for the first time in the press gallery of the county council chambers of the fictional South Riding of Yorkshire. It was here, he believed, that he would find the source of a myriad of social reform, ‘of sanatoria, bridges, feuds, scandals, of remedies for broken ambitions of foot-and-mouth disease, of bans on sex novels in public libraries, of educational scholarships, blighted hopes and drainage systems’.¹²⁶ The building of these examples into a list gives the effect of not only the breadth of issues with which local governments deal but also the cadence of parliamentary procedure: motion, vote, change. When there is social upheaval and crisis, the will for social reform is an imperative, and amid the economic slump and mass unemployment of the 1930s, Holtby was poised to call for social reform through her writing with the belief that ‘a novel can teach about sympathy, understanding and co-operation as well, or better, than a political tract or a deputation to the Prime Minister’.¹²⁷

¹²³ Review, *The New Statesman*.

¹²⁴ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Vintage, 2007), p. 95.

¹²⁵ Shaw, *The Clear Stream*, p. 171.

¹²⁶ Holtby, *SR*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Lady Rhondda was never wholly convinced by Holtby's imaginary writing, primarily because of what she perceived as stale characterisation. Whilst acknowledging that *Poor Caroline* (1931) was 'a more mature book [...] than anything [Holtby had] written yet', she complained that 'not one of the characters, (except Hugh in bits) begins to come alive'.¹²⁸ She advised Winifred to 'choose mediums in which accuracy in detail is not important', reminding her tartly that 'in doing character it [viz. accuracy in detail] is [important]'.¹²⁹ Holtby was concerned throughout her career with the difficulties of character development. She had previously written, while working on *The Land of Green Ginger* (1927):

It is queer how one goes on making the better acquaintance with one's characters, just as though they were people. I could no more make mine do what I want them to do, once I have created them, than I could make you do something. They seem to have a complete individual life, and I could follow every word and action and thought of theirs during a whole day if that were artistically possible. The only difficulty is to know what bits to choose and what to leave out. Novel writing is not creation, it is selection.¹³⁰

That her characters seemed alive to her, allowed for them to be realistically made manifest. In *South Riding*, her characterisation is the novel's greatest strength. Through her close and incisive observation, there is no character for whom Holtby was unable to foster sympathy. Indeed, the ability to sympathise with competing points of view and to understand the motives behind even the more nefarious dealings of some of *South Riding's* more odious characters makes this work a tutorial in understanding. Rather than representing the need for social change through argument and example, she shows, in the lives of people who battle against or advocate for change, motivations, worries, difficulties, and victories. In the review of the novel for *Time and Tide*, Ellen Wilkinson (Member of Parliament for Jarrow from 1935-1947 and later Minister of Education in Clement Atlee's government) recognised this as a strength of the novel, and wrote that,

¹²⁸ Letter from LR to WH, 27 January 1931 (HHC, L WH/5/5.17/01/01f).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Holtby, *Letters to a Friend*, 6 Oct. 1926.

There is a hot humanity under the scheming and lechery of Councilman Alfred Ezekiel Huggins. A whole sector of Northern nonconformist life shies through that horrid lovable creature. Most writers would have made Alderman Anthony Snaith, the psychological cripple, a snake. Snaith, quivering at fifty from the effects of a carnal assault in boyhood, sees kittens being born, sees the charm, efficiency, the tidiness of natural processes unmessed by human taboos, and finds deliverance. These are vignettes of human experience in *South Riding* that take one's breath away by their simple exactness.¹³¹

The two short sections of close reading to follow examine these vignettes of human experience. The first looks at the struggle between old and new manners of governing in the novel through the characters Robert Carne, the local squire of Maythorpe Hall and Joe Astell, the ideologically-driven socialist from Glasgow. The tension between the two, *i.e.* a reactionary response to any change versus the position that something must be done in order 'to justify our power', can be reduced to an economic approach.¹³² This leads into a discussion of the character Lydia Holly, who is a scholarship student at the girl's secondary school. After her mother dies, she must abandon her studies to look after her family, but Sarah Burton takes up her cause with the council as an example of someone who should not be expected to pay. The polemic political, economic, and social visions of the novel are all embodied by male figures. However, this is a distinctly feminist novel. Sarah may linger in the background while the smaller plots are played out, but the novel ends with her 'humbled, healed, softened' and aware of the strong ties between herself and her fellow man.¹³³ This insight comes from her ability to patiently watch and observe others and to sympathetically act as a part of the corporate body of her community.

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At the top of the social strata of the South Riding is Robert Carne of Maythorpe, the local squire who is adverse to any change or expense of the council to effect it. He embodies the

¹³¹ Ellen Wilkinson, 'Winifred Holtby's Last Novel', *Time and Tide*, 7 March 1936 (HHC, L WH/3/3.14/01/020).

¹³² Holtby, *SR*, p. 203.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

feudal trait of the *noblesse oblige*. He had accepted the governorship of the High School ‘not because he was specially interested in problems of female education, but because Kiplington was in the South Riding, and aristocracy dictated a rule of life, and nobility must oblige’.¹³⁴ His involvement with the governance of the area comes not from a desire for betterment or change but from a life-long devotion to the land and its people and also to some extent a impulse for the preservation of his position. Carne’s daughter Midge, like the speaker in the poem in the epigraph, ‘speaks of things before she was there’ because she has only heard second-hand of the former grandeur of their estate and plays games of make-believe to imagine what life was like in better times. Their family’s existence, and status in the South Riding, is embodied in Maythorpe Hall. Maythorpe exists on the aristocratic workings of tenancies and agricultural production, yet the estate is failing when it’s encountered in *South Riding*, existing only as a faded reminder of the pre-war order. The solidity of building serves to highlight both the transience of passing generations and the new mobilities of modern social history. Carne’s identity is tied to Maythorpe, and thus the South Riding, and his character propagates the view that people who are *of* a place are best positioned to criticise, and, if necessary, change it. While, of course, often the outsider has a different and more helpful perspective, Joe Astell is from Glasgow and is portrayed as unacquainted with anything to do with the South Riding and, therefore, less likely to sympathise effectively with the locals. He arrives and travels about with a set of ideas rather than any knowledge of the people who are there.

Mr Mitchell’s fate is an example of the consequences of an economic system which can impersonally affect someone and of how Carne is portrayed as better-suited than Astell to sympathise with the difficulties of his tenants. The Mitchells are a ‘middle-class’ family, recently married, and shortly after having bought a house and begun the payments on their leased furniture, they succumb to a ‘contraction of the European markets’ and have to live in the

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

Shacks.¹³⁵ Mr Mitchell nervously approaches a local committee in order to apply for the dole, and in this scene, Carne is more able to sympathise with Mr Mitchel because of his self-deprecating stance on financial difficulties, for not long before this scene Carne provides his brother with a loan even though he will have to sell some of his possessions to cover the cost. The scene opens thus:

A deep voice from one of the places to his right made him start violently.

“You know, Mitchell, it’s a hell of a feeling asking for money, but it can’t be as bad as the chap I met last week who went to Harrogate to borrow a hundred quid from his younger brother”.

Nothing more surprising had ever been heard at that table. If the ink-pots had spoken, the committee could hardly have been more taken aback. All faces turned to Carne.

“And did he get it”? smiled Whitelaw ready for any diversion.

“No”, drawled Carne. “Before he could even ask, his brother touched him for fifty quid, and he went home and sold some furniture an’ lent it”.

“Well, Mr Mitchell”, the chairman took up the cue, “at least we shan’t try to borrow from you, at the moment. Wait for a year or two—then you may be in our shoes and we in yours”.

They laughed—Fred Mitchell shakily; but the crisis was passed. He was a man among men, a human being—a pariah no longer.¹³⁶

Astell does not understand why it is that Carne is able to relate to the people of the South Riding. What Carne is able to demonstrate through his anecdote is a realistic example of the epithet ‘there but for the grace of God’. By birth, the trappings of Maythorpe may be his, but birth is a matter of happenstance and should not, in Holtby’s view, preclude helping one’s fellow man. While the rest of the committee were willing to sternly consider the case before them, thinking with a cool, logical air, the simple human connection of sharing in the difficulties of life makes Mr Mitchell feel as though he is no longer a ‘pariah’.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 288.

Prior to her mother's death, Lydia Holly, the scholarship winner from the Shacks, has a propensity to think in poetry, living for the snatches of beauty that landscape and, later, literature present amidst 'the squalor of huts, hen-runs and garbage'. The Shacks are scattered with broken and discarded objects: abandoned sardine tins, paper, stale bread, orange skins, empty bottles.¹³⁷ Lydia, by dint of clambering on to the roof of the railway coach in which her family of nine lives, spends her rare free moments looking past this 'rural slum' to the 'loveliness and order' beyond. Her love for the landscape is borne of familiarity and intimate knowledge: the 'wide serenity of the South Riding plain, the huge march of the clouds, the tides that ran nearly a mile out over the ruddy sand' have, over her fourteen years 'become part of her nature.' Poetry, though, she considers 'a very different beauty'; Shakespeare, lent by a neighbour who holds fast to the twin values of 'Culture' and 'Self Improvement', leaves her 'bewildered, enchanted, intimidated'. Called down from her 'sun-warmed seat' by her mother, she becomes again 'an untidy fat loutish girl in a torn overall' as she enters the makeshift domestic space of the railway carriage, which smells of 'lamp oil and unwashed clothes and beds and onions'. Lydia, though, is able to 'jerk free' her mind from the untidiness of vomit and tears (her young sister is unwell), finding an escape in the spacious order of iambic pentameter. Outwardly pragmatic and patient while washing, nursing and feeding her siblings, inwardly she is 'rang[ing] free through moonlight Athenian forests'.¹³⁸

Once enrolled in the high school, Lydia transforms her sense of 'ecstasy' and 'rapture' at reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* amidst the 'long green undulating land' surrounding the Shacks into a blot-strewn, untidy and eloquent essay on 'The landscape round Athens as Shakespeare imagined it, compared with any other rural landscape with which you are familiar'.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Although her English mistress laments the ‘Twenty six spelling mistakes. No punctuation. Five blots, and seventeen crossings out’, she also acknowledges that Lydia ‘knows her South Riding. She has observed and she can describe. And she’s studied Shakespeare’.¹³⁹ Her pupil possesses both ‘imagination’ and ‘sense’, making her work a ‘joy to read’ and worth submitting for the school essay prize. Elated by this praise, Lydia cycles home ‘carolling extemporised verses’, singing ‘of beauty, of method and order’. She is an indiscriminating, if attentive, reader, connecting Oberon’s ‘I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows’ with a courting song (‘When we find wild thyme / I’ll have a wild time with you’) and using one of the lowbrow ditties Miss Burton detests to express the ineffable ‘glory’ of ‘power and learning’.

However, on the day Lydia confirms her ability to connect her lived experience with imagined landscapes and, moreover, to put this into words so others can see what she has understood, her mother learns that she is expecting an eighth child, something the doctor has warned is likely to kill her. Her eldest daughter will, she states bluntly, ‘have to quit [her] grand school and come home to look after the kids’. Lydia is able to use her ‘lively imagination’ to construct a precise itinerary of the ‘days which would very soon face her’, giving no space in her imagined schedule for anything but the grimly prosaic:

Quarter to five, wake Father. Put on the kettle, get his breakfast, the cocoa, the margarine, the bread. Tidy the living-room; go and wake the children; get their breakfast. (Why isn’t there no bacon? Lydie, can’t we have treacle?) See them off to school; look after Lennie and baby; tidy the bedroom, peel the potatoes, get the dinner ready, reed the hens, the pig—if they could keep one; give the children their dinner when they came home from school, noisy and ravenous. Lennie still needed his food shovelling in with a spoon; he was a slow eater; the baby would want a bottle. Wash up the dinner things; then do the shopping, pushing the pram along the dull road into Maythorpe; get the tea ready, the children are coming shouting across the fields; Daisy has fallen and cut her knee; Gertie is sick again. Bert back. Lyd, what’s for tea, old girl? Bacon cake? I’m sick of

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

bacon cake. Can't we have sausages? Washing the children. The heavy shallow tubs, the tepid water. Where's the flannel gone? Don't let Lennie eat the soap now!¹⁴⁰

Unlike previous passages in which Lydia helps to care for the children, no counterpoint of verse is presented alongside this list of tasks. She recognises herself that here father's moods, his 'maudlin misery or facile optimism', will be the only thing left to 'punctuate the days'. 'She had suggested to the senior girls for their holiday reading that Easter, Lady Rhondda's autobiography *This Was My World*, commending especially to them an old Spanish proverb quoted there: "Take what you want," said God. "Take it—and pay for it". To choose, to take, with clear judgement and open eyes; to count the cost and pay it; to regret nothing; to go forward, cutting losses, refusing to complain, accepting complete responsibility for their own decisions—this was the code which she attempted to impress upon the children who came under her influence—the code on which she set herself to act.¹⁴¹

Raymond Williams writes in his work *The Country and the City* that 'most novels are in some sense knowable communities, part of a traditional method—an underlying stance and approach—that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways'.¹⁴² *South Riding's* success within this method of storytelling lies in its ability to reaffirm shared values and a shared perspective, an ability which rests on the social confidence that the community described is already known both to reader and author. It was Winifred Holtby's ability to richly describe that which was knowable and comforting while also expounding ideas for reform and sympathy for competing ideals that earned her the reputation of one who was able 'to find, to test, and to spread the customs and the ideas that would be health-giving and live-saving'.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 161.

¹⁴² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 167.

¹⁴³ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship* (1940; rpt. London: Virago, 1980), p. 267.

CHAPTER IV

“IT’LL NEVER COME AGAIN’: THE FAILING PROJECT OF RECONSTRUCTION AND PREMONITIONS OF WAR IN GEORGE ORWELL’S *COMING UP FOR AIR*’

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art [...] looking back through my work, I see that it is inevitably where I lacked a political purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally.

Orwell, *Why I Write*¹

*Who can deny that things to come are not yet?
Yet already is in the mind an expectation
of things to come.*

St Augustine, *Confessions*²

In September of 1940, an article written by Q. D. Leavis was published in the literary journal *Scrutiny* wherein she claimed that ‘Mr. Orwell must have wasted a lot of energy trying to be a novelist—I think I must have read three or four novels by him, and the only impression those dreary books left on me is that nature didn’t intend him to be a novelist. Yet his equivalent works in non-fiction are stimulating’.³ The ‘dreary books’ to which Leavis referred would have been the four novels written by Orwell in the nineteen-thirties: *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), *Keep The Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *Coming Up For Air* (1939). The seminal works *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were not published until 1945 and 1949, respectively.

¹ George Orwell, ‘Why I Write’, *Collected Essays* (London: Secker and Warburgh, Ltd., 1961), pp. 440-442.

² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 277

³ Q. D. Leavis, *Scrutiny: A Quarterly Review* (September 1940), p. 173.

Her assessment of these works, while undoubtedly condemning, did not constitute a wholly unorthodox reception of Orwell's fictional writings at the time of their publication. In a recent article by Michael Levenson, included in the *Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, the novels of the 1930s are recognised as works which have a common preoccupation with failure, and were likewise unsuccessful financially, resulting in a lack of interest from scholars and readers in general. When these works have been discussed, he goes on to say, they are usually seen 'as distractions from the journalism or as false starts toward the triumphs of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'.⁴ In a similar vein, Orwell's first major biographer, Bernard Crick anticipated a critical indifference towards the early novels and predicted that the author's non-fictional work was not merely a 'pleasant appendage' to his 'real books' but 'may well constitute his lasting claim to greatness as a writer'.⁵ However, Orwell himself maintained an overwhelming conviction that he was meant to write fictional works and that this form of literature held a particular purpose suitable to his belief that, as quoted in the epigraph above, 'political writing' could be made into a form of art. For instance, one could take Leavis's insistence that 'nature' did not intend Orwell to be a novelist as a precise rebuttal to his own prescient recognition that 'from a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer'.⁶ He recalls also that throughout his childhood, the only 'serious—*i.e.* seriously intended' writing which he produced amounted to only a few poems but that he remained engaged in 'literary activities' and always had the notion that sooner or later he 'should have to settle down and write books'.⁷ The decades of conflicting opinions on Orwell's literary talent culminate in Raymond Williams's recognition that the two forms of Orwell's writing in the 1930s, the novels and the 'documentary journalism', 'should be seen as pondering the same difficult relationship

⁴ Michael Levenson, 'The Fictional Realist: Novels of the 1930s', *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 59.

⁵ Bernard Crick, 'Introduction', *George Orwell: Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. vii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

between fiction and fact'.⁸ The chapter to follow operates within this middle-ground view, recognising it as one that allows for a consideration of the interaction between various genres of the author's work and the view, as promulgated throughout this thesis, that the lines of division between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' are less than distinct.

At the outset, this chapter will examine the inter-relation between Orwell 'the pamphleteer' and Orwell 'the novelist'. Similar to Ford Madox Ford's conviction that he should serve as an 'historian of his own time', as discussed in Chapter I, Orwell felt that it was his mission when writing 'to reconcile [his] ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us'.⁹ This rather enigmatic statement, meaning that he wished to write about timely matters regardless of his own predilections, comes from an essay entitled 'Why I Write' (1946) in which Orwell considers, amongst other matters, the way in which a political purpose can be reconciled with 'problems of construction and of language'.¹⁰ The forces of the age, to which he refers, can be divided into two broad classifications (along which this chapter will also be divided): concerns over changes in literature and over a looming social 'crisis'. Orwell responds with a pessimistic outlook to both of these 'forces'. He felt that literature of the 1930s was written with a conscious shift away from the 'High Modernist' works of the 1920s (though without using this terminology to contextualise this change). This impression was owed partly to Orwell's sense of writing in the shadow of literary 'giants', such as James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence, and also to a perceived change in the manner of literary works being produced—a shift from form to content—about which more will be discussed in section II of this chapter.¹¹ Secondly, works of the 1930s in general contain an imminent forewarning or prophecy of catastrophe, formed through an observation of the 'social emergency' of the period, not least related to the premonition of

⁸ Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 39.

⁹ Orwell, *Essays*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Levenson, 'The Fictional Realist', p. 61.

another war with Germany. Alongside various secondary sources that are used in particular to facilitate a discussion of time and nostalgia, various essays written by Orwell are utilised, some of which look back at the nineteen-thirties from the vantage point of World War Two. Each of these works deals with various considerations of the function of literature, in a widely defined sense, in a ‘changing climate’ of the late 1930s which facilitates a later examination of one of the ‘forgotten’ early novels, *Coming Up For Air* as a form of tragic premonition.

In this work, the main character, George Bowling—a fat, middle-aged, travelling insurance agent who is not so much the ‘salt of the earth’ as ‘the bread and cheese and beer’ of it—takes a journey, both in his memory and in actuality, to his childhood home Lower Binfield.¹² In the former, nostalgic recollection of his boyhood, Bowling re-engages self-consciously with an idyllic Edwardian life, persistently recalling in a nostalgic vein the sordid but altogether better life of his youth:

Before the war, and especially before the Boer War, it was summer all year round.¹³

What’s the use saying that one oughtn’t to be sentimental about “before the war”? I am sentimental about it [...] It’s quite true that if you look back on any special period of the time you tend to remember the pleasant bits [...] But it’s also true that people then had something that we haven’t got now.¹⁴

A feeling of security, even when they weren’t secure. More exactly, it was a feeling of continuity [...] a settled period, a period when civilisation seems to stand on its four legs like an elephant.¹⁵

These three quotations demonstrate the way in which Orwell tempered nostalgia about the past with a scrutiny over the validity of one’s memory. Once again, as with previously discussed

¹² Margery Allingham, review of *Coming Up for Air* and *Seasoned Timber*, *Time and Time*, 24 Just 1939, *The Critical Heritage*, p. 154.

¹³ George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (London: Harcourt, 1950), p. 42. All further references are to this edition.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

authors, Orwell's character recognises a break with the Edwardian Era as a result of the Great War, and the fact that Bowling is looking back as a discontented adult on a comparatively carefree childhood causes a distended and romanticised view of life then. Randall Stevenson suggests that the literature of the 1920s and 30s was particularly suited to render memories in a nostalgic manner when considering life before the before the Great War, and furthermore that literature which functions in this manner demonstrates a manifestation of Walter Benjamin's assessment of the twentieth-century as a generally backward-looking period, personified by an 'angel of history' whose face is turned towards the past 'while the pile of debris before him grows skyward'.¹⁶ A discussion of time, and indeed the health of civilisation during a 'transitional' period of time, may be considered, section III will argue, central to a consideration of Orwell's *oeuvre*. Indeed, each of his six novels begins with a clear indication of the time of day—for instance, the well-known opening line of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 'It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen'—that serves as a temporal orientation into the fictional, daily routines of life. Levenson contends that the preoccupation Orwell exhibits over time is indebted to a recognition that 'before we belong to the sweep of decades or centuries, epochs or ages, we are creatures of immediacy'.¹⁷ In this vein, the final section of this chapter will look to the work of Frank Kermode who, in *The Sense of An Ending*, recognises that fictions work as a form of 'sense-making' or a grounding the present through providing a fictional past and future. Furthermore, an historical discussion of understandings of time in the early twentieth-century provides foundational material for this analytical approach. The chapter concludes that the particular form of 'pessimistic nostalgia' (or as discussed below, 'proleptic elegy', in Patricia Rae's terminology) in which Orwell was engaged may be understood as a means by which to work through the grief of impending tragedy and find some form of consoling hope.

¹⁶ Randall Stevenson, 'Remembering the Pleasant Bits: Nostalgia and the Legacies of Modernism', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010), p. 132.

¹⁷ Levenson, 'The Fictional Realist', p. 60.

I. THE STATE OF 'RECONSTRUCTION' IN THE LATE NINETEEN-THIRTIES

The difficulties associated with writing an account of the project of reconstruction after the Great War vary significantly when considering the end of the two decades of peace in the 'inter-war years'. A difference in approach is necessary, in part, owing to an increased certainty that the institutions in place to prevent another full-scale war in Europe such as the League of Nations and the Peace Pledge Union were failing, and that the inadequacy of these organisations was widely known. For instance, Richard Overy, in his work *The Morbid Age*, argues that in the mid-1930s there was a 'water-shed' moment where premonitions of war shifted from the question of 'whether?' to 'when?'.¹⁸ Such a shift in speculation about war is supported by the fact that although Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, which led to the country's withdrawal from the League of Nations and the World Disarmament Conference in October of that year and a general programme of rearmament, it was not until 1936 that the Rhineland was reoccupied, in direct violation of the Treaty of Versailles and an Axis was formed with Italy (then later with Japan in 1938). Consequently, in the early 1930s, whatever any one individual, group, or government may have thought of Hitler's rise to power, the 'Third Reich' was not yet in a position to threaten another war throughout Europe.¹⁹ Likewise, the authors who were considered in previous chapters of this thesis were not closely concerned with the possibility of another war with Germany in their writings, even if they might have been privately troubled over the state of 'things to come' in however broad a sense. Winifred Holtby died in 1935, Ford Madox Ford died in 1939, and Aldous Huxley moved permanently to America in 1937. Ford's

¹⁸ Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation* (London: Penguin Books: 2010), p. 315.

¹⁹ This is, naturally, an overly-simplified summary of the military position Germany held in Europe through the 1930s. The Stresa Front formed between the United Kingdom, France, and Italy in April of 1935 (intended to prevent Germany from altering the terms of the Treaty of Versailles) and its impending collapse beginning with the Anglo-German Naval Agreement concerning the size of the *Kriegsmarine* in ratio to the Royal Navy, would certainly have been enough to provoke anxiety about war in the discerning citizen. Later, in 1936-37, the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact which were signed between Germany, Italy, and Japan would only have added to these fears as a distinct reminder of the manner of alliances, and growing tensions between these alliances, which lead to war in Europe in 1914.

several reminiscences in the 1930s, some of which were discussed in Chapter I, were rather more introspective and concerned with recording his life after the Great War than speculating about the future.²⁰ Huxley continued to publish through the 1930s, yet his works were increasingly focused upon the mystical and operated at some remove from the state of Europe (perhaps the only exception is his collection of essays *Ends and Means: An Enquiry Into the Nature of Ideals and Into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (1937), which contains a chapter concerning the ‘nature of war’, but considers the subject in a largely abstract sense).²¹ Orwell was a generation younger than these authors (in fact, he was briefly taught French by Aldous Huxley when he was a student at Eton College) and, therefore, did not share in the same experience of the Great War. Born in 1903, he was only eleven years old when, on 4 August 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany for violating Belgian neutrality.

Cyril Connolly recalled in his book *Enemies of Promise* (1938) how Orwell alone amongst the boys at St Cyprian’s Prep-School (and later Eton) was an intellectual who thought for himself and who ‘rejected [...] the war, the Empire, Kipling, Success and Character’.²² However, Bernard Crick suggests that Connolly’s account was overly embellished and that Orwell did not, in fact, ‘reject the war’, citing a poem the young Eric Blair had published in the *Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard* on 2 October 1914 called ‘Awake Young Men of England’. The poem called men who did not choose to enlist ‘cowards’ and made a promise to rally in support of Britain’s fight against Hitler, saying:

Oh! give me the strength of the lion,
the wisdom of Reynard the fox,
And then I’ll hurl troops at the Germans,
And give them the hardest of knocks.²³

²⁰ While Ford did not believe that another large-scale war would happen in Europe, he did express grave concerns with the rise of Fascism in private correspondence near the end of his life. See Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life, Vol. 2 The After-War World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 532.

²¹ See Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry Into the Nature of Ideals and Into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

²² Cyril Connolly, *Enemies of Promise* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), p. 164.

²³ Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 85.

The wife of the Head Master of St Cyprian's, Mrs Wilkes, read the poem aloud at a school assembly with the result of a great surge of patriotic feeling amongst the boys, an event that clearly escaped the memory of Connolly.²⁴ Nonetheless, Orwell's own account of his boyhood during the Great War is tempered with the same manner of scrutiny to which Connolly referred. In his essay 'My Country, Right or Left' (1940), Orwell claimed that 'nothing in the whole war moved me so deeply as the loss of the *Titanic* had done a few years earlier'.²⁵ He continued by providing a description of his only distinct memories of the beginning of World War One, which add to the competing mix of sentiments regarding his feelings about the war:

Of the outbreak of the war, I have three vivid memories which, being petty and irrelevant are uninfluenced by anything that has come later. One is of the cartoon of the 'German Emperor' (I believe the hated name 'Kaiser' was not popularized till a little later) that appeared in the last days of July ... Another is of the time when the Army commandeered all the horses in our little country town, and a cabman burst into tears in the market-place when his horse, which had worked for him for years, was taken away from him. And another is of a mob of young men at the railway station, scrambling for the evening papers that had just arrived on the London train. And I remember the pile of peagreen papers ... the high collars, the tightish trousers and the bowler hats, far better than I can remember the names of the terrific battles that were already raging on the French frontier.²⁶

Whether these memories are apocryphal or embellished, one may wonder, but it is the manner of their telling which is of importance here. Orwell claims that the memories are 'petty and irrelevant' and that they are 'uninfluenced by anything that has come later'. These qualifying points appear to support his statement that nothing in the war influenced him. However, the emotions depicted in the excerpt betray a keen awareness of a moment which was less than normal. It is only be natural that a boy of eleven would not know the names of 'terrific battles

²⁴ D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (London: Vintage Books, 2004), p. 29.

²⁵ Orwell, *Essays*, p. 134.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

[...] raging on the French frontier', it would be unlikely, for instance, that he would have been reading the daily newspapers while at school, but he remembers a cabman who burst into tears when his horse was 'taken away from him'. The commandeering of horses by the military is not an instance of peace, neither is the pace of young men 'scrambling' through a 'little country town', nor the invention of a hateful epithet, 'the Kaiser', being given to the emperor of another, now enemy, nation. An aloof attitude regarding the war may have remained with Orwell, but it is clear that he did not wholly escape its 'influence'.

Later, when Orwell joined the Burmese Police in 1922, he was younger than his fellow recruits, and, as a result of this, they had all been old enough to serve in the Great War. He illustrates in his essays 'A Hanging' (1931) and 'Shooting an Elephant' (1936) the farcical rites of the British Empire during his time in Burma and how he hated its military traditions, a reaction against, as he says, more or less, having held a rifle and being trained in these traditions since birth.²⁷ Yet, he somehow maintained a feeling of regret for not having been able to serve in the Great War. One gathers that he felt this way partly owing to a desire to be a part of the camaraderie shared between men who were able to reminisce about their service and the nostalgia with which they told their stories. He wrote when recalling the early days of his service that:

[...] the dead men had their revenge after all. As the war fell back into the past, my particular generation, those who had been 'just too young', became conscious of the vastness of the experience they had missed. You felt yourself a little less than a man, because you had missed it. I spent the years 1922-27 mostly among men a little older than myself who had been through the war. They talked about it unceasingly, with horror, of course, but also with a steadily-growing nostalgia'.²⁸

²⁷ Orwell mentions in an article for the *Evening Standard* (1 December 1945), entitled 'Bare Christmas for the Children', that 'one of the advantages of being a child thirty years ago was the 'light-hearted attitude that then prevailed towards firearms' and how, at the age of ten, he bought a 'Saloon rifle' with 'no questions asked'.

²⁸ Orwell, *Essays*, p. 135.

Orwell lived more with the myth of the war's destruction than a first-hand reality of it. In fact, Samuel Hynes discusses this fact with reference to how the soldiers of 1939-1940 went 'to war in a mood very different from that in which their elders had volunteered in 1914. They would go without dreams of glory, expecting nothing except suffering, boredom and perhaps death—not cynically, but without illusions, because they remembered a war: not the Great War itself, but the Myth that had been made of it'.²⁹ Orwell's disappointed reaction towards being too young to fight in the first war was also indebted to his realisation that he was 'patriotic at heart' and would fight for his country if he were given the chance. As the threat of war increased through the nineteen-thirties, this opportunity became readily possible. He recalled, 'I don't quite know in what year I first knew for certain that the present war was coming. After 1936, of course, the thing was obvious to anyone except an idiot'.³⁰ In a conflicting account, Orwell wrote 'I have known, since 1931,' 'that the future must be catastrophic'. 'Since 1934', he wrote in his *War Diary of 1940*, 'I have known war between England and Germany was coming, and since 1935, I have known it with complete certainty. I could feel it in my belly'.³¹ It is less important here to suggest that there was a specific date in the 1930s in which a change was established in regards to premonitions of a war than to recognise that there *was* a shift and that Orwell was not peculiar for voicing his growing concern. Orwell returned from fighting in the Spanish Civil War in the summer of 1937 to the retreat of his cottage in Herefordshire. Although he had suffered from an illness of the lungs ever since his school days, after the wound he received in Spain, he was never to be wholly well again. In 1938, he and his wife left for Morocco in search of good health. Nineteen thirty-eight proved a difficult year for Orwell. He spent half of 1938 in a sanatorium in Kent with bronchiectasis and the following six months in Morocco. He wrote a letter to John Seats in November 1938 that 'with all this illness I've decided to count 1938 as a

²⁹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Athenaeum, 1991), pp. 467-468.

³⁰ Orwell, *Essays*, p. 136.

³¹ George Orwell, 'War Diary of 1940', *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. XII, ed. P. H. Davison (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 510.

black year and sort of cross it off the calendar.³² The first reference to *Coming Up For Air* as Orwell's next novel occurs in a letter that he wrote to Cyril Connolly on 14 March 1938. The novel was published in June of 1939. Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939 and two days later Great Britain declared war.

The shift from the question of 'whether?' to 'when?' is evident in literature as well when one compares the way in which the possibility of war is discussed between Holtby and Orwell's novels. *South Riding* (1936) ends with an 'Epilogue at a Silver Jubilee' where Sarah Burton is taken along for a ride in an aeroplane above the fictional South Riding of Yorkshire. At 'half-past six on the morning of May 6th, 1935', the morning of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the accession of King George V, a reign which began before The Great War, Sarah recalls the content of a letter from her socialist friend Joe Astell.³³ She thought about his correspondence as she 'bounced and swayed over the South Riding' and how he was thankful that he had left the small town of Kiplington to become 'a militant again' in Glasgow. However, his militancy was not, in 1935, one of re-armament and preparation for war but a fight for social justice, against a system which allows 'men [...] skilled artisans, riveters, engineers, [to rot] on the dole'.³⁴ Finding a remedy for social inequality in education, housing, economics, employment, and health-care is considered more of an immediate need than reacting to the placards seen opposite Astell's office which read 'Flags to-day, gas-masks to-morrow'. Although Astell comments on these signs by saying 'Well, Sarah, is that so much off the point?', one gathers from the tone of his letter that any emergency that might be present is inward-looking and at home, rather than any threat from abroad, saying, 'and the tragic sickening fact is that their only chance of re-employment lies in this arms race. They can return to life only by preparing for death'.³⁵ An 'arms race', without fear of war, is a competition between nations through the building up military might. With contemporary understanding of the 'Cold War' between America and Russia, which lasted

³² Orwell, *Complete Orwell*, vol. XI, p. 237.

³³ Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London: The Reprint Society, 1949), p. 481.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

roughly from the inauguration of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, one may understand war in a twentieth-century sense that does not involve large-scale fighting but, instead, armament as a deterrent to action—a concept unfamiliar to society in the 1930s.³⁶ Even though the language of the epilogue is one of war, of ‘victory’, battle’, destruction’, it is not associated with another totalising European War. Instead, ‘comforted by death [and facing] the future’, Sarah Burton emerges from an ‘air crash’ renewed in her conviction that she should serve the community of which she was a part.³⁷ Later, standing in the Esplanade Gardens with the local band stridently playing God Save the King, the novel comes to a close as Sarah recognises the affection for her new home and the fulfilment of her desire for communal betterment (through confirmation of plans for a new girl’s high school), here through the dedicatory rites shared by the ‘whole of the Kingdom and Empire’, that embodied the Holtby’s watch-word that ‘we are members one of another’.

Conversely, *Coming Up for Air* (1939) discusses the possibility of war with more certainty. In the first fifty pages of the novel, references to an impending war are made approximately a dozen separate times. The first of these remarks happens while George Bowling is commuting into London and is watching a ‘bombing plane flying low overhead’ which ‘seemed to be keeping pace with the train’.³⁸ Opposite Bowling in the compartment were sitting ‘two vulgar kinds of blokes in shabby overcoats’. One of them glanced at the aeroplane and Bowling contemplates this briefest of looks perceptively, ‘I knew what he was thinking. For that matter it’s what everybody else is thinking [...] in two years’ time, one year’s time, what shall we be doing when we see one of those things?’³⁹ A morbid game of reckoning when the war shall begin plays over and over in Bowling’s mind while he wanders around London. At various moments, Bowling repeats to himself, in a defeated manner, that ‘of course there’s no question that it’s

³⁶ Interestingly, Orwell is credited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the first occurrence of the phrase ‘cold war’ in print: ‘1945 ‘G. Orwell’ in *Tribune* 19 Oct. 8/1: A State which was [...] in a permanent state of ‘cold war’ with its neighbours’.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

³⁸ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

coming soon'.⁴⁰ Likewise, the sight of the bomber during an otherwise mundane journey into the city plagues his mind and gives proof to his suspicions of war:

My mind went back to the thoughts of war I'd been having earlier that morning, when the bomber flew over the train [...]

This kind of prophetic feeling that keeps coming over me nowadays, the feeling that war's just round the corner and that war's the end of all things, isn't peculiar to me. We've all got it, more or less.⁴¹

Curiously, he follows this course of prophetic thought to the conviction that war will occur at a specific date: '1941 they say it's booked for'.⁴² Bowling considers that the war has been 'booked', like a table at a fashionable restaurant—that time has been scheduled and set aside for the conflict, and the date of the unwanted engagement is looming. The first two chapters of the book are achingly pedestrian in their accounts of day-to-day life. They follow the routine of Bowling's life: he has a bath, he is interrupted by the clamouring of his children down the stairs, he argues with his wife, Hilda, over breakfast. The day itself is not routine because Bowling has taken the day off work in order to collect a new pair of false teeth, yet jolting reminders of the past and indicators of the future interrupt his errands. He is reminded of his Edwardian childhood by 'King Zog's' name on a newspaper headline which carries his mind back to the parish church of Lower Binfield in about 1900, sparking a memory of the congregation vociferously singing Psalm 135 with the line 'Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan'. An account follows of life in his father's shop (a seed store of steadily declining business), escapades with school friends (most notably fishing), life as a grocer's assistant, the rituals of church (parishioners nicknamed 'Thunderguts' and 'Rumbletummy', who belt out the Psalm across the nave). Bowling's relationship with Lower Binfield came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the Great War. He was only twenty-one when he joined the British Army. In the war, he received a commission, was wounded in France and spent the last year of the war in a

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴² Ibid., p. 30.

useless, forgotten existence, guarding non-existent stores on the coast of Cornwall. By the end of the war, both of his parents had died, and he never returned to his hometown.

When the narrative returns to the present, Bowling accompanies his wife and her friends to a Left Book Club meeting. The Left Book Club was established by Victor Gollancz in 1936 as a means by which to extend and inform the British public. He wrote in the first number of *Left News*, issued to members of the Left Book Club, that the purpose of the organisation was:

to provide the indispensable basis of *knowledge* without which a really effective United Front of all men and women of good will cannot be built. If we are to win, we must have, each one of us, not less but more knowledge than the best informed of our enemies.⁴³

The club proved surprisingly successful; by May 1936, it had 9,000 members; a year later nearly 45,000 people were signed up, reaching 57,000 by April 1939. *The Road to Wigan Pier* was sold as part of a special low-price (2/6p) club edition (44,5000 copies).⁴⁴ In *Coming Up for Air*, the scene with the Left Book Club meeting and the ensuing conversation with Porteus, a retired master of a public school and perhaps Bowling's only 'intellectual' friend, resembles the sort of dialect-heavy scenes which are found in Huxley's 'novels of ideas'. George Bowling is more self-aware and questioning than Huxley's characters: 'Why the hell are we doing this? Why is it that people will turn out on a winter night for this kind of thing?' he asks as the lecture begins (p. 170). The difference between 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' thought within this scene is irrelevant. What reveals itself as more threatening are 'the stream-lined men', the ruthless men, the men without tradition. Driven to violence by the insufficiency of their insane metaphysics, they could be found equally on the left and on the right and it was little more than chance where each particular one was to be found:

⁴³ Victor Gollancz, 'Editorial: The Left Book Club', *Left News*, no. 1, 2-4 (May 1936), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Peter Marks, *George Orwell the Essayist: Literature, Politics and the Periodical Culture* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 51.

You know the line of talk. These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button and it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy. but somehow it interested me to watch him. A rather mean little man, with a white face and a bald head, standing on a platform shooting out slogans. What's he doing? Quite deliberately, and quite openly, he's stirring up hatred. [...] He *means* it. Not faking at all—feels every word he's saying. He's trying to work up hatred in the audience, but that's nothing to the hatred he feels in himself. Every slogan's gospel truth to him. [...]

It was a voice that sounded as if it could go on for a fortnight without stopping. It's a ghastly thing really to have a sort of human barrel-organ shooting propaganda at you by the hour. The same thing over and over again. Hate, hate, hate. Let's all get together and have a good hate. [...] At any rate, I felt what he was feeling.

I saw the vision that he was seeing. And it wasn't at all the kind of vision that can be talked about. What he's *saying* is merely that Hitler's after us and we must all get together and have a good hate. [...] The world we're going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed with, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day and the detectives watch you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really worship him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke.⁴⁵

The speaker in this passage utilises a mechanical manner of unthinking repetition like a 'gramophone'; he does not need to create—he merely repeats the messages of hate with which he has been imbued. Bowling reflects that this stirring up hate is necessary for the fostering of a sense that there is an enemy and later wanders to what extent the hate expressed by this man is different from that of Germans. This scene is a prime example of the novel being able to enter the mind of a character with opposing views, to 'turn the tables on him' and get 'inside *his* skull', and create sympathy with ideas and 'feel what he was feeling' in a way that an essay cannot. Although Bowling may understand the fear that the speaker feels, he remains worried about the

⁴⁵ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, pp. 155-157.

‘after war’ that Bowling is worried about, both because he has seen the effects of a World War but also because there has never been a war with such high ideological stakes before.

When asked at the end of the talk by a ‘youth in a long coat’ what his thoughts are on the Fascists, Bowling offers his experience of the Great War as a deterrent to wanton action in the future:

‘Listen, son’, says George to the earnest young humanitarian Communist, ‘you’ve got it all wrong. In 1914 *we* thought it was going to be a glorious business. Well, it wasn’t. It was just a bloody mess. If it comes again you keep out of it... You don’t feel like a hero. All you know is that you’ve had no sleep for three days, you stink like a polecat, you’re pissing in your bags with fright, and your hands are so cold you can’t hold a rifle. but that doesn’t matter a damn either. It’s the things that happen afterwards’.⁴⁶

After leaving the Left Book Club meeting, Bowling goes to visit his friend Porteous, a retired school master who taught the Classics. When discussing the possibility of war, Porteous too was unable to see that the inventions, weapons, and communications of today had made of the modern tyrannies something wholly different from tyrannies of other days. However, technological advances and ideological firebrands formed the basis of concern over the possibility of another conflict in Europe, and the prevailing sense in the late nineteen-thirties was that war, should it come (or rather when it came) *would* be wholly different than even the Great War before it. Leonard Woolf, in his book *Barbarians at the Gate*, explains that there had been a shift in the tone of news reporting from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day (1939). He wrote that it was impossible to believe ‘that if you opened your *Times* on a morning in say 1907, you did not expect to find its columns filled with horror piled upon horror, fear treading upon the tail of hatred and hatred upon the tail of fear’.⁴⁷ Instead, Woolf argued that the type of news that occupied the papers in this time was government budgets or the grant of governing rights to South Africa. The change in the common news story served to fuel the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 171.

⁴⁷ Leonard Woolf, *Barbarians at the Gate* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1939), p. 11.

manner of 'hate' that Bowling experiences. 'An important point' in Woolf's opening chapter is that after the war changed 'the reaction of public opinion and the leaders of public opinion to what were then considered to be the violations of the rules and standards of civilization'.⁴⁸ Instead of concern for 'the preservation of the standards of justice and humanity', part of the 'most ancient tradition' of European civilisations, violence and divisive political rhetoric infiltrated every-day life.⁴⁹ Orwell recognised a shift in literary endeavour as well, though he felt that it could be utilised for providing art with a purpose rather than dogmatic intoxication.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

II. 'THE PAMPHLETEER' V. 'THE NOVELIST'

The quotation from Q. D. Leavis used in the opening of this chapter continues with her providing speculative advice that 'if he were to give up trying to be a novelist Mr Orwell might well find his *métier* in literary criticism [...] he is evidently a live mind working through literature, life and ideas. He knows what he is interested in and has something original to say about it'. This section follows in much the same vein as discussions in previous chapters about the fine line between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' and both how Orwell navigates this divide and how critics reacted with the aim of demonstrating: a) that 'literature' as a concept is broader than the construct of an either/or re 'fiction' and b) Orwell viewed the novel form as particularly suited to his task of 'making political writing into an art'. More broadly, this section will consider changes in literature between the nineteen-twenties and thirties, the first of the two 'forces of the age' identified in the introduction to this chapter.

Part of the difficulty which arises when attempting to categorise Orwell's writings is that 'he is, allowing for differences of scale, similar to his own Dickens: he, too, is 'one of those writers who are well worth stealing'. All manner of people have raided his work for all kinds of meanings –meanings religious, reactionary, radical. Orwell is, transparently, many things to many men. He is appropriated with equal facility by the new Left, which is drawn to his prickly, stubborn radicalism; and by the ideologues of the Institute of Directors, who see the dread shadow of 'totalitarianism' in the merest gestures of social regulation. To one interpreter, Orwell is 'a genuinely socialist thinker and critic, a lonely figure moving tentatively' towards the 'absent centre' of British socialism'. To another, Orwell is a propagandist in the cause of 'free trade, free enterprise and free markets'. One critic's Orwell, 'frustrating ... reader expectations' in his early novels, sounds like a proto-postmodernist: another's is a sort of ecology-buff...'. 'Discovering changes or apparent inconsistencies in his views hardly exposes him as a fraud, toppling him like the statue of a deposed tyrant. Seen in context, his essays offer a fine-grained record of the

changes and reappraisals in his literary and political thinking. Close examination of them shows Orwell to be opinionated and perceptive, but not infallible. Orwell's writing does not really lend itself to traditional literary analysis—he appears to foil by his disarmingly available presence the elaborate tools that literary criticism habitually deploys: his novels were direct and fairly simple narratives in an old tradition. Their meanings are mainly on the surface. Orwell posed no riddles, elaborated no myths, and manipulated no symbols... 'There is not much to do with Orwell's novels except read them'.

Orwell's essays should be considered central to his literary and political achievements, expressing in a different medium, similar concerns to his novels. In 1969, Irving Howe wrote that Orwell was 'the greatest English essayist since Hazlitt, maybe since Dr Johnson'.⁵⁰ Likewise, Harold Bloom says in a discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that 'Orwell, aesthetically considered, is a far better essayist than a writer'.⁵¹ Orwell's introductory note to his *Critical Essays* illustrates the wide range of periodicals in which he published, evidence that provides support for the accolades above:

Most of these essays have appeared in print before, and several of them more than one. 'Charles Dickens' and 'Boy's Weeklies' appeared in my book *Inside the Whale*. 'Boy's Weeklies' also appeared in *Horizon*, as did 'Wells, Hitler and the World State', 'The Art of Donald McGill', 'Rudyard Kipling', 'W.B. Yeats', and 'Raffles and Miss Blandish'. The last-named essay also appeared in the New York monthly magazine, *Politics*. A shortened version of 'The Art of Donald McGill' appeared in the *Strand Magazine*. 'Arthur Koestler' was written for *Focus*, but will probably not have appeared before this book is published. 'In Defence of P.G. Wodehouse' appeared in *The Windmill*. 'Benefit of Clergy' made a sort of phantom appearance in the *Saturday Book* for 1944 [...] to the other periodicals which have allowed me to reprint my contributions, the usual acknowledgments are due.⁵²

⁵⁰ Irving Howe, 'George Orwell: "As the Bones Know"', *Harper's Magazine* (January 1969, pp. 98-103), p. 98.

⁵¹ Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *George Orwell's 1984: Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea House, 1984), p. 1.

⁵² Orwell, *Complete Orwell*, vol. XVIII, p. 106.

The number of volumes in the *Complete Works of George Orwell* is a testament to the vast quantity of writing that Orwell produced. The index of serials alone runs to four pages.⁵³ While the cope of subject matter is remarkably broad across Orwell's essays, his tracts on literature are the most instructive for this section.

Orwell wrote an article in 1936 for the *New English Weekly* entitled 'In Defence of the Novel', wherein he lamented the declining readership of novels in the 1930s, writing 'at this moment the prestige of the novel is extremely low', so low, in fact, that the phrase 'I never read novels' was, at the time, 'uttered in a tone of conscious pride'.⁵⁴ The 'professional reviewer' was, in Orwell's opinion, responsible for this 'decline'. He provides an example of the 'tripe sort of review' published in newspapers of novels from the *Sunday Times* wherein the author entreats the reader 'if you can read this book and not shriek with delight, your soul is dead'.⁵⁵ The problem with a review such as this one was the commonality of the language. When every review suggests that its subject-matter is a 'work of genius', one can only assume that none of them are—'within the literary intelligentsia this assumption is now taken for granted'. Ultimately, this is the fault of newspapers that employ reviewers and published vast quantities of reviews (the *Sunday Times* published at least fifteen a week at the time).⁵⁶ The problem becomes cyclical, because there would be no use in the reviewer publishing a bad review if they wish to keep gainful employment. The 'cure' Orwell suggested was a publication 'not beholden to advertisement fees from publishers' which would be able to 'keep abreast of current fiction and yet refuse to sink its standards'.⁵⁷ As for the reviewer, they would have to be people who really cared for the art of the novel (and that means, probably, neither highbrows nor lowbrows nor midbrows [*sic.*], but elastic-brows), people interested in technique and still more interested in discovering what a book is *about*. His defence is never fully qualified, at the end of the essay he retreats from the

⁵³ Orwell, *Complete Orwell*, vol. XX, pp. 550.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 520.

opportunity of expounding further views on the novel, but it seems that what he's really advocating is an open discussion about the quality of literature being produced and for editors to allow dissenting views to be published. It is a curious coincidence that Orwell was reviewing for the *New English Weekly* at the time of writing this essay.

In a review written for *Commonweal* in 1950 after *Coming Up for Air*'s first American printing, 'the first war, he thinks, marked the passing of more than an era. It was the end of a civilization, and of a comparatively beneficent way of life. Ever since, our world has been going through a transitional stage'.⁵⁸ This review takes up the mantle of Orwell's view that 'the novel we are used to is also being sawn off at the roots [...] for novelist or novel-reader what remains is the chance to get one's nerve back before the bad times begin'.⁵⁹ Periodical culture in Britain in the nineteen-thirties was often evaluated in relationship to the preceding decade. One reading of the difference in publications between the twenties and thirties recognises a shift away from the 'aesthetic-dominated' world of former decade, and before the war, to a more 'politically-engaged' manner of authorship in the latter. This statement is, of course, an oversimplification, but it does some small insight. There was certainly a substantial overlap between the two decades with regards to the major magazines. *The Criterion*, *The Adelphi*, *Time and Tide*, and *The New Statesman*, for instance, continued to thrive into the thirties. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker argue that in the 1920s 'one definite response' by journals to the previous decade 'was a refusal of dogma, exemplified by the man "isms" that dominated the pre-war cultural field'.⁶⁰ The politically inclined publication is partly, in Orwell's opinion, the result of 'a Conservatism which had failed'. In his essay, 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', first published in *Horizon* in 1944, and reprinted in his *Critical Essays*, Orwell contrasts the criminal-hero of 1900, who 'belongs to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards', and the criminal hero of 1939,

⁵⁸ John Cogley, 'Review', *Critical Heritage*, p. 156

⁵⁹ Unsigned Review, 'Coming Up for Air', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 June 1939, in *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Jeffrey Meyers (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 152.

⁶⁰ Brooker and Thacker, p. 456.

providing the example of the hero of James Hadley Chase's *He Won't Need It Now* who is portrayed 'stamping in someone's face and then, having crushed the man's mouth, grinding his heel round and round in it'. This was a 'prime example' of the riotous perversion in modern 'tough' fiction. He concludes by saying that 'comparing the schoolboy atmosphere of the one book with the cruelty and corruption of the other, one is driven to feel that snobbishness, like hypocrisy, is a check upon behaviour whose value from a social point of view has been underrated'.⁶¹

Returning to the review of *Coming Up for Air* which was published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the reviewer specified that 'Orwell is a novelist, and he never forgets it for a minute. In *Coming Up for Air*, he is, of course, making a point. But primarily, he is writing a novel. A less skilful writer undertaking a job like this might have found himself on the lecturer's podium without realizing it, again and again. Orwell never abandons his story'.⁶² This statement corresponds with Bernard Crick's view, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, that Orwell's fiction and essays are inextricably linked, yet that the novel form adds to the ideas he seeks to express. In *Coming Up for Air*, the novel's effectiveness is owed to the fact that Bowling is a believable and likable character. Although much of the novel is very serious and contemplative—it is, after all, 'a novel that, on the eve of world war II, expressed the almost inexpressible fears of every Englishman, warning them in frightening detail of the coming catastrophe—nearly every page is laced with comedy'.⁶³ The subject matter of 'coming catastrophe' is made palatable with the inclusion of an amiable character and light-hearted moments.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Critical Heritage*, p. 154.

⁶³ Ibid.

III. PROPHECIES OF CRISIS: A MODERN(IST) ESCHATOLOGY

‘Only time will tell’, the saying goes, and so it was believed by those in the nineteen-thirties who wondered when, for the second time in a generation, Britain would again be at war with Germany. This section shall establish an understanding of the trend of crisis that underpinned much discussion and scholarship in the 1930s and how this is portrayed in *Coming Up For Air*. In order to do so, it is worth, at the outset, considering a brief history of modern conceptions of time. In the eighteenth-century, one’s place in the world became embedded in time with the invention of a chronometer accurate enough to measure (within a tolerance of a matter of seconds) longitude against a standard time established at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. To understand the nature of the interconnectivity of place-ment and time in a philosophical or practical (rather than abstract or astronomical) sense, John Harrison’s development of his No. 4 Chronometer and its profound effect on maritime navigation. Because of this, *where* one was became equivalent to *when* one was in relation to a standard time regulated at Greenwich, London (a.k.a. The Prime Meridian). Casey’s contention that not only did Harrison’s chronometer reveal the mysteries of longitude, which had puzzled Galileo and a whole host of later astronomers, but it confirmed a particularly ‘temporocentrist’ view of the world which has dominated the Modern Period (from the Enlightenment to present day, through the philosophies of Hegel and Descartes). Edward Casey argues that ‘if we construe world-order as time-order, then the world, including our own world, is at all times in imminent demise’.⁶⁴ And through an obsession with recording/documenting time which manifest in ‘a sense of an ending’. We, for instance, look to clocks and calendars for guidance to the passing of time, but these objects do not, in actuality, offer guidance, only a sensation of the inexorable passing of time. The inter-war years were a period of crisis and ‘transition’ partly because of the trauma of

⁶⁴ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 7-8.

war, but also because of the contrast between the relative certainty of life in the Edwardian era compared with upheaval, change, and the potentiality of another war. Stephen Kern argues that the First World War was the beginning of the imposition of 'homogenous time' through efforts such as the synchronisation of watches in order to launch attacks in unison.⁶⁵ Likewise, Patricia Rae suggests that what was desired in the inter-war years was a return to the Arcadia of Edwardian Britain (one of familiar comforts), but this was a wish that could never be granted, not least because time cannot be rolled back. However, as we see in *Coming Up For Air*, the war did away with a chance of returning to Arcadia because of development projects and urbanisation. Bowling, for instance, is not settled. He is a travelling salesman, in contrast to his father, who operated a business out of the same building in which the family lived. Furthermore, his home has been destroyed through modern development and London steadily encroaching upon the countryside.

Frank Kermode discusses the ways in which literature works when considering moments of 'apocalypse', and in particular, suggests that fictions are a form of 'sense-making'. However, this is dependent upon fictions not becoming myth—the former is active and dynamic, the latter is static. Grand narratives might have been considered dead after the Great War, but fiction was not. *Coming Up for Air* may be considered pessimistic in outlook because it laments the destruction of England's 'green and pleasant land', demonstrates the inevitability of war with Germany and the way in which different portions of society (the Left Book Club, the public school master, the shop owner) were reacting to this news. The concern present in *Coming Up For Air* with chronicling, telling histories, and predicting the future as discussed above is depictive of the concerns of a large portion of society at the time. In 1914, Oswald Spengler wrote *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, or *The Decline of the West* as it was titled in its English translation; however, because of the war, it was not published until 1918. The subsequent

⁶⁵ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880-1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), p. 288.

volume was published in 1922 with the subtitle an *Outline of a Morphology of World History*. The work begins with the statement that ‘for everything organic the notions of birth, death, youth, age, lifetime, are fundamental. May not these notions, in this sphere also, possess a rigorous meaning which no one has as yet extracted? In short, is all history founded upon general biographic archetypes?’⁶⁶ This was a particularly deterministic consideration of the history of civilisations, which took as its pattern the organic lifespan of all living things. Within this model, which was received as inherently pessimistic, he considered that the decline and fall of a civilisation was nothing more or less than the death of an individual organism: an inevitability that must be accepted. Because of the success of Spengler’s work in Germany, an English translation was published by George Allen & Unwin in 1926 (with the second volume following in 1928). The work sold ‘slowly if steadily’ (2,856 copies of vol. I, 1,473 of vol. II).⁶⁷ This work, along with those of Flinders Petrie and Arnold Toynbee, contributed to a disruption of the ‘Victorian article of faith’ that civilisation was in a state of constant and mounting progress.⁶⁸ If there were a disruption of progress, then it must follow that western civilisation was, in fact, in a state of decline. Overy discusses the ways in which an idea of decline became common discourse throughout the ‘public sphere’, particularly through the abundant amount of archaeological and anthropological research in the first few decades of the twentieth-century which fostered an increased fixation upon past civilisations. This fascination culminated in Howard Carter’s discovery of King Tutankhamen’s Tomb in the Valley of Kings in Egypt in November of 1922. In *The Times* on 30 November 1922, the discovery was heralded as ‘the most sensational Egyptological discovery of the century.’⁶⁹ A full-page description of the opening of the tomb and

⁶⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West (Abridged Edition)*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 3.

⁶⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ "An Egyptian Treasure." *Times* [London, England] 30 Nov. 1922: 13+. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Oct. 2017.

its contents ran with updates almost daily.⁷⁰ As a result of the increased interest in civilisations and their lifespans, there was a growing scientific understanding that the rise and fall of a wide range of civilisations could be effectively charted and some possible pattern detected. Of course, the tacit fear inherent in the understanding that the rise and fall of ancient civilisations may be charted is that, if a pattern were detected, it may be as applicable to the modern world as it was to the ancient and, thereafter, similarities and ‘diagnosis’ could easily occur. This state of mind draws especial focus upon things past which may be beyond redemption.

Furthermore, Kermode suggests that there is an inherently human ‘need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end’.⁷¹ The Bible is, perhaps, the commonest example of this: Genesis ‘In the Beginning’, and Revelation ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus’. ‘and although for us the End has perhaps lost its naïve *imminence*, its shadow still lies on the crises of our fictions; we may speak of it as *immanent*’.⁷² Delineate the difference in meaning between these two words and explain the fact that what Kermode means is that historically, those who were predicting ‘the end times’ were concerned with dates and a finite moment of reckoning (the majority of predictions about the apocalypse assume that the end is pretty near), whereas the End now is manifest more in social anxieties or crisis. Kermode provides a history of apocalyptic reckoning, for example the year 1000 when... Millinea, centuries, and other ‘fundamentally arbitrary chronological divisions’ are often employed in bearing the weight of a society’s fears or hopes.⁷³ The *fin de siècle* is an example of way in which epochs or *saecula* coming to an end can have a profound impact on the well-being of society. ‘Periods of Transition’, times which are considered not to exist to the end or the normal flow of life but when the fates are preparing for a final reckoning, are particularly relevant to times before war, or to borrow Ford Madox Ford’s word, ‘Armageddon’. An understanding of this time originates with the prediction

⁷⁰ "Opening Of The Tomb." Times [London, England] 17 Feb. 1923: 10. The Times Digital Archive. Web. 1 Oct. 2017.

⁷¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

of the 'reign of the Beast' which would last for three and a half years. Joachim of Flora divided the temporal history of the world into three phases. The time within a novel is not related to any external ordering of time.⁷⁴ 'We cannot, of course, be denied an end. It's one of the charming things about books, that they have to end'.⁷⁵ The Kaiser was called the 'antichrist' during the first war, Hitler was in the second. This, Kermode claims, shows that this form of crisis is on-going and anyone can be 'type cast' to add credence to the eschatological fears of a generation.⁷⁶

In his theory of temporality, in *Confessions XI*, Saint Augustine addresses the problem of the conception and measuring of time. Augustine delineates two primary forms of experiencing the passing of time which he calls *intentio* and *attentio*.⁷⁷ These two categories, broadly, refer to either an 'active' or 'inactive' way of engaging with the present. He comes to this conclusion through first considering whether time itself exists, and concluding that it does through a thought-experiment about the life span of a sound, in this instance, his own voice. Because his recitation of a hymn or singing of a note has a beginning and an end, this demonstrates that time has passed. Particularly, it is relevant if the recitation of a hymn is regulated and repeatedly said at the same rate. This constitutes premeditation, or an expectation of the passage of the life span of the hymn read aloud. Therefore, there is a set amount of time during which the sound may be heard, after which, it will pass into memory and cannot be heard anymore. However straightforward an exercise this may seem, it constituted a foundation for a theory of *distentionem*, or mental distension: the phenomena of an internal time-consciousness.⁷⁸ Through this theory, Augustine conceived of the idea of a three-fold present, wherein an individual may exist simultaneously in the 'present-past' (memory), the present (attention), and the present-future (expectation). *Attentio*, the passive experience of time: 'present has no space because it passes

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷⁷ Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961), XI: 28, 16.

⁷⁸ Andrea Nightingale, *Once Out of Nature: Augustine on Time and the Body* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), p. 79.

away in a flash'.⁷⁹ *Intentio*: 'an active form of attention (the present) that shapes time by planning and carrying out activities.

The state of *intentio* may or may not have any influence on the future. This is what fits into the chapter about Orwell though: 'who can deny that things to come are not yet?' the future is not now; whatever may happen has yet to happen', 'yet already is in the mind an expectation of things to come'.⁸⁰ What is this expectation? In the nineteen-thirties, this expectation was war.

The past is a curious thing. It's with you all the time, I suppose an hour never passes without your thinking of things that happened ten or twenty years ago, and yet most of the time it's got no reality, it's just a set of facts that you've learned, like a lot of stuff in a history book. Then some chance sight or sound or smell, especially smell, sets you going, and the past doesn't merely come back to you, you're actually *in* the past. It was like that at this moment.⁸¹

Even if Bowling cannot return to Arcadia, there are consoling elements within this work (specifically as it functions as a fictional text). The quotation used in the title of this chapter from *Coming Up For Air*, 'it will never come again'. To what does the word 'it' refer? the answer is both a time and a place. This is, perhaps, the simpler part of the phrase to unpack: Bowling's childhood, before the war, safety of home/family life/Lower Binfield. That's what 'it' means for Bowling, but this phrase is more than an expression of a private anxiety. In a broader context, it is an expression of a desire for certainty and peace.

And the next war coming over the horizon. 1941, they say. Three more circles of the sun, and then we whizz straight into it. The bombs diving down on you like black cigars, and the stream-lined bullets streaming from the Bren machine-guns. Not that that worries me particularly. I'm too old to fight. There'll be air-raids, of course, but they won't hit everybody [...] As I've said several times already, I'm not frightened of the war, only of the after-war [...] because it means good-bye to this thing I've been telling you about,

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, XI: 28, 37.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 31.

this special feeling inside you. Call it peace, if you like. But when I say peace I don't mean absence of war, I mean peace, a feeling in your guts.⁸²

Samuel Hynes discusses the trope of nostalgia in the post-war years when he writes, 'Edwardian past and wartime past seemed conciliatory realities, one refuting and cancelling the other. But both existed in the minds and imaginations of post-war survivors, and both together defined the troubled post-war world'.⁸³ But nostalgia, arcadia, 'the golden years', are not only unobtainable again but the memory of them has been tarnished over time. Patricia Rae offers the phrase 'proleptic elegy' as a label for the type of 'grieving' that occurred through the second half of the nineteen-thirties when wide-spread war became, once again, an inevitability: 'premonitions of sorrow commingled with memories of the grief endured in the Great War'.⁸⁴ This is a form of writing that anticipates sorrow, fulfils the need for a sort of 'psychological rearmament'.⁸⁵ Traditionally, elegy is poetic in form arising from the pastoral laments of Classical literature. In the literary imagination, elegy functions as a counterpart to well-established rituals of mourning: it prompts the expression of grief and bewilderment; it idealises the deceased and preserves our memories of them among the living; and it offers consolation and reassurance, finding solace in the seasonal rhythms of nature or in sustaining moral, philosophical and religious ideas.⁸⁶ From its beginnings elegiac poetry has functioned as medium for 'the work of mourning' (this is discussed, for instance by Sigmund Freud in his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia (1917)'). Historically, most elegies are about people; however, before and after the First World War, elegy as a form of grieving shifted towards the loss of a way of life, or a time, of a generation, of an innocence. In essence, the form became communal rather than personal. Modern elegy, often times, passes into the realms of 'antielegy', where it expresses a 'refusal to mourn', which rejects

⁸² Ibid., pp. 608-609.

⁸³ Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 354.

⁸⁴ Patricia Rae, 'Double Sorrow: Proleptic Elegy and the End of Arcadianism in 1930s Britain', *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 49, no. 2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 246-275, p. 246.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 246.

⁸⁶ Stephen Regan, 'Elegy', *Thinking About Almost Everything: New Ideas to Light Up Minds*, ed. Ash Amin and Michael O'Neill (London: Profile Books, 2008).

Freud's process of grieving. This is, to some extent, based upon a declining acceptance of traditional modes of understanding the world: religion, the nation, bravery.

One conciliatory resource for Britons who were facing the prospect of another war was the English pastoral landscape and the idea of Arcadia which came with it: that 'green and pleasant land'. This concept was chiefly associated with peace. This corresponds well with the recollections Bowling has of Lower Binfield. Rae maintains, and this is important for this chapter as well, that Arcadianism had played such an important part in helping people through the Great War (and the period afterwards) that it was only natural that, on the threshold of another war, similar visions and hopes would be conjured up. Memories of the countryside, of hiking and fishing and of Edwardian childhoods 'sustained' Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden (this and an appreciation for the beautiful French countryside in which they were stationed during the war). Sassoon's Sherston remembers the joys of being on his own by a river:

For me it was a luxury to be alone for a few minutes, watching the yellow irises, and the ribbon weeds that swayed like fishes in the dimpling stream. I was sorry to be saying good-bye to the Marais and its grey-green pools and creeks and the congregation of poplar stems that upheld a cool whispering roof. Water-haunting birds whistled and piped, swinging on the bulrushes and tufted reeds, and a tribe of little green and gold frogs hopped about in the grass without caring whether they arrived anywhere. All this was obviously preferable to a battle, and it was a perfect morning to be reading a book beside the river.⁸⁷

Fishing becomes a singularly unifying activity of nostalgia. As an especially child-like activity during which Sherston watches nature move to a languid summery dance that does not have any purpose, he is able to escape the horrors of war. The simplicity of the emotion he feels, the luxuriousness of being 'alone for a few minutes' is so obvious that he does not need to explain any further than by saying that it was 'obviously preferable to a battle'. Much like Gringoire in *No Enemy*, communion with the natural world allows Sherston and Bowling momentary peace.

⁸⁷ Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 39.

Christ! What's the use of saying that one oughtn't to be sentimental about 'before the war'? I *am* sentimental about it. So are you if you remember it. It's quite true that if you look back on any special period of time you tend to remember the pleasant bits. That's true even of the war. But it's also true that people then had something that we haven't got now.

What? I was simply that they didn't think of the future as something to be terrified of. It isn't that life was softer then than now. Actually it was harsher. People on the whole worked harder, lived less comfortably and died more painfully [...] And yet what was it that people had in those days? A feeling of security, even when they weren't secure. More exactly, it was a feeling of continuity. [...] Whatever might happen to themselves, things would go on as they'd known them...⁸⁸

George Bowling invests a tremendous amount of hope in the journey to his childhood home. He keeps the gambling winnings which he uses to finance the trip a secret, because of a combined worry that were his wife to know about the seventeen quid on a mare called 'Corsair's Bride' that he would be required to send it on necessities for the family and a desire for solitude in his reminiscence.⁸⁹ There is also an element of considering this manner of contemplation and nostalgia unseemly for a man (for instance in the scene where Bowling stops by the road to look at a view and pick flowers and, embarrassed at this display, pretends to be relieving himself in the bushes as a motorist passes). As discussed in the previous chapter, on Winifred Holtby, the nineteen-thirties were a time of particular economic hardship for a great deal of British society who were reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. Any attempt to return to 'Arcadia' was compromised by this. Bowling does not have the expendable income to use on a trip (he discusses this when he talks about the holidays that the family are able to take), so that the only way he can finance a trip is through gambling. Patricia Rae argues that 'the antithesis of Arcadianism is Utopianism: an orientation towards the future rather than the past, and a

⁸⁸ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, pp. 558-559.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

conviction that the solution to society's ills lies not in restoring a Golden Age but in creating a brand new kind of social organisation'.⁹⁰

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell parodies the Conservatives who still believe that everything can return to 'normal' (*i.e.* life before the Great War): 'Lord Halifax, and all his tribe, believe that when the war is over things will be exactly as they were before. Back to the crazy pavement of Versailles, back to "democracy", *i.e.* capitalism, back to the dole-queues and the Rolls-Royce cars, back to the grey top hats and the sponge-bag trousers, in *saecula saeculorum*. It is of course obvious that nothing of this kind is going to happen. A feeble imitation of it might just possibly happen in the case of a negotiated peace, but only for a short while. *Laissez-faire* capitalism is dead. The choice lies between the kind of collective society that Hitler will set up and the kind *that can arise* if he is defeated.'⁹¹ 'The anti-Arcadian proleptic elegies of the late 1930s, in other words, and the critique of consolatory language they offer, can be said to have opened up a path toward the welfare state'.⁹² Much like Gringoire's longing for a sanctuary in *No Enemy*, there were recurring appeals to "pastoral oases" among soldiers at the front. Orwell saw a powerful connection of the countryside and youthful freedom. He explains the passion of the young authors who were drawn to write about the countryside, like Richard Jeffries, W.H. Hudson, John Masefield, and A.E. Housman in 'Inside the Whale'. Likewise, Bowling's chief desire for his return visit is to go fishing at a pond he discovered as a boy where he remembers seeing (a carpe that must have been 100 years old). However, upon arrival, he finds that the fishing hole he thought would still be secret and, therefore, safe had been turned into a refuse dump for a fake-Tudor housing estate, and the location on the Thames where he used to fish with his brother was overcrowded with hordes people, gramophone music, and litter.⁹³ Many people are trying to fish, but 'a crowd like that would be enough to scare every fish in creation'.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Rae, 'Double Sorrow', p. 264.

⁹¹ Orwell, *Complete Orwell*, vol. XI, p. 429.

⁹² Rae, 'Double Sorrow', p. 265.

⁹³ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, p. 223.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213-14

This is an example of the manner in which country pursuits were commoditised in the inter-war years. Roger Scruton argues that the countryside is something of a ‘natural habitat’ of the British, and that even the language used to talk about the land connects it to the nation.⁹⁵ It is a curious fact of the English language that the word ‘country’ is used to mean country, the land, and country, the nation. The etymology of the word reveals that one of its derivations from the late Latin *contráta*, means ‘against’ or ‘opposite’, *i.e.* what is opposite one’s view. Similarly, the Provençal *encontrada* means ‘that which is encountered or met with’ in one’s surroundings.⁹⁶

One may wonder how any form of optimism can arise from a bleak tale that laments a decline in values and predicts war. However, there is a distinct difference between dark content and a dark outlook. In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Friedrich Nietzsche begs the question ‘is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, wary and weak instincts—as it once was in India and now is, to all appearances among us “modern” men and Europeans? Is there a pessimism of *strength*?’⁹⁷ Later in his discussion of tragedy, he suggests that ‘Apollonian’ (or utopian) thought is ‘happiness in dreaming’, or the stagnating loss of consciousness of reality.⁹⁸ Likewise, Fredric Jameson argues that this form of ‘happiness in dreaming’, ‘keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one yet takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is.’⁹⁹ If this is so, tragedy (or in the case of this chapter, ‘proleptic elegy’) may be considered a form of hyper-awareness of reality in the present that operates off of the fuel of concerns about the future. Literature works as a means of consolation and steadying in the face of oncoming hardship. As Nietzsche wrote, ‘*Art* approaches as a saving sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with which one can live; these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the

⁹⁵ Roger Scruton, *England: An Elegy* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 237.

⁹⁶ ‘Country’, n. *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online, third ed. Oxford University Press).

⁹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), p. 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 111.

horrible'.¹⁰⁰ So then, is *Coming Up for Air* 'a defeatist story? In one sense, yes; in another sense it is the most heartfelt of cautionary tales, with neither display nor self-righteousness in the telling, only an impassioned and ruthless honesty of imagination'.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 60.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

EPILOGUE

ALTHOUGH in one sense the ‘project of reconstruction’ in Britain during the inter-war years, which this thesis considers, failed with the outbreak of a Second World War, there is a strong case for suggesting that the period of war-time emergency between the years nineteen thirty-nine and nineteen forty-five fostered a greater impetus for reconstruction than the two decades which preceded them. At the close of World War Two, the Conservatives, upon calling a General Election, believed that Winston Churchill’s favour as a war-leader would secure their place in Government. However, in actuality, the voters showed reasonably little interest in foreign or imperial affairs, the cornerstone policies of Churchill’s peacetime platform. In *English History 1914-1945*, A. J. P. Taylor recorded that ‘folk memory’ accounted for much of the unprecedented twelve per-cent swing to Labour, meaning that the horrors of a second world war did little to erase the recollection of mass unemployment in the nineteen-thirties and the post-1918 focus upon reparations from the Germans instead of rebuilding at home.¹ The division between Conservatives wanting to support the Empire and return trade to pre-war levels and Labour wanting to build a better home for soldiers and British subjects in general, led to Labour being installed in Government with 393 M. P.s against 213 Conservative M. P.s, forming the party’s first ever majority Government. When Clement Atlee accepted the Premiership, in July 1945, he recognised that his plans for the nation—*inter alia*, nationalisation of the coal and steel industries, the creation of a universal healthcare system, establishing a national insurance plan,

¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 596.

building public housing—would be undertaken with the knowledge ‘that there can be no going back’.² The aim of the post-war Government would be ‘not . . . to recover what has been lost’ but to ‘build something better than we’ve ever done before’.³ This echoed Atlee’s views from the beginning when he argued during a speech to the House of Commons that ‘while planning for war we have to plan for peace. We remember what happened at the end of the last war—derelict areas, derelict industries, derelict human beings. We have to consider how we are to maintain all our people in this struggle’.⁴ In the same way that the suffering of the Great War did not end with the Armistice, reconstruction did not end with another declaration of war.

Owing to the necessarily narrow focus of the this thesis—Ford and the self, Huxley and architecture, Holtby and society, Orwell and war—there remains a great deal of war literature in the novel form, which was written during the Great War and in the decades to follow, that has not entered into the discussion in these pages. Furthermore, there are many authors who were not writing in English, or who were not British, writing about the First World War and their experience during and after the conflict. Henri Barbusse, Ernest Hemingway, Ernst Jünger, Emilio Lussu, and Erich Maria Remarque are only a few of the better-known authors who have not been mentioned in this thesis. When considering what remains to be written about on the subject of reconstruction, one should imagine that there is an immense amount of material from France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and the many other countries even indirectly involved in war on such a colossal scale. Although the chapters above have demonstrated the rich seam of writing available for study on reconstruction in inter-war Britain, it would be intriguing to broaden this line of enquiry into literature of other than English origins. In a sense, each strand of research that this thesis attempts to interweave could be expanded upon. For instance, examining solely the topic of ‘shell-shock’, as briefly discussed in chapter one, could (and indeed

² Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London: Pimlico, 1975), p. 63.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mr Clement Atlee, *Hansard*, HC Deb 28 November 1939, vol. 355 cc9-92.

has) merited a full-length study. The same is true for architecture, social reform, or nostalgia in the early twentieth century.

There are certainly authors of World War Two who could be explored in a similar study as well. Kingsley Amis, Pierre Boulle, William Golding, Evelyn Waugh, and John Wyndham Parkes each wrote about, or were influenced by, the Second World War. However, as Randal Stevenson argues, the Great War retains a special hold over literature as a means of communicating experience. This is partly owed to the fact, as Vernon Scannell wrote in his poem 'The Great War' that:

Whenever war is spoken of
I find
The war that was called Great invades the mind...⁵

Moreover, writing and reporting would never again be as central to wartime experience as they were between nineteen-fourteen and nineteen-eighteen.⁶ The cinema, television, and radio became increasingly influential in wartime commentary, with 'on-the-scene' news reporters delivering information first-hand. The authors who wrote in the trenches and in the years afterwards were closely concerned with representing their experience faithfully as well, or as Ford would have say, to make their readers *see*. However, words can never carry experience 'raw and complete, to readers'.⁷ It is perhaps because of the proliferation of writing about the war and its incommunicable experience that it remains so firmly embedded in the cultural consciousness of the nation.

Ford, Huxley, Holtby, and Orwell were each haunted by the spectre of The Great War and used writing as a cathartic act of writing through their experiences and also for looking towards the future. Likewise, the novels considered in this thesis are each vessels of consolation and of hope. This thesis has added to the fields of study regarding literature of the First World

⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 345.

⁶ Randall Stevenson, *Literature and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 227.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 229

War and of the novel form in general by arguing that, outside of the formal bounds of modernism in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, there were novels written with a particular purpose. Through a combination of previously overlooked approaches, and by applying these to works that are often forgotten in studies of the Great War, this work has delineated a specific lineage of thought regarding ‘reconstruction’ as it was manifest in the lives and works of authors who were ‘historical witnesses’ of their times. The works within these chapters have been considered in terms of their historical engagement, exchange, and debate in the literary sphere of the inter-war years. Yet it seems most significant at the close to recognise that nearly one hundred years hence, these works retain the power to invoke horror, solace, hopefulness, and contemplation, so that, as Cecil Lewis wrote at the close of his reminiscence of the Great War, *Sagittarius Rising*, ‘the reader scanning the cold print feels something stir within him and take fire, and gazes stupidly upon the page, seeing the ink blurred, uplifted by the music, hardly knowing why’.⁸

⁸ Cecil Lewis, *Sagittarius Rising* (1936; rpt. London: Frontline Books, 2009), p. 332.

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